

California State Archives
State Government Oral History Program

Oral History Interview

with

THOMAS M. REES

California State Assemblyman, 1954 - 1962
California State Senator, 1962 - 1966
United State Congressman, 1966 - 1976

December 10 and 11, 1987
Santa Cruz, California

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

RESTRICTIONS ON THIS INTERVIEW

None.

LITERARY RIGHTS AND QUOTATION

This manuscript is hereby made available for research purposes only. No part of the manuscript may be quoted for publication without the written permission of the California State Archivist or the Head, Department of Special Collections, University Research Library, UCLA.

Requests for permission to quote for publication should be addressed to:

California State Archives
1020 O Street, Room 130
Sacramento, CA 95814

or

Department of Special Collections
University Research Library
405 S. Hilgard Avenue
UCLA
Los Angeles, CA 90024-1575

The request should include identification of the specific passages and identification of the user.

It is recommended that this oral history be cited as follows:

Thomas M. Rees, Oral History Interview, Conducted 1987 by Carlos Vásquez, UCLA Oral History Program, for the California State Archives State Government Oral History Program.



March Fong Eu
Secretary of State

California State Archives
1020 O Street, Room 130
Sacramento, CA 95814

Information	(916) 445-4293
Document Restoration	(916) 445-4293
Exhibit Hall	(916) 445-0748
Legislative Bill Service (prior years)	(916) 445-2832

PREFACE

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

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

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

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

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

Oral History Program
History Department
California State University, Fullerton

Oral History Program
Center for California Studies
California State University, Sacramento

Oral History Program
Claremont Graduate School

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley

Oral History Program
University of California, Los Angeles

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

John F. Burns
State Archivist

July 27, 1988

This interview is printed on acid-free paper.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTERVIEW HISTORY	i
BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY	ii
I LIFE HISTORY	
[Session 1, December 10, 1987, Tape 1, Side A]	
Family History	1
Primary Education	3
Childhood Friends	4
Internment of Japanese-Americans	5
Muted Protest of the Internment	6
II MILITARY SERVICE	
Military Induction	7
Racism in the Military	8
Military Service in Los Angeles	9
Basic Training	11
Combat Duty in Europe	14
American Soldiers in Combat	17
Distributing <u>Stars and Stripes</u>	19
Witnessing German Atrocities	20
Rees's Ideological Motivation in World War II	21
Developing an Antiwar Attitude	24
III HIGHER EDUCATION	
Attending Occidental College	27
Studying Foreign Languages	32
Affinity for Classical Music	33
[Begin Tape 1, Side B]	
Travels to Colombia and Central America	35
What Rees Learned about Latin America	40
Attending Law School at Boalt Hall	43
IV MIXING BUSINESS AND POLITICS	
Going into the Export Business	45
Political Initiation: The 1953 Fletcher Bowron	
Mayoral Campaign	49
Campaigning Among Chicanos in East Los Angeles	52
Attacking the <u>Los Angeles Times</u>	55
Campaign Tactics	56
Bowron as a Political Candidate	59

	Lessons of the First Political Experience	60
	Working on a Congressional Campaign	61
	Shortcomings of Chicano Political Efforts	63
	Going into Business Full-time	65
V	POST WORLD WAR II DEMOCRATIC PARTY POLITICS	
	Membership in the California Republican Assembly	66
	[Begin Tape 2, Side A]	
	Changing Party Affiliation	68
	Fighting Communist Infiltration of Liberal Groups	69
	Democrats Who Supported Republican Candidates	70
	Democratic Party County Central Committees	71
	The California Young Democrats	72
	The Democratic League	72
	Divisions Among Democrats	73
	The Democratic Club Movement and Meeting	
	Jesse Unruh	77
VI	REES'S FIRST ASSEMBLY RACE	
	Running for the Assembly	79
	The Fifty-ninth Assembly District in 1954	80
	Campaign Organization	83
	The Stigma of Changing Party Affiliation	84
	Rees's Victory in First Assembly Race	85
	Rees's First California Democratic Council	
	Convention	86
	CDC Members Involved in Rees's First Assembly	
	Race	88
	Campaign Strategy	90
	More on the CDC	91
VII	THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF REES'S POLITICAL CAMPAIGN	
	Developing Name Recognition in an Assembly	
	District	92
	How Service Clubs Define Communities	94
	Combatting Voter Apathy	97
	Using Media	100
	[Begin Tape 2, Side B]	
	Poster Sniping	106
	Raising Campaign Funds	108
VIII	LESSONS REES LEARNED IN FIRST ASSEMBLY TERM	
	Defeating Charles Lyon for the Assembly	110
	The Unruh-Bonelli Fight	111
	Dealing with Labor Support	112
	Assembly Reelection Campaign	115
	The 1955 Speakership Fight and the	
	"Good Government" Group	117
	Rees's Committee Assignments	122

	Rewards for Supporting Luther Lincoln for Assembly Speaker	123
	Building an Affinity Group Among Freshmen Assembly Members	125
	Getting Used to a Legislator's Social Life in Sacramento	127
	Relations Between the Assembly and Senate	131
	Lessons of Rees's First Assembly Term	134
	[Session 2, December 10, 1987, Tape 3, Side A]	
	Luther Lincoln Supporters on Key Committees	139
	Rees's Reelection Campaign	140
	The 1955 Speakership Race	147
	Consolidating Rees's Democratic Partisan Group	148
	Battles Over Oil Issues	150
	Developing Partisan Fund-raising Techniques in the Assembly	154
	Jesse Unruh's "Praetorian Guard"	156
	Rees's Political Objectives in the Assembly	160
IX	THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF POLITICS	
	Campaign Finance Abuses	161
	Grassroots Organization versus the Professional Media Campaign	165
	The Amateur Lawmaker versus the Professional Politician	166
	[Begin Tape 3, Side B]	
	How Professional Staff Can Isolate a Legislator	169
	The 1959 Speakership Battle Between Augustus Hawkins and Ralph Brown	174
	Assessing the California Assembly	178
	Labor-Management Issues in the Assembly	179
	Jesse Unruh and Campaign Financing	183
	Assessing Speakers of the Assembly	185
	Jesse Unruh's Contributions to the California Legislature	187
	Unruh's Misjudgments	189
	Edmund G. Brown, Sr., Democratic Assemblymen, and the 1958 Elections	191
	Governor Brown's Relations with Unruh and the Legislature	195
X	REES'S LEGISLATIVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN THE ASSEMBLY	
	[Session 3, December 11, 1987, Tape 4, Side A]	
	Rees's Subsequent Terms in the Assembly	199
	The Rees-Levering Act	199
	Pressure from Party Finance Committees	201
	Confronting UCLA over Student On-campus Parking	202

	Working on the Master Plan for Higher Education	206
	The 1959 and 1961 Legislative Sessions	207
	Rapid Transit in Southern California	208
	Freeways over Railways	212
	Resisting the Real Estate Lobby	214
	Rees's Group Consolidates Its Influence	215
XI	REES'S TENURE IN THE CALIFORNIA STATE SENATE	
	Why Rees Ran for the State Senate	218
	Jesse Unruh's Campaign for the Speakership	219
	Economic Reasons for Rees Leaving the Assembly	221
	Rees's Campaign for Los Angeles County's Lone Senate Seat	222
	Rees's Original Intention to Run for the United States Senate	224
	Regional Occupational Training Centers	228
	Southern California Rapid Transit District	230
	Labor Conflicts and Compulsory Arbitration [Begin Tape 4, Side B]	231
	The Growing Distance Between Rees and Jesse Unruh	232
	Why Rees Opposed the One Man, One Vote Mandate	234
	Adding Democrats to the Senate Through Special Elections	236
XII	CHANGES IN CALIFORNIA POLITICS DURING THE 1950s AND 1960s	
	Consolidating Campaign Fund-raising and Distribution of Campaign Funds	238
	Political Power Shifts from San Francisco to Los Angeles	239
	Raising Funds Through the "Poker Club"	241
	Tapping the Los Angeles Establishment	243
	How the System of Fund-raising Functioned	245
	Paul Ziffren's Role in the California Democratic Council	250
	Ziffren's Role in the 1960 Presidential Campaign	252
	Rees's Summary of California Politics in the 1950s and 1960s	254
	The Impact of Adlai Stevenson on Democratic Party Politics	258
	Some Contrasts between East Coast and West Coast Politics	262
	Why Ronald Reagan was Elected Governor	263

	[Begin Tape 5, Side A]	
	The 1961 Legislative Reapportionment	265
	Delivering the Reapportionment Results to President Kennedy	271
	Rees's Civil Rights Legislation in the State Senate	275
	The Rumford Act Repealed: How and Why	276
	Working on the Master Plan for Higher Education	280
	The California Arts Commission	282
XII	THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC CONVENTIONS OF 1956, 1960, AND 1964	
	Supporting John F. Kennedy in 1956	286
	The California Delegation to the 1960 National Convention	288
	A Split Delegation	291
	Jesse Unruh's Poor Timing	294
	Going Against One's Constituency	297
	Impact of the National Convention on State Politics	299
	The 1964 Race in California for a United States Senate Seat	300
	The Disintegration of the California Democratic Council	301
	[Begin Tape 5, Side B]	
	Why Pierre Salinger Lost a United States Senate Race	303
XIII	THE 1968 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN	
	Opposing the Vietnam War	306
	The Robert F. Kennedy Campaign	308
	Kennedy's Primary Election Defeat in Oregon	309
	RFK's Reception in Los Angeles	310
	RFK's Assassination	314
	The 1968 Democratic National Convention	316
	The Traumatic Impact of the Vietnam War on American Politics	317
	Supporting Eugene McCarthy at the 1968 Convention	322
	Why Hubert Humphrey Lost the Presidency	323
XIV	REES GOES TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES	
	Why Rees Ran for Congress	325
	Average Week of a California State Senator	326
	The Effects of the State Senate Reapportionment	330
	Fighting the One Man, One Vote Mandate	330
	Problems Killing Bad Bills	331

	[Begin Tape 6, Side A]	
	Being More Effective in State Government than at the National Level	333
	Jewish Opposition in Rees's State Senate District	336
	Governor Edmund G. Brown, Sr., and the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority	340
	Rees's Role in the 1972 Presidential Campaign	343
	The Problem with California's June Primary	346
	Edmund Muskie's Downfall	347
	The Impact of Media on a Candidate's Image	349
	The Trivialization of Political Morality in the Media	350
	Should the "Fourth Estate" be Regulated?	352
	Writing One's Own Press Materials	354
	Using Humor in Politics	355
XV	WHY REES LEFT THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES	
	Why Rees Resigned from the Congress	358
	Trying to Reform the Congress	360
	The "Watergate Babies" in the House of Representatives	367
	The Costs of Leading Reform Efforts	368
	[Begin Tape 6, Side B]	
	Lawyers in Politics	371
	Taking the Bar Examination	372
	Rees's Philosophy of Government	375
	The Relationship Between Politics and Economics	379
	The Future of Government Spending Limitations	382
	A Resurgence of Liberalism	383

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Interviewer/Editor:

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

Interview Time and Place:

December 10, 1987
Rees's home in Santa Cruz, California
Session of two hours

December 10, 1987
Rees's home in Santa Cruz, California
Session of two hours

December 11, 1987
Rees's home in Santa Cruz, California
Session of four hours

Editing

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

Rees reviewed the edited transcript and returned it to the UCLA Oral History Program with only minor corrections.

Papers

The interviewer was unable to consult any private papers for this interview, although he examined the oral history interview conducted with Rees by the John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, Massachusetts, on March 5, 1969.

Tapes and Interview Records

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

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

Thomas M. Rees was born in Los Angeles, California, on March 26, 1925. He was raised and educated in West Los Angeles and, in 1954, went on to represent the Fifty-ninth Assembly District. He was the youngest member of the California Assembly at the time.

Rees was educated in Los Angeles public schools and attended Occidental College, where he earned his bachelor's degree in political science. He studied law at Boalt Hall on the Berkeley campus of the University of California, and became a member of the bar in California and Washington, D.C., in 1973. He currently practices environmental and personal injury law, is president of Community Development and Management, San Jose, California, and lives in Santa Cruz, California.

Rees served in the infantry in World War II and saw action in the closing phases of the European campaign. He returned to the U.S. to finish his education, traveled throughout Latin America, and founded Compañía del Pacífico, a agricultural implement exporting business.

He first became involved in politics as an aide, then campaign manager, for Los Angeles mayor Fletcher Bowron in his unsuccessful 1953 reelection campaign. Originally a liberal Republican, Rees became a Democrat and was elected to the assembly at the age of 29. He served in the assembly until 1962, when he was elected as Los Angeles County's sole state senator until the senate was reapportioned in 1965 in response to rulings challenging California's formula for representation in the state legislature's upper house.

Rees was part of a reform group in the assembly and an effective senator, specializing in legislation related to metropolitan organizational planning, social insurance, state fiscal reorganization, consumer credit, rapid transit, and other areas. Elected in 1966 to the House of Representatives, he represented the Twenty-third Congressional District until 1976, when he retired from politics. As a congressman, Rees specialized in urban problems, monetary policy, and foreign trade. He authored the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970 and was a member of the Committee on Banking and Currency. Rees also was part of the "Watergate babies", a group of liberal Democrats seeking substantive reforms in the lower house in the mid-seventies.

I. LIFE HISTORY

[Session 1, December 10, 1987]

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

Family History

VASQUEZ: Congressman Rees, could you tell me something about your life history, your family background?

REES: I was born in Los Angeles, March 26, 1925. My father's name is Caradoc Rees. He emigrated from Wales, I think at about the age of twelve or thirteen, and apprenticed as a painter in Minnesota. He then served in World War I. After World War I, he married my mother.

My mother's maiden name is [Mildred] Melgaard. Her father was a Norwegian emigrant, and her mother was Swedish. Her father was a banker who owned a series of small banks in northern Minnesota. It was a strange marriage because my father dropped out of school [Laughter] when he was twelve to work--because that's what one used to do--while my mother's

family was well educated. But he was a very intelligent person and was an excellent craftsman and artist. They moved to Los Angeles from Minnesota, I guess, around 1923, '24.

My family life was essentially middle class, my father always had his own business. It was called the Rees Decorating Company. He concentrated on the houses of the very rich. [He did] a lot of murals, a lot of specialized decorating, for example, gold-leaf decorative ceilings. I grew up in that field. There was a fairly large Welsh community in Los Angeles, and I had a lot of relatives. The Welsh are great singers.

VASQUEZ: In what part of the city did you grow up?

REES: I grew up in West Los Angeles. My parents still live there, around Burton Way and La Cienega [Boulevard]. It wasn't that expensive in those days. I think they paid less than \$3,000 for their house. The latest offer--because it's been rezoned--was about \$650,000. The developers can't understand [Laughter] why they've lived there for so many years and have not sold out. My father is ninety-one and my mother is eighty-six.

I was kind of introverted as a kid because I was the first born, and my father was a very strong disciplinarian. I wasn't allowed to drive a car until after I was in the service. I wasn't allowed to do a lot of things. I was not inclined to be a social gadfly. I wasn't a member of any important student organization other than the stamp club, and things like that. I grew up in the same neighborhood.

Primary Education

VASQUEZ: What schools did you attend?

REES: I went to Carthay Center Grammar School, John Burroughs Junior High School, and Los Angeles High School. But mine was an interesting community. There were a lot of Jewish families there. Some of them had emigrated from Nazi Germany.

I got very emotionally involved at a young age, eleven or twelve, in all of the problems that were occurring during the latter part of the thirties. I was very well aware of Adolf Hitler. I was aware of the Japanese. I was aware of the Ethiopian war. And I was very emotionally involved.

My closest friend's family was very left-wing and very active. Not subversive. They weren't subversive at all. I used to go over to their house because it was so intellectually stimulating.

Childhood Friends

VASQUEZ: What was his name?

REES: [Donald] Don Silver was the son, he was my age. We were not political activists. He was later a professor. He's changed a great deal. I think he's just a good old, garden variety-type Democrat, you know. We were a lot of things during the thirties and forties. I was never a member of any party. Of course, I was just in my early teens, but I tended to be with the liberal anti-Nazi group. I'd read a lot, and I liked music a great deal. My own family encouraged this.

I don't think I was happy in high school, because that's when things started getting social and I wasn't that social. I was always kind of nervous on dates. You know, what you talked about, things like that. But World War II had hit. And so, my last two years at Los Angeles

High School were during the first year and a half of our participation in World War II.

Internment of Japanese-Americans

I know I became active because they put the Japanese-Americans in concentration camps. Manzanar [California] was the camp that most of ours went to. And a lot of us were very unhappy about this. It took away our B football team. We had one of the best in the city. We knew these kids and we were resentful about the way they were being treated. We also knew as soon as we got out of high school we would be going into the service.

VASQUEZ: What is it you thought was unfair about it?

REES: Well, I thought it was unfair to take people because of their national origin and, all of a sudden, say that they are potential traitors. I mean, we had people who had German backgrounds, or Italian backgrounds. They weren't questioned. In fact, I knew one kid who had a German background, and his parents were card-carrying Nazis. That seemed to be okay. But if you happened to be an ethnic Japanese. . . .

We'd go downtown to the Japanese area--down

to First Street--and they were auctioning away all their assets. The sleazes came in. They were buying everything for two cents on the dollar. And nothing was held in trust. Their assets were seized and were sold, and there were really no realistic bids. I suspect there was a great deal of collusion on that.

Muted Protest of the Internment

VASQUEZ: Were you involved in any kind of protest?

REES: Well, we didn't protest much in those days. It was always difficult, because it wasn't like the sixties or seventies or now, where you could have a meaningful protest. We were in a war. Most of us knew we were going to be personally involved in it. It was kind of passive mumbling. We didn't have street demonstrations.

VASQUEZ: Did you write?

REES: No, I didn't write. It's kind of hard to recall. You see, I don't recall my activities at school that much because I didn't have that many activities. My father had me join ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps] to get some military training so I'd be prepared for war. But it didn't do me much good. I was in the infantry

for three years and finally made private first class.

II. MILITARY SERVICE

Military Induction

As soon as I graduated in June, I took voluntary induction. I went to the draft board and asked them to take me. But when I was in my last year, the army and the navy came through the high school and they gave us tests. I took the test, and if you had a certain IQ, you were asked to join a program of the army. It was ASTP, Army Specialized Training Program. In the navy, I think it was called V-12. So, a good percentage of us--because it was a good high school--qualified for the program.

When I went into the service, we were sent to regular infantry basic [training], near Anniston, Alabama, a place called Fort McClellan. If you remember, Anniston, Alabama, during the early civil rights battles, that's where they burned two buses. It was extremely difficult. It wasn't that enlightened an area. We had a fair number of blacks at Los Angeles High School.

I'd say about 10 or 15 percent.

Racism in the Military

VASQUEZ: Were these middle-class blacks?

REES: A black kid taught me about Rossini's overtures. He played the clarinet in the orchestra. Yes, most were middle class.

We were having a few problems, the northerners, because of the way the blacks were treated. Of course, there weren't any blacks in the combat units. They didn't allow them. There wasn't any integration in combat units. But we would get on buses and some black soldiers would be involved. The white rednecks driving the bus were mean. If we tried to sit in the back of the bus, they used to give us heat. And, of course, in the professional military, there's a good percentage of southern officers. So we were considered the troublemakers, not the rednecks.

It was interesting though, because when you're in the army and you're thrown into a unit like this--all of us had IQs over 120--a lot of the enlisted cadre who couldn't pass the test to go to officer's training just gave us hell. I mean, they just beat the hell out of us. But, we

were all out of high school, all in good shape. It was right through the summer. And summer, I mean, is just terrible down there. Our fatigues would be white because of the salt and sweat. But they didn't beat us down. They tried to, but they didn't.

VASQUEZ: Was there a group of you that went through basic together from Los Angeles?

REES: Yes, there was a group. I don't think there were any that I knew from Los Angeles High School. But there was a group, and we first met at the Los Angeles induction center at Fort McArthur, where we got our uniforms and our shipping orders. We traveled [together] and we got to know each other on the way to Alabama. Then you got to know others. A good friend of mine was from East Orange, New Jersey. When you're from L.A. and you've never been out of L.A. and you all of a sudden get into the service and meet kids from all the other parts of the country, it's quite an education.

Military Service in Los Angeles

Once we got through basic and survived, they sent us off to various colleges. They sent me to

Los Angeles City College. It was on Vermont [Avenue]. There was nothing worse for anybody in the service [than] to be stationed near the folks, because you'd like to get away. You didn't want to go home [Laughter] every weekend. You had other things to do. But I was stationed here.

The program only lasted for about five months, and then they decided they needed more infantrymen, and they abolished our unit. We were sent to a regular infantry division. I enjoyed being in L.A. and, again, I made some good friends here. I've lost track of them, unfortunately. They moved away from the Los Angeles area.

VASQUEZ: Did you make any friends in the service that were important later on in your political life?

REES: I have a few. Not too many in my political life. I didn't have too many friends in high school, maybe four or five. My closest friend, Norman Skinner, tended to be pretty conservative. He would visit me when I was in congress and tell me how I was wrong. And there was Don Silver and a few others in high school. When there was a

break like the war, we really got scattered, and so there wasn't much continuity. I don't know if there's ever been an alumni meeting or anything from L.A. High School, because we were really scattered. First, we got in the service and afterwards we went to college all over the country.

I like jazz, and all the great jazz musicians seemed to be going broke in L.A. while in Los Angeles in the service and trying to get movie work. I used to go to a place called the Streets of Paris. I heard all the great people there. Art Tatum. Fats Waller, I saw him at the Florentine Gardens. Big Sid Catlett, Mead "Lux" Lewis, Albert Ammons. I mean, fantastic musicians. [Louis] Armstrong, Charlie Teagarden. It was a fascinating time. It was a good place to be. The Hollywood Canteen was in business. It was fascinating while it lasted but it didn't last very long.

Basic Training

They sent us up to the Eighty-ninth Division, which was maneuvering up around Hunter Ligett. Of course, we were the "damned college kids." We

had already gone through regular basic, where they kicked the hell out of us again because we were "college kids." I didn't even know what a college looked like when I went through basic. And then we go into the Eighty-ninth and we were the "college kids." So they they started pounding on us there.

We were on maneuvers. We were supposed to be a light division that fights between regular terrain and high mountain terrain area like the coast range. We carried everything in backpacks. The other division, the Seventy-first, carried everything on mules. We were maneuvering to see who had the greatest maneuverability. I always liked that part. I actually liked combat more than taking basic training. It was a mess because [we went] right through the rainy season. You know, February, March, up in those mountains. When we finished, they decided that the college kids should take basic training again. So, while all the old guys were sitting around in their pup tents, we were out there [Laughter] doing basic [training]. I was getting so sick of basic.

VASQUEZ: What year would this be?

REES: 'Forty-four. I got in in '43. And then I think I got through Christmas at home. Then, about January, we transferred to Hunter Ligett. At that time, they were starting to give us physicals for potential replacement troops. Let me see. 'Forty-four was D-Day, wasn't it?

VASQUEZ: Yes.

REES: Yeah, well, they had the landings in Sicily. And so, they were starting to pull people out of our division to be used as replacements. I volunteered. I just wanted to get out of there, but they wouldn't let any of the ASTP group go. It was a pain in the ass, because the division had been used as a training division, and they had maneuvered the hell out of it. I mean, they really pounded these guys. It started off as a division up at Camp Carson, very-high-altitude stuff. And that's punishing.

I used to do a lot of mountain climbing when I was in high school. I climbed Mount Whitney [California] twice before I got in the army. Every summer I'd backpack into the Sierra [Nevada]. It's tough when you get up in the thin

oxygen to be carrying a lot of stuff. It really is, and especially if you do it for a long time. I'd do it just for two weeks.

Combat Duty in Europe

VASQUEZ: Did you get shipped overseas?

REES: Oh, yeah, I got shipped overseas.

VASQUEZ: Weren't you in [General George] Patton's Third Army?

REES: Yeah, many of the old guys who stayed were with the division when it was maneuvering in the swamps of Louisiana, and they got the hell beat out of them there. They were supposed to pull carts and it was raining. They kept saying, "Well, kid, you think it's tough here, you should have been in Camp Carson." Or, "You should have been in Louisiana." Then the generals decided they were going to put us into a regular camp to get us ready to go overseas.

So they shipped us to Camp Butler, North Carolina. I kind of enjoyed it because it was near Chapel Hill and Duke [University], so I was able to get a little culture in. [Laughter] A new group came into our division, they were the eighteen-year-old kids. They wouldn't ship us

overseas until we were nineteen. And so we had the eighteen-year-olds, the ASTP, and the old group. So they decided, "Well, we're going to give the test to see who is going to basic again."

We, the ATSP group, came out first and the eighteen-year-olds came out second and the old guys came in third. The colonel, who was an old guy, got mad and decided just the eighteen-year-olds and the ASTP should take basic. So I took basic again, for the third time. They finally got us ready. They kept delaying us and delaying us. And we finally went overseas about Christmas. It was at the end of [the Battle of] the Bulge, and we landed at Le Havre [France] in a blinding snowstorm. The camps for the American troops were called "cigarette camps." I was at "Lucky Strike." Another one was "Twenty Grand"; another one was "Pall Mall."

These were the camps that we set up. They were mostly just tents. And, of course, the tents kept slipping into the slit trenches. The johns, the latrines, were just big trenches, and one poor guy just slipped in because the whole side caved in. We were hungry because they had torpedoed some of our ships. We weren't getting

supplies. I remember there was an orange floating in the latrine [Laughter] and somebody said, "Gee, I wonder what it tastes like now? It should be pretty well pickled." [Laughter] It was very cold, and we were doing a lot of maneuvering. They had us clearing mines that had been left.

And then they shipped us out. I started in combat in Luxembourg, a place called Mersch, I think the name was. That was our first combat, then we fought mostly around the Mosel [River]. We crossed the Mosel and hit some of the Rhineland. On my twentieth birthday, we crossed the Rhine at a place called Sankt Gorehausen and our battalion took very heavy casualties. It was just ridiculous. We had no air or artillery support. We passed that, got our replacements, and started again. We ended up the war in a city by name of Zwickau. It's called Karl-Marx-Stadt¹ now. That fantastic skater the East Germans have, she is from that town.

1. It was the town of Chemnitz that was renamed in 1953 to Karl-Marx-Stadt. Zwickau is still known by the same name. Both towns are located in the southern part of East Germany.

And we just stopped there. We could have gone all the way to Prague [Czechoslovakia] but under the treaty we had to stop there. In fact, our division was the closest division to Berlin. If we had gone a bit north, of course, we'd have run out of fuel, but if we had gone north we would have hit it. I was a rifleman and ammunition bearer in a machine gun squad.

VASQUEZ: What was your rank when you left the service?

REES: Private first class, PFC.

VASQUEZ: Very good.

REES: In training it was known as Poor Fucking Civilian. We felt, those of us [who] had proved our mettle by not striving for a higher rank, we were proud of our rank. But we were good servicemen and did well in combat.

American Soldiers in Combat

VASQUEZ: What did you learn about Americans being in the service in the Second World War?

REES: Well, it was fascinating because I met so many Americans, the soldiers I first worked with were all educated, I mean they finished high school, and had IQs over 120. That was the ATSP group. And the interesting part was getting in the

regular units where you met others, and there was a natural schism. I really was shocked by the vulgarity of a lot of them. I think a lot were just trying to put us on. Gradually we all kind of blended.

VASQUEZ: In combat?

REES: Oh, even before combat. We got over there, and we got very tolerant of a lot of things. I was with these kids from South Boston, real bigoted guys, lace-curtain Irish Catholics. I was trying to tell them blacks were good people, jeez, "Oh, my god, you've seen an ape." It got to be ridiculous. There were just a lot of different people. I met a lot of southerners I liked. I would talk about civil rights problems, and I could actually have a decent discussion. Of course, that was with people that were a lot better educated, that got out of high school. Now, with the pure redneck, it was tough.

After the war in Europe, we were going to go to Japan, and then when war ended they canceled our orders and disbanded the division. Our group more or less took over Camp Lucky Strike, and we started processing soldiers returning to the

States. The first guys we processed were United States POWs [prisoners of war], and we had German prisoners doing our scut work for us. I had a German captain, Willie Hilgers, who was an engineer, with a Ph.D., a metallurgical engineer. He could speak English and about that time I got my military occupation number changed. I didn't want to be a 745 rifleman going to Japan, so I finally got it changed to information specialist and started distributing Stars and Stripes, which gave me almost complete autonomy. All you needed was a clipboard and you could do anything.

Distributing Stars and Stripes

VASQUEZ: Did you ever write for Stars and Stripes?

REES: No, I just distributed it, but I was able to get some good trips around France. I didn't smoke cigarettes, so I had plenty of currency. They would give us two or three cartons a week, and I could do anything with a few cartons.

So I got to know Willie Hilgers because he would read Stars and Stripes and then do a German synopsis and put it on the bulletin board. I kept in correspondence with him, and during the difficult time after the war, I sent him a few

food packages. He came to visit Washington, D.C., for a conference when I was in congress, and it was just great seeing him. My kids were awed. They would go over to the neighbors' kids and say, "That's dad's prisoner!"

Witnessing German Atrocities

I felt very strong about that war. Our division captured the first concentration camp, a camp called Ordross [Germany], it was the first one captured by the Third Army. It was horrible; all the things I suspected were true. I was very ideologically motivated in that war. If they had not allowed me to serve I don't know what I would have done. I really felt strong about it and every feeling I had was confirmed in spades when I got into Germany. I didn't go around beating up prisoners and all of that, because it is not the privates who cause war. Some of the guys would be hot shots and say, "Oh, be very rough on prisoners." If you give me a general, fine, I might be rough on him. But I wasn't going to be rough on my own kind.

Willie Hilgers was an engineer, and I doubt if he was political at all. He probably didn't

have much awareness of what was happening when he fought the war. But I really have a thing about the Nazis, the political system that allowed them, and the mental attitude of people that allowed them to do what they did. The Germans voted for and supported the Nazis. I'm fascinated with that era of history, I really am.

Rees's Ideological Motivation in World War II

VASQUEZ: You say "ideological." Did you have an ideology at that time, do you think?

REES: Well, I don't know, I was just kind of liberal. My parents were Republicans but that's what they were supposed to be.

VASQUEZ: Why?

REES: Because they were kind of middle class, owned their own home, had a car.

VASQUEZ: In your youth, who had the most impact on your political thinking?

REES: Well, my parents were Republican, but they were [Earl] Warren Republicans, so there was no problem. They didn't go around hating [President Franklin D. Roosevelt] FDR. Then I had close contact with my friend Don Silver and his family, and I still considered myself a

Republican. I registered as a Republican in my first election, but again Earl Warren was governor.

VASQUEZ: At the time you considered yourself a Republican?

REES: Well, I did because the Democratic party was really in complete disarray. A lot of the liberal movement had been actively infiltrated by the communists. This is the time when the ADA [Americans for Democratic Action] started as an anticommunist operation to try to fight off that infiltration, which was real. I don't consider this McCarthyism, there was a very real attempt by communist activists to take over liberal organizations.

VASQUEZ: What was the fear that this instilled in people?

REES: In who?

VASQUEZ: In people of the liberal persuasion, who feared communists would infiltrate or take over their organizations? Hadn't they been allies against the Nazis?

REES: Yeah, we had all been allies against the Nazis, and I met a few Russians after the war and I was very big on the Russians. Of course, I hadn't read about Joseph Stalin and the gulag and things like that, I still felt that we needed to be a

little leery, a little suspicious. I actually wrote something that was printed in Yank magazine about how we shouldn't just disband our armed forces--there still might be a threat. These were just feelings of someone twenty years old who had served as a private in the infantry.

I got transferred to another division in Passau, Germany, which is right on the East German border. They made me automotive-parts clerk but I could barely drive a car. Later we went to a town called Bad Ischl, Austria, which was Emperor Franz Josef's summer resort. I took over a nightclub there, the Plantation Club. It shows you the southern influence in the goddamn army. So I ran that nightclub for a while and during the period was able to visit Vienna, where I went AWOL [absent without official leave].

It was fascinating to see. The Russians that had been captured, especially civilians that had been brought into Germany to work in factories, they were terrorized. They did not want to go back to Russia, but we had this agreement with the Russians that everyone went back, all the displaced persons. One of my best

friends [Dean] Henphill, who was in my regular unit and also in ASTP, was doing military police duty in Vienna. We got together when I was there, and he said these people would try to kill themselves by putting their head down and running into the wall because they didn't want to go back. Of course they were right, because so many were killed by Stalin.

Europe at that time was just up for grabs, I mean everything was changing, and you had these huge masses of people, you could see the railway cars jammed with them. It was something to see the attitudes of terror. I have never seen such terror as that of people being forced to go back to what they figured would be certain death.

Developing an Antiwar Attitude

VASQUEZ: What impressions about Europe and European politics did you bring back from the war?

REES: Well, I have an anti-German bias, I still have it. It's inconceivable to me that what happened, happened. They are wonderful, creative people; I mean, I am very heavy on a lot of German culture. Here's Goethe and here's Mozart, but then Mozart was Austrian, but Brahms, whom I

love, and Strauss, and this happens. You go into a German church and there will be all these little commemoratives for the German troops that were killed and who had belonged to that parish.

I developed this hatred of war. I have something about life, I mean, I don't even like to kill spiders. I just can't--to me it's inconceivable. We had a firefight in one town and supposedly they had a white flag and so we started moving in. The white flag was a ruse and they machine-gunned our [unit] and one of my best friends was killed. Right in the head. And we came in and we really punished that town.

And the next morning. . . . By then I was the messenger for the weapons company so I had to cover a battalion front. I liked it because it put me on my own. There's a lot of exposure, but it was more interesting than feeding bullets into a machine gun. I saw a German with a gut wound, and he had a sulfur pack [but] he couldn't reach it. [He] was asking for water. You're not supposed to give water for a gut wound, and I couldn't shoot that man. He might have shot my best friend the day before, but I couldn't shoot

him. I might have, five minutes later, but when I looked at him, he looked just like I did. He had blue eyes and blond hair, about my age, so I took my pack, wrapped it and gave it to him. I don't know if he made it. And then to see a concentration camp . . .

VASQUEZ: Might it have been different if he had been a different color or had slanted eyes?

REES: I don't know. I don't think so because I used to do a lot of demonstrating against the Vietnam War. I have never had much of a racial bias.

VASQUEZ: Had you worked that out by the time you were twenty, or was that something that came over time?

REES: It never really occurred to me that much. All through high school--remember this is at the end of the Depression, and except for some of the snotheads from Hancock Park, we were all kind of equal. The only kids that had cars were the guys that built them in their garages. We had a fairly heavy Jewish population, a pretty heavy, well, I'd say 10 percent Japanese, not many Chicano, but 10 or 15 percent black. I guess no one was threatened. In the army, of course,

blacks weren't allowed to serve in combat.

VASQUEZ: They were in segregated units, weren't they?

REES: Yeah, I was in a barroom brawl once. There was a black guy at the bar so I said, "Hi guy, how are you?" And a couple of rednecks got on my case. "What are you talking to that nigger for?" I never saw blatant racial discrimination until I got down South. I mean, I didn't walk around all day looking for it, but it was there.

III. HIGHER EDUCATION

Attending Occidental College

VASQUEZ: So, when you got back from the service what did you do?

REES: When I got back, I was going to go to college, everyone was going to go to college. I had some disabilities, every infantryman had frozen feet and hemorrhoids. I guess I still have the problems, and my feet were not in good shape, but I didn't know quite what to do.

There was something called "52/20." You could take twenty bucks a week for fifty-two weeks' unemployment insurance, but I wouldn't do that because I considered it welfare. I won't

take that kind of money. My parents went to a vacation up at Mammoth Lake, and I was hiking around there and I found that American Metals, a big mining company, was starting to open up some of the old mines at Mammoth, and I got a job there on the bull crew.

I worked in the mines for about three months, and in the mean time I was accepted at Occidental College. It was funny because my high school grades were so-so, I got a couple of D's, but they were a little better than average. But my test scores came out very well, and I knew a little bit about Occidental.

I started working when I was sixteen. I worked summers and holidays and things like that. I worked for the Palmolive Company, giving away free soap coupons, and we covered Eagle Rock where Occidental was located. I didn't apply to UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles] because you had to take something called a Subject A examination, and if you flunked it you had to take bonehead English. I didn't want to do that so I think I applied to UCLA, but Occidental was the one that sounded good, a small

school that was in Los Angeles. I wrote a rather intemperate letter when I was working up in the mines saying, "Either you accept me or forget the whole thing." They accepted me.

VASQUEZ: A letter to the college?

REES: Yeah, and later I got to know Dean [Benjamin H.] Cully, who was kind of an icon there, very famous, hell of a poker player. He told me, "You know, you were considered right on the margin of whether to take you in or not. In fact, you were on the minus side of the margin. What happened was that they showed me the letter and said, 'With this kind of attitude I don't know if he is going to fit in.' And I said, 'You know I think this is just the kind of person who would benefit with a liberal arts education.'" So it worked.

VASQUEZ: The letter put you over the margin, did it?

REES: Yes.

VASQUEZ: Were you satisfied with your education at Occidental?

REES: Oh, yes, I thought it was great. I loved it, we had several veterans' barracks. I lived in what we called the "boondocks." All of us were veterans, and they put us on the side of the

school next to the girls' athletic field. We kind of lived our own life there; we weren't monitored.

I think the school was petrified at what would happen when these veterans came in. You've been hard-drinking soldiers and sailors and everything else, and then you come into Occidental College and they just were petrified. They didn't know what the hell to expect. But frankly, the veterans were more mature. We wanted one thing, and that was an education. We were far more mentally active than the new eighteen-year-old freshmen, and we behaved ourselves. I had one professor, Cecil Dunn, an economics professor, who quit teaching after the veterans' class left. He said he didn't want to get back to teaching kids. He was a top-flight economist. He was the rate economist for the Pacific Gas [and Electric] Company. I got to know him better later, when I had my own business. It was a damn good education; I loved it. I was very close to my professors.

[Raymond G.] McKelvey was a character. He was a fantastic professor. He only had a

master's degree, but he was fantastic. He made you think. He bombarded your mind. He said obnoxious things and made you want to kill, but he was wonderful. And the other was [Richard F.] Dick Reath, who just died last year. These are relationships and friendships that I kept until they died. And then [there was] my religion teacher, Dr. [Silva] Lake. I didn't take religion until my last semester saying, "Oh, god, who wants religion." I found it was one of the most fantastic courses. It was the history of the New Testament.

VASQUEZ: What religion were you brought up in?

REES: Oh, my father was Welsh Baptist, but "When you come to the new country now, you have to rise up. So, Tom, become an Episcopalian." It became the religion of the mine owners, for god's sake.

Dr. Lake was huge; she must have been about two hundred and fifty pounds. Professor Lake spoke Greek, Arabic, Aramaic, and Hebrew. I mean a fantastic woman. She would ask me out to dinner. We would go to a Greek restaurant on Los Angeles Street downtown, drink martinis, eat garlic-laced beets and stuffed grape leaves. It

was that kind of an intellectual stimulus that I had. I donated more money each year than I had to pay in tuition when I was there; or, rather, the amount Uncle Sam paid in tuition. I think the GI bill was one of the most fantastic things.

VASQUEZ: Is that how you paid your tuition, the GI bill?

REES: Yeah, I was the first member of my father's family to ever get through college. He was delighted because my only brother became a Ph.D. and a professor.

VASQUEZ: What is your brother's name?

REES: John, John [D.] Rees.

One summer I decided not to work. I'm fascinated with languages. I never get very good grades in languages, but I'm fascinated by them. Most teachers try to be perfect with grammar; to me, I want just a little bit of grammar, I want communication.

Studying Foreign Languages

VASQUEZ: What languages do you speak?

REES: Well, Spanish is my best language. I used to speak some German and some French, but I have to be really in [the culture]. I can't learn language from a book. I went to Mills College

and they had a summer school, it was La Maison Française.

VASQUEZ: Mills College in Oakland [California]?

REES: Yeah, Oakland, Piedmont. It was coeducational in the summer and, in fact, the Paganini Quartet was in residence. That is where I first got onto Béla Bartók and became a Bartók freak. I really got a great musical education there. [Egon] Petri, a great Dutch pianist, was in residence, Darius Milhaud was in residence too, but he was away that summer. Mills wasn't used to having veterans because it was a women's college. I had to sign up for all of the work programs because they didn't trust the government to pay them. So I was a waiter.

VASQUEZ: This is after Occidental, or in the summer?

REES: Summer. At Mills, I used to work as a gardener on the weekends and then I waited three meals a day at La Maison Française. I also was an usher at the concerts, which was great because I really expanded my love of classical music.

Affinity for Classical Music

VASQUEZ: Where did you develop this affinity for classical music?

REES: Well, from my mother. I remember we would go to the opera and I always liked classical music. When I was in the army they had these orientation films, propaganda films, "Why we're fighting." Everyone is supposed to see them before they go overseas. They sent around a little form and I said, "No, I have never seen one of those." I saw them about eight times because the music was so good. When the Russians were coming there would be these great Tchaikovsky symphonies and everything else.

VASQUEZ: And Wagner for the Germans?

REES: Yeah. In fact when I was running my nightclub, my live-in was an opera singer, Helga Eberstaller.

[End Tape 1, Side A]

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

VASQUEZ: You were talking about your love for music, and how Occidental and Mills College furthered that.

REES: I went to summer school at Mills because at La Maison Française you are supposed to speak French all the time, but I had to work so much of the time that I really didn't have much time to study or talk French. The French thought that if you waited on tables you were from a lower class or something.

Travels to Colombia and Central America

In the United States a lot of people wait on tables and I met a beautiful woman from Colombia by the name of Blanca Martinez Restrepo. She came from one of the top families in Colombia. I don't know why she was working as a waitress, but she also worked at the concerts, so we had this heavy romance. I must say it was very platonic, but it was very idealistic. I mean she had a beautiful mind and was going back to Colombia. So when La Maison Française disbanded, I went back to Occidental, and we kept writing to each other. I said, "Oh, my god, I can't let this go, I can't let this distance kill anything." And I was of the opinion then that there is always a one and only. It doesn't prove out that well all the time. I decided since I always took a lot of units that I could take off my spring term and then go down to Colombia. So I went to a freight-boat service and got passage on a freight boat.

I had relatives in the [Panamá] Canal Zone; in fact, my uncle, Fred Sill, was one of the top people in the Zone. He dealt with the weighing

of ships to find out how much they should be charged. He was a huge person. He must have been about three hundred pounds, because when he took his little pilot boat out to the ship and jumped on the ladder, the ship kind of listed. My uncle Fred, who was a very funny guy, [told] tons of great stories. One story he told me: There are a lot of pickpockets there and they have a lot of coloreds called Beijins. They are kind of old Carribean stock who had lived in Panamá and worked on the canal. They had a lot of pickpockets, so what he did was to sew fishhooks, so when this guy put his hand in to take his wallet, he couldn't get it out because it was tied in with the fish hooks. Uncle Fred just ignored him, but kept walking around and this poor guy finally begged to be let go and promised to reform.

I stayed in Panamá for a while. One night I thought there was a tropical storm, the whole building was shaking. I found out it was Uncle Fred snoring, he couldn't sleep on his side because was so big. He has a wonderful family. They're my first cousins and I don't have too

many first cousins. Then I took a plane to Bogotá [Colombia], and that was my first meeting with Latin America.

It was very difficult because it was a year after the [Jorge Eliécer] Gaitán assassination, and the country was up for grabs. It was one of those typical countries where 5 percent owned everything and 95 percent of the people were destitute. Obviously, I knew where my sympathies were, and I was not getting along very well. I got along fine with Blanca, but with some of the young studs, I actually thought I was going to get in some fights. But I told them how in the infantry we learned how to kill with one hand and that kept them away a bit, but it was difficult. I traveled around a fair amount. I had some great adventures, met a lot of fascinating people, but again I had never seen such poverty. I had never seen such a split, where so few have so much. And the wealthy were not mean, they weren't nasty people.

The wealthy felt that they were very good Catholics, and they handed money to the poor as they walked to church. They thought they were

good people, and they were. [Blanca's] family was nice, even though I was American, radical, and a Protestant. They were very conservative Catholics, and she was the apple of their eye--I mean they had about ten apples in the family--it was just difficult.

So finally I had to go back to school, so I took a steamer down the Magdalena River to Barranquilla and by then I was pretty broke, but I got to Cartagena and stayed at a hotel. I got a cut rate because they had me stay in a room with a German who was working for them. There was a Colombian who was staying at the hotel who thought I was German because I got along so well with this German who had been on a U-boat and was interned during the war. And we got along just fine. They didn't create Hitler; as long as he was an enlisted man, great. This Colombian started telling me how he hated the Americans and how he used to help the Germans. I think a day later this German told him that I was an American and I had been in the army for three years. This Colombian, every time he saw me, would dart off to the other end of the hotel.

I took deck passes on a steamer to get to Panamá because that's all the money I had left. I think I landed in Panamá with a buck seventy-five.

VASQUEZ: What happened to the hot romance?

REES: It couldn't be. She knew it and I knew it, it just couldn't be. I wasn't ready to get married for another ten or fifteen years.

VASQUEZ: And those were the conditions?

REES: No, they weren't the conditions. You can't put impossible terms, there was no way I could support a wife and family. If she came back, I still had two years of college and I was pretty immature. There was no way that I could live there. It just wouldn't work, but I think both of us enjoyed it. As I said, it was the most platonic romance I ever had and it was wonderful.

I met [Ernest] Hemingway's brother [Leicester] Les. Hemingway's brother worked for the embassy and I got to know him. He was horribly envious because I was always going off to look at a mining operation or some damn thing. He wanted to go, but he was trapped with wife and family.

REES: Deck passage on the boat was a funny thing, it's very tough. People who take deck passage are not easy people to get along with and I do look like a "gringo pata salada," you know. Six foot four inches and they look at me and say, "Oh, gringo." And I could just see myself being tossed overboard because there is no place to go, you know you had only a deck. And I would say, "Yo soy noriego vago." I learned to speak Spanish with a Norweigan accent. I survived, and the buck seventy-five got me into Panamá City. I stayed a few days with my relatives and went up through Central America, mostly by land. I went through Nicaragua and Honduras.

VASQUEZ: This would be the late forties right?

REES: Yeah, '49. If you go by land--there are only two classes down there--you either go upper class or lower class, there is nothing in between. I was going lower class because of financial restraints, but it was fascinating. I saw a lot of things. I got put in jail once, but other than that, I got back to Los Angeles safe.

What Rees Learned about Latin America

VASQUEZ: What did that trip teach you about Latin America?

REES: Latin America I consider to be a huge enigma, because when I was in high school they said the future is Latin America. They have been saying the future is Latin America now for years, and it never is.

When I was in Colombia, I was building up a fair amount of fluency. I have never had real good fluency in Spanish, and it is a lot easier for me to talk than it is to understand. Most people it is the opposite. But I think in language, I think in Spanish and when it comes at me I don't have any control; when I'm speaking I have control.

I find I didn't think they were very realistic. They would consider themselves realistic, especially Colombians, you know, they don't speak Spanish in Colombia: "Hablo castellano." I'm giving an Argentine pronunciation.

I just thought they were unrealistic. I couldn't understand the ego or the machismo that I would get from a border guard or an official. Everything was always my fault. It's that arrogance that makes you want to kill. Of course, they are looking for you to make a bad

move. It was the politics of it. I couldn't stand the poverty. I couldn't stand seeing kids that were cripples by the time they were twelve because they were working at five when their bones were still growing. I didn't know I felt that strongly. These countries weren't in the war, what happened? They made all of this money during the war, what did they do with it? You know what were they doing? They were selling everything they had; my god, they were making fortunes. Where the hell was it in 1949? I didn't see it. All I saw was a bunch of poor people. I kind of like the Latin culture, or I wouldn't have stayed there as long as I did. And my impressions of Mexico, if we ever get into that I have a lot more experiences. Have you ever read Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano?

VASQUEZ: Yes.

REES: But anyway, it was a fascinating trip, I enjoyed Mexico City. I had never been to Mexico before other than to Tijuana. I got back and adjusted to Occidental College and going to operas at the Shrine Auditorium.

Attending Law School at Boalt Hall

VASQUEZ: Now, when you got out of Occidental, did you first go into business?

REES: At Occidental I was developing a very heavy romance. I didn't want to get married, I didn't know what to do. So I decided, "Oh, hell, I'll go to law school." When you don't know what to do, that's what you do. You go to law school or get a master's degree.

VASQUEZ: Was that really your interest, law?

REES: Well, I was interested, I was a political science major. At one time I wanted to be a screen-writer; I like to write. I thought about being an architect, but not too seriously. I wasn't jazzed up to go to law school, but I wasn't quite sure what I wanted to do. I was accepted at Boalt Hall, which was considered the best in the state. I went up there and so did my girlfriend. She also ended up at Berkeley.

VASQUEZ: What was her name?

REES: Virginia Smith. You will find that one in the phone book. Anyway, I went to law school, and I didn't like it, I didn't like the law school because they were so intense. I had gotten a

damn good education. Occidental was damn good education. They treated me like an adult, a human being.

Law school is like going to basic training again, and I thought, "Jeez, I'm getting too old for this. How much of this do I have to go through?" I had one great professor, William Prosser, who taught torts. Prosser is the god of torts. The Prosser et al Restatement of the Law of Torts, that's the bible. And he was a fantastic professor. But he was the only fantastic professor that I had. The rest were mumbling all the time. The law students, a lot of them were odd people. I remember the big game, Cal [University of California, Berkeley] versus Stanford [University]. We played in our stadium, and I had to pick up something from the law library after the game. I got in there and I said, "We won, we won the big game." "Shhhh, Shhh." They didn't want their study interrupted. I didn't like it, it was like infantry again. I was working just to work, and I passed. I didn't pass with any great honors, but I got through. For the time I spent in law school I suspect I

could have gotten very good grades if I had worked creatively. I did fairly well with Prosser. He was also the dean. We got along very well.

That summer I decided to go down to Mexico. I had been working part time at Cal distributing Camel cigarettes and didn't need to work during the summer, and so I decided to go down to Mexico with a friend of mine [William] Bill Stiger. We didn't take a car, and we went to Nogales by bus.

IV. MIXING BUSINESS AND POLITICS

Going into the Export Business

VASQUEZ: What year was this?

REES: 'Fifty-one. We took a bus, went to Hermosillo, and I kind of looked around. It was a farm town and then went through Guaymas and then we finally got to Culiacán, and we had to take a train because they hadn't finished the road south. The funniest thing happened. We're in this bar--I was having a pretty good time by then--a farmers' bar and they had the big rotating ceiling fan. They used to call the Southern Pacific [line of Ferrocarriles Nacionales], which ran down the

coast in Mexico there, "sur paciencia," "southern patience," because it was so slow. We hired a young boy to stand at the station and told him if he heard the train coming, to run into the bar and tell us, because you never knew when the train was coming. The train was supposed to be there at noon. He comes running in at noon and says, "The train's here." Everyone says, "No, it can't be, it's never on time." "What's happening?" We got to the station and found the train was exactly twenty-four hours late. It was the only train I ever got seasick on because they never fixed the roadbeds and this train would sway back and forth.

VASQUEZ: And they still do.

REES: But we had a good time. We went to Guadalajara, then took the train into Mexico City and spent some time there. I took kind of a slow route back and I stayed in Hermosillo and met a guy named Roberto Acuña. He was a parts man for Caterpillar tractor. And he said, "Jeez, you know, if you ever want to go into business, I know all the farmers here and we could probably cut the price on farm machinery and parts." The

way they price tractor parts down there is, they use a different conversion on the peso. If the peso was ten to the dollar they charge the parts out as if it was five to the dollar. They would take a big markup there and that would be in addition to their regular retail markup. There is not too much real aggressive competitive marketing in Mexico; they are always fixing prices, especially in those things that farmers need. Acuña convinced me, and I decided not to go back to law school. I figured I could always go to law school, and my Berkeley romance was getting a bit too heavy. I just figured I would take the coward's way out.

So I went down there and formed a company, Compañía del Pacífico. All the assets I had was the car I had then, an office at the old Philharmonic Auditorium building, a little teeny office, paid twenty dollars a month rent, and that was the beginning of the company. We had a few orders which we filled, and I learned all about the export business. I had a big order for a rebuilt tractor, and that's where I learned [export] documentation because I used an export

broker, looked at everything he did, and memorized it. If he had farted between the sixth and the twelfth copy of the invoice, I would have done that from then on because I figured that's what you're supposed to do. I knew documentation and licensing, so we started selling some things into Mexico. It was very tight, I wasn't making any money and I had to borrow some money on my car. The company was not much, but at least it was a business, and it was mine.

VASQUEZ: Did your family ever help you in your business?

REES: No, I never asked them to. It was up to me to make the business go and I never asked my family. I knew if I asked them they would have helped me but I had strong feelings [that] it was my deal.

This, in a way, is how I got into politics. I would go down to Hermosillo, sell farm machinery and parts, and spend time with all my farmers. Then I would run back to Los Angeles and wait for farm orders to come in. There is a Hotel Laval in Hermosillo, and I broke the record in drinking tequilas one night. I couldn't get out of bed for three days but by god I became a "¡Qué hombre, este gringo patas saladas!" I

didn't do that all the time because I wouldn't be alive today. I used to stay at the San Alberto [Hotel]. Mariachis would play there; you would sit outside under these big trees and drink your beers. In the summer they had little half bottles because it's so hot if you had a full bottle it would be warm in a few minutes. I had just a lot of fun. I had a lot of interesting customers, and I would go out to the farms, rather than spend a lot of time just sitting in my room. If I didn't have an order, I didn't have anything else to do. This was '52, '53.

Political Initiation: The 1953 Fletcher Bowron Mayoral Campaign

No, 1953 was the [Los Angeles] mayor's election. It is always the year after the presidential [election]. We had a mayor by the name of Fletcher Bowron. Bowron had been elected after a recall to remove a very corrupt mayor by the name of Frank Shaw. Bowron had been a superior court judge, a very honest man, of complete integrity. But he gave the most boring speeches in the world; he was a very reserved person. He didn't know how to "work the floor."

Politicians have got to work the floor, get to meet everybody. The national real estate lobby decided they were going to kill public housing in Los Angeles. This was public housing that was built under law and was sponsored by Senator [Robert A.] Taft of Ohio. It certainly wasn't communist housing.

At that time the guy in charge of housing was Frank Wilkinson, who unfortunately had a very strong commitment to the left wing. I don't know if he was ever communist, but he was close enough it made him a very good target. So they came in, the whole national real estate lobby--that's when the Los Angeles Times was a pretty reactionary newspaper--and they got a congressman by the name of Norris Poulson to run for mayor. Norrie was not quite as boring as Bowron, but pretty close.

VASQUEZ: Who were some of the people at that time who supported housing? Were people like Ernest [E.] Debs around at the time?

REES: I don't recall. Ernie was on the city council. The city council at that time had a real nut by the name of [Edward J.] Ed Davenport. This was during the heavy [United States Senator Joseph R.] McCarthy period and things were very

difficult at the time. At Occidental, I was vice president of the Young Republicans Club, along with [John T.] Jack Knox; no, actually I was president. As you know, Jack is now a strong Democrat, but then we used to go to the Young Republican convention. We were the liberal group. [Robert H.] Bob Finch was active then, and [Joseph] Joe Holt. Bob Finch was the one that recruited us. He had gone to Occidental and then graduated and went to law school at 'SC [University of Southern California]. That is when I first met Richard [M.] Nixon. He came to speak at the Occidental College Young Republicans. I was a political activist, and Occidental was active at our student convention.

VASQUEZ: So you were active in [Thomas E.] Dewey's [presidential] campaign?

REES: I mean this sounds ridiculous. I was actually heading up the Dewey for President group at Occidental College. But back to the mayor's campaign, I had all this extra time and I figured they were picking on this guy [Bowron] and so I went to see him and said, "I'd like to help you, I have a lot of time. Until I get an order from Mexico."

He had nothing for a campaign. He had some of the loyalists, some of the good people of Los Angeles. Bryant Essick was one of them, of Essick Manufacturing. He did have a fair amount of the chamber of commerce types that weren't really roped into the real estate lobby and knew Bowron was not a dangerous radical, and so I got involved. By choice I became involved mostly on the Eastside because my Spanish was very good, and I was big and could run fast.

VASQUEZ: Was it the issue or the man that got you involved first? The issue of public housing or the personality?

REES: I had respect for the man, but what I saw was this conspiracy of the right wing coming in to destroy this guy and elect their own patsy. At that time I was pretty anti-Los Angeles Times, because they were a reactionary paper. Later, I was one of the first Democrats they ever supported.

VASQUEZ: We will get to that.

Campaigning Among Chicanos in East Los Angeles

REES: But it was a pretty reactionary paper, and I just felt it was overkill. There was nothing bad in the man's record. At that time, I was in the

business and would go over to the Biltmore and have a beer at noon. We had kind of a round table, a few of us there that would sit and talk politics, we were kind of aware of city politics. I went to see Bowron's campaign and they really weren't very well organized. I kind of took over the Eastside coordination. At that time there was another guy running, [Lloyd Aldrich] the city engineer, who was running against Bowron and got very close four years before. He had taken the Eastside, and I was supposed to turn that around. So I started working with Tony Ríos and some of the CSO [Community Service Organization] people.

VASQUEZ: Was [Councilman] Edward [R. Roybal] involved?

REES: Yeah, but Ed was suspicious. Tony wasn't suspicious, but Ed was because he was in office and that was his base. "Who are these Anglos coming in?" Ed has never been, as you know, a militant Chicano. He is one of those people from New Mexico. You know how they are. I supported Bowron, and we met him. He didn't give us any problems. I did political organizing, trying to figure out how we could get some communication

going, get the word out, and try to get the vote.

VASQUEZ: Who was it you were trying to move? People in housing projects or people in the leadership of organizations?

REES: At that time I wasn't much into vote patterns and vote production. I got into that a couple years later. There wasn't much grass-roots organization, [rather] we were concentrating on the CSO to get the word out that Bowron was the guy to support.

Now, the CSO weren't the young hotheads that you see now. They were older, but they weren't as old as some of the "tío Tomásés," like Dr. [Julius] Calderón and some of the others. They had a strong labor union base, and they had the best broad base in the community. I mean they were strong, so that I was trying to get the word that Bowron was the candidate because usually in a neighborhood like that if you get the word out that Bowron is the guy, they are not going to go for Aldrich, and they are not going to go for Poulson. We worked on flyers and stuff like that. I spoke at a lot of community groups . . .

VASQUEZ: Was this primarily in Boyle Heights?

REES: Yeah, Boyle Heights and Lincoln Heights. Yeah, I spent a lot of time out there. Bowron won the Eastside, but in the citywide election, Bowron ran second to Poulson. That's considered sure death if you are incumbent you run second, even though you make a runoff. So a lot of our support money left.

Attacking the Los Angeles Times

There was another guy in the campaign that had gone to Occidental. His name was Jack Brady and Jack was about my size. He was about six foot three and a speech major, and he was in the Bowron campaign also. I ignored him at the beginning because he was more of a flack type. He wanted to challenge Poulson's frog against Bowron's frog in a frog jumping contest at Calaveras County [California]. I'm strictly an infantryman; I wanted to be out there in the precincts. But when Bowron ran second in the primary everyone left, and so Brady and myself were practically running the Bowron campaign for [mayor of] the city of Los Angeles. There was a vacuum and so we got more into it and had a lot of fun because we had the strategy of attacking

the Los Angeles Times.

No one ever attacks the Los Angeles Times, so we got Bowron to put out some real zingers: "Norman Chandler calls Norris Poulson 'Norrie,'" the little tie-in deals. We tried to build this whole thing up, and the Times just went ape. They even had a front-page cartoon. They had never had a front-page rebuttal cartoon before, and were really pretty tough.

Campaign Tactics

I was trying to start a civic political party because the city elections were nonpartisan. I was going to call it Civic Volunteers, and we were working with various groups trying to develop the concept of a municipal party for good government. We would travel with Bowron a lot, but it was a problem because he was terrible on television. I mean if this guy would give a fireside speech, he was so boring the fire would go out. Poulson was more boisterous but still kind of a fool--nice guy, but kind of a fool.

We would go to the television station about half an hour before the broadcast, just Brady and myself, and start talking to the interviewers and

we would find out what they thought. We would then go in the john, over the urinal we would put a little Bowron sticker. We would say to the interviewers, "Look, Poulson has got these big horned-rim glasses, if you question him this way and this way it is going to make him look like a blurb." We talked with these guys, and then when Poulson came up we would both very courteously say, "How do you do, congressman." He knew damn well we were working for Bowron. That makes a candidate nervous. Then he would go to the john and above the urinal would see a Bowron sticker. I guess you would call it "dirty tricks." We didn't think it was dirty tricks; we just felt it was good campaigning. That's when I first met Murray Chotiner. Murray Chotiner for some reason, I don't know how or why, got involved in the Bowron campaign. I met him in the primary when I was in charge of the Eastside. I said, "Jeez, I'm having a problem because last time Aldrich took every precinct in the Eastside, I don't know what to do." "Tell them he can't win." I said, "No, I don't think you understand." He looked at me like that. "You asked me. Tell

them he can't win." So I went out there and said, "Aldrich can't win." And we got all the precincts.

So I developed a great deal of respect for the political acumen of Murray Chotiner; he was very direct. I'm not giving him a medal for some of the things he did, but I just say he was one of the sharpest political types I've ever met because he was very direct. He didn't suffer fools. He saw it and he said, "This is what you do." None of those profound analyses and polls to figure out where you are to go.

VASQUEZ: How many people did you have working in this campaign?

REES: Gee, I don't know. There must have been twenty or thirty around the headquarters.

VASQUEZ: What kind of people were they?

REES: Just people, one of the guys that I worked with I remember . . .

VASQUEZ: Were they professional types?

REES: Yeah, they were professional types, upper middle class. I don't recall too much; I don't recall any blacks. There might have been. There weren't any Chicanos that came into the campaign;

I went out to them. The headquarters campaign wasn't too active because we didn't have any money. Some of the press [materials] were things that Brady and I were doing, mostly Brady because he was more [involved with the] press.

VASQUEZ: Who was Roybal supporting in all of this?

REES: He was with Bowron.

VASQUEZ: But not active?

REES: I don't know if Ed was a congressman or not; maybe might have been the city council.

Bowron as a Political Candidate

VASQUEZ: He was on the city council.

REES: But no one was really getting into the race. It was really the L.A. Times versus Bowron. Bowron was a difficult guy to really get heated up on. He was not a [Governor] Adlai [E.] Stevenson with rhetoric, and wonderful ideas to go out and fight the devil. He was just this little white-haired old man with complete integrity, and we still came pretty close in that campaign without any money or television or anything. We came very close. We didn't have any poll takers or anything like that, but it was a lot closer than most people thought. I think we took most of the

precincts in the Eastside. The problem, of course, is they don't vote heavily in the Eastside. But those who did vote voted Bowron.

Lessons of the First Political Experience

VASQUEZ: So was this your introduction into politics?

REES: Yeah. It was a great introduction because in a short while I started as a precinct worker and ended up running part of the campaign. The next election, I was really hot to go; I was also working part time with a guy named John Cassidy, who later became a councilman. Cassidy was a public relations man, a very old-fashioned public relations man. He had been in the Bowron campaign so there was this kind of trio of John Cassidy with his old saws; he was really a character and kind of talked in old quotations. I remember once he was talking, he said "Yep, it's an old Leimert Park family." I looked at Brady. I said, "Leimert Park wasn't formed until 1924, what do you mean an 'old'?" It was not like saying, "an old Boston family." Old Leimert Park, jeez. But Cassidy was funny. He was a great raconteur and just a character. He never knotted his tie, his tie wasn't knotted this way,

[Gestures] it just kind of came over. Little things, he was kind of eccentric.

VASQUEZ: In this first experience, did you meet people or did you learn things that were significant in your later political career?

REES: Well, obviously. This was the first real campaign. I had been around campaigns and I had done precinct work before and things like voter registration. But this was the first time I really had a hands-on experience and my feeling was there was too much fluff in campaigns. They still aren't direct enough and there isn't enough fieldwork, there isn't enough precinct work. You don't pay anything for precinct work. You get your contacts for zero dollars which certainly beats television, newspapers, and everything else. It's one on one. I got fascinated with numbers, how many people are registered, how many people vote, so I started working into that field.

Working on a Congressional Campaign

I got into a new campaign right away because Norris Poulson became mayor. That opened up his congressional seat for a special election, and

the guy who ran in that district was a fellow named George Arnold. He was Thurman Arnold's son and he was married to Drew Pearson's daughter-- talk about a dynasty! George was born and raised in Wyoming with Thurman Arnold but lived most of life in Washington. And, of course, Drew Pearson is from Washington. George came to California to seek his fortune as an attorney. And I got along with George. He was a little strange at times and so we worked well. I don't know who. . . . Yeah, [Glenard P.] Lipscomb, a state assemblyman, was the Republican candidate. We got beat. Special [elections] are very difficult because you don't have an overall party effort, like a statewide election.

VASQUEZ: How much were you able to count on [Democratic] party support?

REES: Well, we had cross-filing in those days, so I don't even think that we were allowed to have one's affiliation party on the ballot.

VASQUEZ: No, you weren't.

REES: Ballot designation didn't come in first until '54 so that there wasn't ballot designation. The Republicans had a lot of money. We had labor

support, we had good labor support. But the problem is you got some of these labor guys and they would sit around chewing their cigars saying, "Don't worry, labor is going to deliver." It is hard to get past them, because everyone is an instant campaign expert. Lawyers also are instant campaign experts; certain people in certain fields think they know everything about campaigning. It is like having a pope write for Hustler magazine, for god's sake, in most cases. So I went through George Arnold's campaign working in the field. I enjoyed the field. He had some Chicano areas I was trying to work, but he lost. Afterwards, Brady and I had tried to get CSO to hire us, not with their money, but as a percentage of what we raised. We were going to try and do fund-raising for them and really build a good financial base which they didn't have. But again, there was just a lot of suspicion.

Shortcomings of Chicano Political Efforts

VASQUEZ: A financial base for what, their social programs or their political campaigns?

REES: Building up their activities, not political campaigns. Because there wasn't much awareness.

I feel the Chicano or the Latino has a difficult time because he is really living in two different realities and can skip from one to the other. That is the difference between the black activist, they only have one reality, they are black and living in LA. But I think a Chicano activist at times will become Mexican and then will become American. It is a dual personality thing which I can comment on because I saw it in Venice, in my own congressional district. Give me Boyle Heights any day. In Venice, they were off the wall. At least in Boyle Heights there was some stability there, some history. It was an interesting campaign, but they didn't hire us. They had an executive assistant who was going to be working with us. He had been assistant to Dennis Chávez, who was the New Mexico senator.

VASQUEZ: [United States] Senator Dennis Chávez?

REES: This poor guy would cry. He was a beautiful person, but he really couldn't take much pressure. You would see the tears start coming, so we gave up the CSO.

Then Cassidy took us down to Palos Verdes

[California] to try to convince them that diatomaceous earth mining was good for the Palos Verdes Peninsula. So I was down there for a while, just kind of drifting. I was still selling farm machinery and if I had orders I would go down [to Mexico] and fill them.

Going into Business Full-time

VASQUEZ: And law school, what happened to law school?

REES: I just never went back. I passed my first year and said good-bye. My great romance got married, probably fortunately for me. I was very happy. I liked having my own business. I didn't like working for other people. My father never worked for anyone either. It's kind of a family tradition.

The export business was interesting. The problem was, it's easy to get into business, but it is extremely tough to make the big move upward. Anyone can get into business, but it is when you have been in business for a year or two and you know you have to expand, you just can't continue trading dollars. I was also being paid for the job in Palos Verdes. But I was pretty broke in those days; [what] I was getting paid

and most of the money I made in the export business went back into the business.

VASQUEZ: Was anyone else with you in the business?

REES: No, just Acuña down in Hermosillo. He would spend all his money. We would make some money. We would split a couple thousand. I would put mine in the bank, and he would go out and get a fancy office and furniture. I said, "What the hell do you need an office and furniture for? That doesn't sell farm machinery. Hell, give me the bar at Hotel Laval, I'll sell farm machinery." That's what people do, they make their first buck and put it all up front, and they go broke. Anyway, I started getting involved with Democratic politics. Let me see, Eisenhower's first time was 1952.

V. POST WORLD WAR II DEMOCRATIC PARTY POLITICS

Membership in the California Republican Assembly

I was a member of the California Republican Assembly in my district at that time, and I was in charge of about fifteen or twenty precincts. I always get back to my precinct work and Nixon gave his cloth-coat speech, the Checkers

speech. One of the political activists called me and said, "What'd you think of it?" I says, "I thought it was the biggest bunch of bullshit I ever heard. He never answered the question." So that kind of cut it. I wasn't very popular around the California Republican Assembly. It was also a time [when] the conservatives were taking over.

Warren was no longer governor, [Goodwin J.] Goodie Knight was. Goodie started as a very conservative governor because I think he just wanted to get that [wing] of the party. He actually ended up as a kind of Warren prototype in terms of his program. It was very odd, because he was originally right-wing and anti-Warren.

VASQUEZ: But didn't he end up with a lot of labor support?

REES: You bet he ended up with labor support. So at the time I started thinking, "Hell, I'm not a Republican, I'm a Democrat. I mean this is ridiculous."

[End Tape 1, Side B]

[Begin Tape 2, Side A]

Changing Party Affiliation

At that time I was about to change my registration. Rosalind [Wiener] Wyman was running for the [Los Angeles] City Council, and some of her people persuaded me to [remain] a Republican for a few more months so I could head up her "Republicans for Wyman" committee.

Then I became an active Democrat. It was during the McCarthy period. I remember one night Jack Brady and I went to the Hollywood Legion Stadium [where] Joe McCarthy was giving a speech. He was the most evil person I had ever seen. He was very smooth and he had that audience in the palm of his hand. "I have here this document, this document on a State Department employee." He would throw this stuff out. He was very good at what he was doing. People tend to discount him now, but he could mesmerize people. He built conspiracies and weaved things together.

VASQUEZ: Who was the audience?

REES: Well, the audience was for him.

VASQUEZ: But what was the composition of the audience?

REES: I don't know. They were lower middle class,

middle class, I guess. They looked like they were fairly tough. Brady and I were not heckling. Both of us are big, but we weren't heckling. It was kind of frightening. It was also the time when they were starting to ruin the University of California with the loyalty oath controversy.

Fighting Communist Infiltration of Liberal Groups

VASQUEZ: Did you get involved in the loyalty oath controversy at all?

REES: I did when I ran for the legislature; I felt very strong about it. I knew a communist when I was in high school and I didn't consider the person evil.

I was well aware, though, that there was communist infiltration of liberal organizations. When I was at Occidental College we had a program where we worked part-time and then we'd coordinate our work experience through seminars in the evening. I worked in a shoe factory and was close to another student, [Walter] Walt Slater, who was at Occidental. Walt is Jewish. I think he is originally from the Bronx. He had a bad leg. He got hit by a land mine in the Battle of

the Bulge. He was Mr. Democrat at Occidental; we became very close friends. Walt, an intern at the AFL [American Federation of Labor], had about five or six of us at a meeting of the CIO [Congress of Industrial Organizations] when the anticommunists took the unions back from the communists. You talk about drama and intensity. That was the great thing about Occidental, at that time we were all clued into these very realistic things.

Democrats Who Supported Republican Candidates

VASQUEZ: Occidental seems to have been a meeting point for a network of people that went on to get involved in both Democratic and Republican politics.

REES: Yeah, Bob Finch was at Occidental, and [Congressman] Pete [N.] McCloskey, [Congressman] Jack [F.] Kemp, and all of us are fiercely loyal to our school.

There were so many [people who remained] Democrats and supported Republican candidates. And there were tons of them in Los Angeles. They were used all the time in campaigns as Democrats-for-this Republican and I wasn't going to do that.

VASQUEZ: Who, for example, comes to mind when you say that?

REES: Oh, [James L.] Linn Bebe, who was a senior partner at O'Melveny and Myers, he was always the chairman of Democrats for a Republican. I worked with him later when I was in the state senate. He was top flight, a very prestigious lawyer, but he felt that Grover Cleveland had double-crossed the party or something. [Laughter] He is a pretty old man, by the way, as you know. But it got to be a pain because they were adamant saying, you know, "The party is gone to the dogs." And the Democratic party was weak, didn't have too much structure at that time; we didn't have the assembly; we didn't have the senate. We didn't have any statewide offices. We didn't have anything.

Democratic Party County Central Committees

VASQUEZ: The county central committees, were they of any importance? Of any strength?

REES: No. I never paid any attention to it. All my time in politics, I never paid any attention to the county central committee, because I could never figure out what the hell they did. My structure was basically CDC [California Democratic Council], CDC people. Some of them

were on the county committee, but all they ever did was have a meeting every month and argue about a lot of things. They didn't raise money.

VASQUEZ: They didn't do any precinct work?

REES: Well, if someone happened to be a member of a club that did precinct work then they did precinct work, but the county central committee was never a factor.

The California Young Democrats

VASQUEZ: How about the Young Democrats?

REES: Oh, they were never a factor in my campaigns. I was never a Young Democrat. I mean, hell, when you had CDC, you had old and young people. We had a lot of young people in the CDC club movement.

The Democratic League

VASQUEZ: How about the Democratic League?

REES: I don't know. Was that Jesse [M. Unruh]'s group?

VASQUEZ: Yes. The people were USC, some from UCLA, but Jesse was prominent.

REES: See, I wasn't active at that time. That was Sam Hartog, Jesse, and Frank Mankiewicz and that group. I know them all, but, see, I was not active at that time. Let me see, we are getting

into the 1950s.

VASQUEZ: Early fifties.

REES: In '53 I was very active in the city campaign. That's where I started meeting a lot of people from the Westside that were Democrats, and I got involved in the special election for George Arnold. I think [it was] the first time I really made contact with my own party in my own district. It was in November of '53.

Democrats love to have conferences. They just love to have conferences and this one was called the "little Asilomar". So at this little Asilomar they would break up into groups and discuss all your problems, and local clubs had tons of martyrdom. They had tons of martyrdom to begin with because in those days, we had nothing. I mean, we had blown every election known to man.

Divisions Among Democrats

VASQUEZ: In a state where the predominant voter registration was Democrat, and in a county where that was even more the case, why were Democrats in such disarray?

REES: Well, part of it was [that] the battle against the extreme left wing which blew the party

apart. You would have your old-time Democrats and you would have . . .

VASQUEZ: Represented by who, who would you think of as an old-time Democrat?

REES: I can't think of the names. I'll just throw out [Congressman] Chet Holifield, but there were others, I can't think of their names.

VASQUEZ: So these were all the old staid-and-true Democrats?

REES: Yeah, and we didn't have too many on the Westside because they had a more naturally liberal area. They had more office holders. The old-time Democrats had districts like Holifield's which is in Montebello. They were traditional Democratic districts. [Clyde G.] Doyle was another congressman.

Incumbents really weren't that anxious to build organization because they had control. Incumbents don't like organization. I was one of the few that did. They want to have their own organization, not a grass-roots, a Democratic organization.

VASQUEZ: Was somebody like [Robert W.] Bob Kenny interested in organization?

REES: Well, Bob Kenny had his own unique niche. He was

an old-time Democrat, but he was a wild liberal and also had a fantastic sense of humor. He ran for attorney general and got beat [in the 1946 gubernatorial race], but Kenny is a delightful guy to be around. See, it is kind of hard for me to gauge who was far out and who wasn't because so many things have happened since then.

There were always problems on the liberal side, because it had been infiltrated by people who had been fellow travelers and such. So you did have some problems. John Despol used to be head of the CIO and was there when the communists took over. He was leading the pack of the anti-communists when the communists were defeated. But later he was impossible because he was so completely anticommunist. He saw a communist under every basket. Subsequently, he became a Nixon supporter. Some of those who really fought the fight got to be complete fanatics on the other side.

VASQUEZ: How about someone like [Samuel W.] Sam Yorty.

REES: I put him with the old-timers, strictly a professional hack. Here was somebody who was identified with the extreme left wing of the

Democrats and then shifted right with the political wind.

VASQUEZ: He was considered a fellow traveler, as you put it I think, and then went to the other extreme along with Jack [B.] Tenney.

REES: Yorty was never in the same league as Tenney. Tenney was completely out of there with the Un-American Activities Committee in the state senate [Joint Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities in California]. That was a crusade in the '54 campaign.

VASQUEZ: Right. Where would you put them in this continuum of Democrats?

REES: Well, I'm not saying that the old-timers were all conservative; some of them were pretty far out. You have to remember who was around; Upton Sinclair and [Governor] Culbert [L.] Olson. So you had a lot of gung-ho people from that period. I'm talking about attitudes.

VASQUEZ: What had happened to them by the fifties do you think?

REES: There weren't too many around; you would see some of them but they weren't too active. Earl Warren just blew the Democratic party apart because he

beat them in their own primaries.

VASQUEZ: How? He took your program?

REES: He swiped our programs, swiped our primary; there wasn't much left. By '53, though, I think things were ready to [change] because I think we were building a concept of the Democratic party. In '48 [President] Harry [S] Truman won that [election] on his own. There really weren't many Democrats around, active Democrats. He won that on his own. I think by '53 the club movement had started up, and we had a lot of clubs in my district.

The Democratic Club Movement and Meeting Jesse Unruh

VASQUEZ: Tell me how the clubs worked in those days?

REES: I will just give my introduction on how I got involved in this. I went to the "little Asilomar" [meeting]. It was an overnight thing, and that's where I first met Jesse Unruh. I saw this guy in the parking lot--it was dark--and I think he had pint of Scotch. Jesse always drank Scotch, couldn't stand Bourbon. I always drank Bourbon, couldn't stand Scotch. And he had a top coat on. I wasn't used to seeing people with top

coats in California, they look so funny. He was big, and we just started talking. I was saying, "Jeez, these guys are so spaced out. They got the martyr trip going. What the hell's wrong with them? They ought to fight tough." And he said, "You bet."

We started talking. He had run for assembly against [Harold K.] Levering in 1952, which I could not conceive of, because that was a Republican district. I don't care who would have run in that district, he couldn't have beat Levering. But he had run there. Mankiewicz convinced him to. Anyway, he finished up his Scotch and threw away the bottle and said, "Jeez, who is this guy? Is he one of us?" And so we started talking. This was Jesse Unruh.

VASQUEZ: Had you heard of him before?

REES: Oh, just barely, but he was not really a major figure then. We got to talking, and we had a lot of similar ideas about politics, elections, and trying to professionalize the approach.

I was at one seminar where they were talking about the smear, and martyrdom was just all over the place. I don't do well with martyrs. I

said, "You people are from the Westside, and I know that area 'cause I live there. [Charles W.] Charlie Lyon is the assemblyman. He has been there for forty years, and his time is ripe. This will be the first year you have party designation and the district isn't conservative I mean you can take the district." And they asked, "Well, who the hell are you?" And I told them who I was. "Well, what have you done?" And I told them some of it, and they said, "Would you like to run for the assembly?"

VI. REES'S FIRST ASSEMBLY RACE

Running for the Assembly

VASQUEZ: Had Charlie Lyon already had his legal problems?

REES: No, not yet. But the [Arthur H.] Samish stuff was starting to bubble up, and he had been a Samish lieutenant. There was this fat woman there with an IQ of about 200 by the name of Vivian Koppels. She was president of the Beverly Hills Democratic Club, and her weight was approximately right with her IQ, just about two hundred [pounds]. And she must have thought, "Oh boy, I'm going to be a kingmaker on this one." I

got to know the people and, you know, they said, "Let's get together, why don't you come to a club meeting?"

The CDC never had a strong central structure. It was based on individual clubs. Then they said, "Let's form a council of clubs." This had gone on the year before. Alan Cranston was in on the beginning of that. They did and the central structure was strengthened.

VASQUEZ: You didn't attend the original Asilomar meetings?

REES: No, I wasn't active then. There was a council for each congressional district, and a council for the assembly district, as a way of kind of pulling things together. In my district, the congressman was a fellow named [Donald L.] Jackson. Jackson was on the House Un-American Activities Committee [Committee to Investigate Un-American Activities], and that's all you needed. All you had to do was mention HUAC and that was like raw meat. There were always a lot of active clubs because my district is a very liberal Jewish district.

The Fifty-ninth Assembly District in 1954

VASQUEZ: Tell me about your district, give me some of the

history, some of the demographics at the time you came in.

REES: My district. . . . The Fifty-ninth Assembly District took in Beverly Hills, Beverlywood, which is southeast of Wilshire [Boulevard], went south of Pico [Boulevard], and west into the area I called Westside. Santa Monica [Boulevard] was the border down to Venice, then east on Venice Boulevard and the northern boundary would be Olympic [Boulevard]. And it took in some of Cheviot Hills, a little bit of Holmby Hills. It was a district that had Republican legislators, but the demographics were changing. It was becoming more Jewish.

Once they started suggesting that I run for office, I started gathering statistics. I would take the registration and the vote for the presidential elections and on my slide rule convert that and come up with a percentage graph. My graphs got more sophisticated as time went by, but it was just to analyze the district.

VASQUEZ: You started doing this before you even ran for assembly?

REES: Some of it, yeah, in a rough way. See, I had

been in these other campaigns, but I had never been completely in charge. In the Arnold campaign, these theorists were around and in other campaigns it was the same. I wanted a campaign I could do my way, and the only way to do that was to be the candidate. I said, "I'm going to run my campaign, I'm going to concentrate on precinct work, registration, and get out the vote. The issue stuff, I don't see any problem with because they're my issues." I was against the loyalty oath, and things like that.

VASQUEZ: Were there people in the district involved in one way or another in the Hollywood blacklisting cases? For example, people involved in film?

REES: Not really, the film community is an odd situation, there is a self-isolation. Film stars aren't [usually] campaigning for state assembly candidates, maybe not even congress. They tend to get involved in U.S. senatorial or presidential campaigns.

VASQUEZ: How about screenwriters and producers?

REES: We would have people that were screenwriters, but we didn't have any big names. I know a fair number of people in the industry, but very few of

them did I meet in my kind of a campaign. I'd be with the paisanos, [the people in the] district. I did have some rich ones, but they weren't that involved in the motion picture industry. When I first started running I was young and new to the Westside environment.

VASQUEZ: Twenty-nine years old, weren't you?

REES: Yeah, I think it was twenty-eight when I started running. I had to figure it out. I had a few workers that had been through the Hollywood battle, but the only ones I met were staunch anti-communist, and they were a pain in the ass, only interested in one issue. I was not going to let them start telling me who I was going to have as volunteers. I didn't have any problem because I didn't have anyone who was connected with the hard left ever actively walk into precincts. They just don't get involved in state assembly campaigns.

Campaign Organization

VASQUEZ: Who did your precinct walking?

REES: I became a member of the Beverly Hills Democratic Club, which had a lot of young people. It was no way a body exchange. It was a way to meet people,

it was a very popular club. We had some older people in it too, it was a very popular club. Then we had the Westside club, that I spent a lot of time with, because that was my major development area. I decided to run, but I really didn't have any opposition. It was a little difficult, because I had just changed my registration the year before. But they didn't really have anybody else.

The Stigma of Changing Party Affiliation

VASQUEZ: What drawbacks did that have? Did people raise the issue of you changing your registration? Was it ever a question of party loyalty?

REES: Hell, I was a real Warren Republican. I certainly was not an opportunist. For god's sake, Charlie Lyon had been winning for forty years. Two years before he won the Democratic primary. The Democrats didn't look like they were going to win anything for a while with [Dwight D.] Eisenhower as president. It was really not the time that most people would become opportunistic and get into the Democratic party. They needed someone to balance the ticket, to fill out the ticket because their big shot was against Jackson. That

was this crusade [against the] House Un-American Activities Committee.

We always ran a good race against Jackson, but he always had a lot of money. He always had lots of mailings. We lost. The numbers for the congressional district just did not work out. I mean the numbers worked out for my assembly district but at that time a congressional district was composed of assembly districts and we had two assembly districts for the congressional district. Now that's been done away with by the [United States] Supreme Court, but the other district was a district that a Democrat could not take. Don Jackson was a tough candidate; they would have these huge fights every two years, so that I was needed more or less to build my district for the congressional vote.

Rees's Victory in First Assembly Race

VASQUEZ: So how did you win the first time out?

REES: Well, it was a fascinating campaign. Vivian Koppels got to be extremely difficult, because she had her finger in every campaign around the state. That's when [Richard P.] Dick Graves ran

for governor. She became very important. She was supposed to be my chairman or manager, but I could never get ahold of her. It was just as well. When I made my own decisions, she would get mad. A group of us including Jack Brady, Ronnie and David Solomon. (He's a medical professor at UCLA, very strong supporters; we used to have meetings at their house.) George Zukor, who later became a judge, decided to run the campaign. It was a great group, it really was. There was Harry and Gigi Campbell and the Prussins from the Westside group. I could go on for a long time naming people. There are people that I had just got to know.

Rees's First California Democratic Council
Convention

I went to my first city CDC convention that year. I got to know my Sixteenth Congressional District people, and by then I was actively running for assembly. The problem was Dick Graves had just changed his registration a year before and that was the big issue. His opposition was a guy named [Peter] Odegard, who was a professor from Cal [University of California,

Berkeley] and was pretty liberal for that time. Graves was very good. He used to head the League of California Cities and was very articulate, very suave, very bright. I was afraid to say too many good things about Dick Graves because I had just changed my own party registration.

It was a wild convention! The nomination came up for lieutenant governor, and the candidate for lieutenant governor was Steve Zetterberg. He was an attorney from the Claremont area, nice guy, looked a little bit like [President Abraham] Lincoln, and it was all set. They said, "Gee, we need a Mexican-American to nominate him." And they got Ed Roybal to either nominate him or second him. A lot of liberals who supported Odegard were really pissed because they lost. They felt they were getting railroaded, and Ed Roybal started making a nomination speech for Steve Zetterberg, and the hot dogs started running the floor and having demonstrations and shouting, "Roybal for lieutenant governor," and I swear to god, Roybal ended up his speech by accepting the nomination, and that was it for Steve Zetterberg. It was just fantastic.

VASQUEZ: So that is the way Roybal ended up running for lieutenant governor?

REES: Yeah, he was supposed to be nominating Zetterberg, but he ended up accepting the nomination. People were resentful; a lot of the pros like Don Bradley and the rest of them, really pushed the Graves thing through. I was a Graves man and I was very close to Don Bradley, who was one of the great pros of all time. It was the damnedest thing I have ever seen, poor old Zetterberg, I don't think he ever ran for another thing.

CDC Members Involved in Rees's First Assembly Race

But back to the assembly race, with Vivian [Koppels], we finally decided on a certain strategy. We'd begged her to stay, and we knew that she would just say, "No, I'm not going to stay, I've been insulted." We had it all fixed on who we were going to nominate for campaign chairman. And that's what happened. We were all saying, "Vivian, you can't leave us, you are so essential to our campaign." "No, I won't, I can't. I am too busy." She wanted us to beg her forgiveness. So finally Brady said, "Well, it is

too bad, Vivian; it is going to be a great loss. Nominations are open for chairman." So we nominated one of our people.

VASQUEZ: Do you remember who it was?

REES: I forget, I would have to look it up in my files. It might have been George Zukor, Ronnie Solomon, Rod Segal, Agnes Marx, a whole bunch of people. That was basically the Beverly Hills crew. There were some great people there. There was Helen Mellinkoff from a prominent Jewish family that lived in Beverly Hills for years. I mean, through thick and thin, she was the great loyalist.

VASQUEZ: Are these the same Mellinkoffs, one who is at the UCLA medical center, and one who works at the [San Francisco] Chronicle?

REES: Yeah.

VASQUEZ: This is their mother?

REES: Yeah, she was strong. She was a white-haired lady by then, but strong and just a lot of fun. I grew up in a Jewish neighborhood and have gotten used to it. I don't live in a Jewish neighborhood, I feel a little out of place. We had a great group, and then we started bringing

people in from the Westside club, and a few others to build the campaign. I more or less ran the campaign.

Campaign Strategy

VASQUEZ: So what was the campaign strategy?

REES: This was the first year we had party designation so we were going to do everything to stress party designation: Democrat for assembly, Democrat this, Democrat that, on the brochures. We knew the district, we knew it had Democratic loyalty. We could tell that from the presidential vote where people know if they are really Republican or Democrat. Once they get past that and get into minor offices, they don't know. I mean they'd get a big letter, it said, "Democrats for Charlie Lyon," two hundred people on the letterhead, what were they supposed to think?

In those days not much money was spent on legislative races. I spent probably less than five thousand dollars, and one of the advantages of the CDC was that we had slate mailing for the first time. "This is your Democratic slate, these are your CDC candidates." The first time we had that was the '54 election. We had slate

headquarters. We didn't have individual candidate headquarters. Everything was done on the basis of Democrats and working for the Democratic slate.

More on the CDC

VASQUEZ: So unlike the conventional wisdom which some people try to perpetuate, that the CDC was only an ideological debating club, there was organization? Was it very effective then?

REES: Well, it depended what kind of a club. We had debating societies; we had plenty of those. The issues were our fuel. If I had been for loyalty oaths, I doubt if I would have had one CDC member walking the precincts. I have always been right with my district on issues.

The only issue that I might disagree is with some of the more passionate Israel types who turn me off because I have some sympathy for Palestinian Arabs, who have no civil rights. Other than that, I have always been close to my district on issues. The whole thing on HUAC, the whole thing on civil rights, the whole thing on Vietnam, had no problem.

VII. THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF REES'S POLITICAL CAMPAIGN

Developing Name Recognition in an Assembly
District

VASQUEZ: So apart from using the party label, how did you go after Charles Lyon?

REES: Well, I didn't want to do that yet, so first I had to develop some structure. I spent a lot of time working with the various clubs, trying to develop precinct organization. I did a lot of walking. Part of the problem with precinct working is that in the daytime you don't see anybody. In the evening you had to figure when Groucho Marx was on TV because no one would answer the doorbell. Today no one will answer the doorbell because they think you are a mugger, but in those days we didn't have that problem. We used to do a lot of precinct work on weekends and we would also use this for recruiting. If they weren't registered to vote, we would give them information on how to register. That's when registration was still a little difficult.

VASQUEZ: So, for name recognition you'd walk precincts?

REES: Well, I walked precincts, but it's very difficult in a metropolitan area. In the Los Angeles

metropolitan area, there are thirty-five assembly districts with crazy lines splitting communities. It's very difficult to define a district as someplace that people live. It's not like a city. Beverly Hills was the only intact city in my district.

VASQUEZ: Did the 1951 Republican assembly reapportionment hurt that district at all?

REES: I don't know what it did, because I don't know where the old lines were. The good Democratic congressional districts like [James] Jimmy Roosevelt's had three assembly districts. Every good Democratic vote in this huge area was tossed into Jimmy Roosevelt's district. If Jimmy had less than 75 percent of the registration he couldn't sleep nights, and at times he was a pain to deal with. Later, with subsequent reapportionments, he insisted on huge majorities in registration, and I couldn't convince him that it wasn't the percentage of registered voters, it was the loyalty factor and production of voters.

You have got to figure you have so much time in a day. Maybe you can go to the breakfast meeting of a service club. Then you have from

about 9:00 A.M. dead time, and maybe you might have a speech at noon. But who's going to listen to your speech? Especially if you are not an incumbent, you've got no one to talk to. You might get in one or two service clubs maybe, but there were those who didn't want one candidate without the other, or something like that. Or, if you were a Democrat they didn't want you.

How Service Clubs Define Communities

VASQUEZ: How useful and how important were the service clubs?

REES: I didn't think they were very important, but I wanted to deal with them because in a way they tended to define communities that were not defined. I had a community in Rancho Park, I had West Los Angeles, I had Cheviot Hills, I had Palms, I had the Sherman Junction area, Mar Vista. None of these are cities but they are defined as kind of a business area. West Los Angeles was different from Westwood, then you had West Hollywood, you had all of these nondefined areas . . .

VASQUEZ: That the service clubs represented as a defined community?

REES: Yeah, they gave you some definition; at least you would know some people there. They might not vote for you or anything, but at least you could talk to someone and get a feeling of the community. First, I had to figure out how to use my day. So I started walking down Pico Boulevard starting at about La Cienega [Boulevard] and hit every damn small business on Pico Boulevard, and there were a hell of a lot of them all the way to the Santa Monica city border. These people were going to be in their shops and no one was beating their doors down. Most of them were just trading dollars. I come in: "I'm Tom Rees and I'm running for the state assembly, and I just wanted to introduce myself. I'm a Democrat." Most of them were Jewish merchants, what the hell? So we would talk for a while and I would go to the next one and do the same. It occurs to the guy in talking with a customer, "You know some funny guy running for the state assembly named Rees came in here yesterday, here's his brochure, I never met a candidate before."

I would do the supermarkets around noon and later starting at around 4:15 P.M. because a

supermarket really kind of defines a community. Most people who shop in a supermarket live within a mile or two of that supermarket. There were some great production ones, the one at Pico [Boulevard] and Overland [Avenue], you know that huge shopping center, Vons? I started hitting people as they walked into the market. But they didn't have any groceries in their hands so they dropped the brochure in the market, and they wouldn't talk to me, and the manager would come out and insist that I get off his property. That was before several Supreme Court decisions on public places. [Laughter] I decided the best way to reach them was in the parking lot, catch them after they had left the market. Their hands would be full of groceries, they wouldn't want to talk to me for twenty minutes about some issue, and I would just drop the brochure in their sack and go on to the next one. Then they wouldn't drop their brochure in the market, and the manager won't come out and throw me off the property. [Laughter] So I did that, I hit those markets every night and especially on weekends at noon. Fifteen years later I would have people

say, "Golly I met you at Ralph's." I never forgot that.

To me, a candidate was a commodity, and you had to sell that commodity. You had to be sure that that commodity got to the most people available. I would go to the movies, to people standing in line. They weren't nearly as good because you had people coming from other areas, but they weren't going to get out of the line to avoid you.

Combatting Voter Apathy

It's a funny thing, people are always screaming about politicians. But when a politician comes to their front door, they don't want to talk to him. I had one guy that said, "I don't want to talk to you, politicians, the hell!" I said, "Look, I'm not going to let you close this goddamn door because I don't like being talked to that way." I was really kind of pissed. I had had a tough morning. I said, "I bet you I'm the only goddamn politician who has ever knocked on your door to ask for your vote." And the guy said, "Well, I guess that's right."

I was pretty aggressive on that, because it

really got me mad. That's part of the system. When I find someone, "Oh, I'm not going to vote, it's all a lousy system," I want to tear their head off. I fought a goddamn war [Pounds table] and had a lot of people--good friends of mine--killed in that war to protect that right. I see these idiots who say the whole system is lousy. I have never operated on that premise. The system is good, the system is there. As Adlai Stevenson said, "You get exactly the government you deserve." If they don't want to vote, that's their problem, I feel sorry for them. You would get a lot of educated people, liberals especially, they would say, "Oh, I'm above the process," and it just really got to me.

I did a lot of door-to-door campaigning, but house meetings were the thing. "What's 'in' this year?" House meetings were in.

VASQUEZ: Coffee klatches as they were called?

REES: Oh, they were a pain in the ass because you would spend all this organizational time getting ten people together. Most of them were people you knew and they were already voting for you. We used the house meeting as an excuse for a

mailing, this was after I was elected. We'd send an invitation, you know, "Your assemblyman, Tom Rees, wants to talk to you about these issues. He's going to be in the neighborhood at your neighbor's house." Then we would write, Mrs. Ralph Cohen, such and such and such Oakhurst at 8:00, etc. We would send them out to the whole precinct, maybe three hundred households. At the first ones, we bought coffee and doughnuts and all these things, two people show up. I was not going to spend the time to phone the pre-cinct, I mean there just wasn't that manpower. I was really pissed. These were good precincts and so I said, "Well, screw it. What I'll do is I'll keep up the program, I don't give a damn if anyone shows up. But it will give us an excuse to get a mailing in at a time when there aren't very many political mailings coming through. It was not like the last week when you opened your mail box and you got fifty brochures. And it worked out very well. We were able to get a lot of penetration; pretty soon I got into three pre-cincts per house meeting, I mean, the biggest crisis was, if a lot of people showed up and we

didn't have enough refreshments.

VASQUEZ: You couldn't be at three places at once?

REES: I would prefer that they showed up, but if they weren't going to show up I would prefer they say, "Well, that's something, an assemblyman right here." But it's very difficult, everyone will complain about the politicians but politicians will break their ass to find any kind of a forum. They will speak to anyone, just to get people to talk to; it's very difficult to find forums.

Using Media

VASQUEZ: Now how did you use, or did you try to use, the press? Radio and television, of course, were already available in those days.

REES: Oh, in those days you just didn't. Maybe you could get a television interview, but it was almost impossible. With a metropolitan area, you are looking at a thirteen million media market, and your assembly district is maybe a quarter of a million people. We just didn't bother with radio or television advertising. It would be extremely difficult, especially for a non-incumbent to get anything on radio or television.

Even the Los Angeles Times, it's a local paper, but it's still covering a thirteen million media market.

[End Tape 2, Side A]

[Begin Tape 2, Side B]

VASQUEZ: What about the community papers?

REES: We called them "throw-aways." The editors didn't like that.

I was always called the assemblyman from Beverly Hills. The population of Beverly Hills is thirty thousand, and the population of an assembly district is a quarter of a million. Beverly Hills was always good because we had strong Democratic registration. The Democrats all voted and they all voted Democratic. I will get back to media.

My strategy in the first campaign was to try to get my Republicans to concentrate on Beverly Hills, 'cause they were concentrating on my strength. Then I went to the Westside and really developed some organization, really built some organization out there. Olympic Boulevard was more or less the main street, and National [Boulevard], this is where we built our best

strength. We had some good new clubs, we did a lot of recruiting, and this is where we would surprise them. But in all campaigns I try to get Beverly Hills as the focal point of the opposition. Beverly Hills is always a very pleasant place to campaign. [Laughter] You've got these big fancy mansions and all these brilliant, wealthy people, just great. That had been the problem with Democrats before. They all ended up in Beverly Hills. I say, the votes are already there, I didn't want to talk to someone who was going to vote for me. In the district, we had several strings of papers. We had a bunch of them run by the Santa Monica [Evening Outlook]. They covered the whole Westside area with their throw-aways. Then, you had the Beverly Hills Citizen, they had throw-aways. You had [Al] Waxman, a real--I won't make any editorial comments. He's [Congressman] Henry [A.] Waxman's uncle and he had his papers. I think the Reporter, that covered the area between Fairfax and La Cienega. Paul Parker had the Pico Post, that really covered his area well. He only had one paper, but he covered with it very well. And

then you had another string of papers that were weeklies. I remember the editor was named Felicia Mayhood and I spent a lot of time with her. I spent a lot of time with these local papers because it was the only way you could get anything printed.

I would always do my own releases, but they really didn't print issue releases. It was very difficult to say, "Rees comes out against loyalty oath." You really had to tag it in; usually it was, "Joe Schmo Becomes Head of Veterans for Rees." It was that kind of "PTA President Endorses" thing. What got in the paper really would not keep you up at night reading.

VASQUEZ: But was this one of your tactics for name recognition?

REES: Oh, yeah, it was very important, I did all my own presswork and busted my ass trying to figure out stories. Tuesday was their deadline day. They put the paper to bed Tuesday night and it came out Thursday. I would stop by each one; sit down with Felicia for example. We called her Happy because of her name. She loved bullfights. I would sit down and talk with her, we were

friendly, and we'd talk for awhile. I would give her the release and she would say, "Oh, god." I would say, "Well, what are you looking for?" I was just trying to get a feeling from her and then I would go talk to Paul Parker of the Pico Post. He was an older, very abrupt guy, who had been there for years and was apolitical. He was just looking for ads. I would talk to him and he was very difficult to break down. Then I would talk to Waxman, who I always felt wanted me to offer him an ad or something. Some of these guys would say, "Okay, I will give you white space for ads." If they gave me five column inches I had to buy five inches of ad. It was tough getting past Waxman, who was part of the old school. You bought your endorsement.

VASQUEZ: How much would an ad cost in those days?

REES: They used to have what they called a political rate.

VASQUEZ: Was it like it is today, twice as much?

REES: Yeah, yeah, yeah, the political rate was always twice as much because they figure they were giving you all this free publicity. Of course, if you didn't send this publicity to other papers

and they read your publicity in another paper, they would call you up, "You're not sending us stuff anymore!" Tuesday was the day. Waxman was always maneuvering some scam. Paul Parker was there strictly do-re-mi [money]. Happy was pleasant. The Beverly Hills paper got bought by a guy named Dave Highler, a local realtor, and he was going to be a kingmaker. He was a Republican, and the staff guy I talked to was in the local Republican Assembly. We got to know each other very well, I got a pretty good break from the paper, but the essence was that I did it personally and I talked to him every week and I knew what they wanted for copy. I didn't have much money.

VASQUEZ: You supported yourself how, with your business at this time?

REES: I mean just barely. At times in my life I have lived very frugally. I had discovered horsemeat about three years before. I thought it made great steak, but I haven't seen it on the market since then. I was a bachelor. I didn't have as many expenses. I had a car.

VASQUEZ: Now, you had the CDC firmly behind you but wasn't

Jesse already in opposition to the CDC?

Poster Sniping

REES: In the '54 campaign, I got the best nonincumbent vote in California in the primary, before anything happened.

VASQUEZ: To what do you attribute that?

REES: Designation on the ballot, plus I ran a good campaign. There was some name recognition. We used to do sniping, you know the snipe sheets? Those 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ -foot by 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ -foot posters.

VASQUEZ: You did your own sniping too?

REES: A couple times I did, but later I had some of my crew do sniping. I'll tell you someone could write a book on snipe wars. There were professional snipers. A lot of the pros were just these old winos. They'd give them so much per sheet to put up. And we were always trying to figure out where the professionals were going to go. You had to watch out, because if you snipe some areas, you are going to have the owner of the building call you up, ready to put you in jail. We had free zones where you knew you could snipe.

When we used our volunteers we really had to

lecture them, because sometimes these guys would snipe on new construction walls and we had to go there and steam the stuff off. You really got to know about every free zone in your district for sniping. Of course, there's no sniping in Beverly Hills. They'd have you arrested, I mean that's a capital crime in Beverly Hills. [Laughter] You tried to figure out when the pros were going out, you would follow them and cover their sniping. Sometimes the pros would double up on us. So, we would send the first crew out, they would come right through and cover over us. The snipe wars were just hilarious.

We never got in any fights or anything but there was constant combat between the professional crews and our crew. Then we started sniping outside of our district because [ours was a] district of commuters. Then I would get a call from another candidate saying, "How come you're sniping our district?" And we would say, "Well, we're not covering any of your paper, we're just covering this other paper." Campaigns like that I thought were just a gas, I loved them.

VASQUEZ: You enjoyed the ground-level organizing?

REES: We had Ph.D.'s out sniping. They liked it; they got all dressed up in their dirty clothes. It was like going out to combat. At that time, too, you had a lot of people who had been in the service, and it was kind of a throwback. They didn't want to stay home every night watching Groucho Marx, or whatever. Then the billboards, that was tough, too, because you had these small boards. Seven sheet boards. They jacked the price up, and then it was expensive to print the paper.

Raising Campaign Funds

VASQUEZ: Where did you raise your money?

REES: Well, we would have a regular support mailing, but they never do much. Mostly we had parties, fund-raisers, ten or twenty dollars.

VASQUEZ: Who were your big contributors?

REES: I didn't have many big contributors in the early days. Most of my money was generated within the district. You'd get some hundred dollar contributions. The first time I ran I didn't have any Third House [lobbyist] contributions. I didn't expect any because Charlie [Lyon] was their

god. This guy had been speaker and had made a lot of money. But we'd get a hundred dollars here, hundred dollars there. Don Silver's father gave me a hundred dollars. A hundred dollars was a big contribution. We'd have a lot of brunches. I like social events. I think if you are going to ask people to contribute, you might as well try to give them a good time.

Later, I used to take over La Cienega Boulevard on a Sunday when the galleries weren't open. I'd have the galleries open--the whole thing was kind of a Rees gala. We would have docents in every gallery and we'd put a couple of thousand people in the street. The galleries loved it because there were potential customers and we weren't taking a piece of their action and we'd raise a fair amount of money. I'd always have a little mariachi band with a guitarrón and everything. I love those things. We always had fun things. I remember once we bought out two hundred tickets for the Stuttgart Ballet at the Music Center [of Los Angeles County]. We did that kind of fund-raising, but that was a little later.

VASQUEZ: But this was later, already.

REES: The first year was just survival fund-raising.

VII. LESSONS REES LEARNED IN FIRST ASSEMBLY TERM

Defeating Charles Lyon for the Assembly

VASQUEZ: Now, come election time and this veteran assemblyman who had been the assembly speaker only got 8,800 votes to your 22,000. How did that happen?

REES: We did very well in the primary, we really did. We had the best nonincumbent vote in the state of California, and it surprised the Republicans because they hadn't done anything. I was five or six months ahead of them.

Then about three weeks later, Lyon got indicted by the San Diego Grand Jury for grand theft and bribery tied up with the [William G.] Bonelli liquor scandals. Of course, Vivian Koppels called me up right away. All of a sudden I became a very popular candidate! I had to make state committee appointments; in those days candidates made appointments. I was automatically a member and I had three appointments. That can break a campaign up too. The infighting for appointments.

The Unruh-Bonelli Fight

Where I got close with Jesse Unruh was in the Bonelli fight. Bonelli had been the fountainhead of the Republicans. But he was a bipartisan Republican and always played a close game with the old-time Democrats, and with labor. He always got labor endorsement. He decided to become a Democrat because of the liquor scandal, and here I was running alongside the guy as a fellow candidate. I said, "My ass he's going to become a Democrat, not on my slate." So we got in this huge fight because he was trying to buy his way into the state committee slate.

The CDC got involved in the primary with their slate, then in the final the state committee got involved, because the state committee couldn't by law become involved in a contested Democratic primary. But the state committee in my district was the CDC, because that was the form of the party. Jesse didn't want Bonelli because he had a tight race he thought he could win. We started working with a few other people. The CDC certainly didn't want Bonelli

there. The guy became a Democrat and got indicted for grand theft and bribery and wanted on our slate, baloney. We got in this huge battle and organized labor came in with both feet flying and started making threats. I got into a huge battle with the labor people. The state convention used to be in the summer, and we had a huge battle that year for state chairman. Assemblyman [William A.] Munnell was the good guy candidate, and [Elizabeth] Liz Snyder, who was a fine woman, she was the bad person candidate.

[Laughter]

Dealing with Labor Support

You go through these things, you build a good and evil confrontation, then you find out afterwards that the people you thought were really evil were fine people, even though I still think she was on the wrong side. I got involved in the race supporting Munnell, and these labor guys were saying, "Look, Rees, you think you are pretty good because they indicted Charlie Lyon but you know we have the power to make or break you."

And you would get these threats, and it was

difficult because some of these guys, they're not very subtle. They don't know a damn thing about politics. Someone said, "Go talk to Rees," and so they had the dark glasses on and the purple shirt, the yellow tie, "Okay, kid, you know we think you got a goddamn good career ahead of you. You can take Charlie Lyon, but you know you've got to have help."

We had a huge fight up in Sacramento. They were calling Unruh and Rees "disloyal to the Democratic party," and it was a major battle. I think we were able to keep Bonelli off [the slate], but I'm not positive. I would have to go back to my files. I was working closely with Jesse on that and some guys would say, "Tom, you're a SOB but that Unruh is a real SOB," and then they would go to Unruh and say, "Well, Unruh, you're pretty bad, but it's that Rees who's the real SOB." I always called him "the other one." That "other one," Rees or Unruh. I have a picture of Unruh someplace saying, "To the other one."

It was a very bloody battle because it was very heavy, very heavy. I had a chance to win

that district, and it was very tough when I needed a slate and state committee support. Slates were expensive and I wanted to get all the support I could get. But some of my unions were different. But I had the Machinists Union [International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers] at Douglas [Aircraft Company], and that was damn good. [Louis] Lou Sean, a little guy, he was good. He really did a good job, and the IBEW [International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers] were always good, the [International Brotherhood of] Teamsters weren't too active. I don't even know if the screen unions ever had a legislative committee, they just weren't there. Of the building trades, painters and carpenters did nothing, sheet metal workers nothing, it was basically IBEW and maybe some steelworkers. I didn't have any steelworker unions, most of mine were the Douglas union; they were good. The bartenders were nothing, those were the days when they would close the bars on election day, and you could never get one to cover a precinct.

VASQUEZ: Who was behind the write-in candidate, General [Harold L.] George?

REES: That was the Republicans. George was a major general in the Great War. Ten years before I was a private first class, he was a major general. It kind of fascinated me. Lyon was convicted about ten days before the election.

VASQUEZ: George got what, 6,000 votes more than Charles Lyon?

REES: He got more than that, I thought; their total I think was higher than mine.

VASQUEZ: Yes, put together.

REES: I thought George was a little closer than that but it was a damn good campaign. The Republicans really did a hell of a job. I mean they put that thing together. Write-in campaigns are very complex. They did everything, they were sending everyone pencils: "Let's support the General,"

VASQUEZ: This was after Lyon was obviously in trouble?

REES: Yeah, but I would say in a very short time, that thing took off like a rocket.

Assembly Reelection Campaign

VASQUEZ: What was it, money, organization?

REES: Yeah, money and organization. Their last hurrah seemed to be two years later when they tried to beat me, and then I think they kind of gave up on

my assembly district.

VASQUEZ: They came close.

REES: They sure did.

VASQUEZ: They came within 150 votes of beating you that time.

REES: I know it.

VASQUEZ: Tell me about that.

REES: I did get elected in 1954, and I did go to Sacramento. The next election, everyone seemed to be going onto get me. I voted just the way I wanted to vote up there. I was vice-chairman of [Assemblyman Caspar W.] Cap Weinberger's Committee on Governmental Organization. Well, this was the committee that handled all the liquor legisla-tion, and we were trying to get the Bonelli people and the Samish people--put them under and clean up the mess. I was acting as Cap Wein-berger's right-hand man because we were part of the so-called "good government group." And I would have lobbyists talk to me about it, "Well, Rees, you are a nice kid, but. . . ." I was the youngest member and there is nothing worse, and I was making some mistakes.

VASQUEZ: I think a way of understanding your second

election, or your first reelection which was a squeaker, is going over tracing your first term. The 1955 Speakership Fight and the "Good Government" Group

- REES: Okay. Well, I was elected, and Jesse was elected, and we both went up to Sacramento. At the time, the big battle was for the speakership. The Republicans controlled the assembly, so the battle was basically between two Republicans at that time.
- VASQUEZ: Was this going to be Luther [H.] Lincoln?
- REES: It was Luther Lincoln, and, I think, [Assemblyman H.] Allen Smith was the other candidate. We would have these battles that would pit "good government" against "bad government."
- VASQUEZ: You came in with the "good government" crowd?
- REES: I came in with the good government crowd.
- VASQUEZ: Who were some of the other people involved in this? Was Allen Miller with you?
- REES: Yeah, Allen Miller was with us; Bill Munnell, who later became a majority leader; Jesse; I think Carlos Bee, who was elected from Hayward. On the Republican side, we had some very good people: [Thomas W.] Tom Caldecott from Berkeley. It was

a good group.

VASQUEZ: Was Robert [W.] Crown with you?

REES: No, Bob was not elected at that time. I think he came in two or four years later.

VASQUEZ: How about [Eugene G.] Gene Nisbet?

REES: Gene Nisbet came in, a good man. Gene was my roommate.

VASQUEZ: Then that was the group?

REES: It was good government versus bad government. The [Committee on] Governmental Organization had all the liquor legislation. Then the evil guys were [Richard J.] Dolwig, and . . . oh, Glenn [E.] Coolidge, who used to eat ribs in Santa Cruz, was another one.

VASQUEZ: Good guy, bad guy?

REES: Good guy. Then there were enough bad guys in there. [Richard H.] McCollister was a bad guy. Then there were some of the old-time Democrats who were against us.

VASQUEZ: Over in the senate, did you have any allies?

REES: I didn't know anyone in the senate. The spectacular race in '54 was Jack Tenney's, who was defeated in the Republican primary by Mildred Younger. Mildred Younger was one of the most

dynamic women that I have ever met. She really was something else. She is a complete antithesis to her husband [Evelle J.] Ev Younger. I had known her when I was in the Young Republicans. She was really fantastic, she was a debate champion, she was just something else, very bright, very aggressive, and our candidate was [Senator Richard] Dick Richards. Dick was a very Germanic-looking person, shock of blonde hair, walked this kind of pacey walk. He was slim, fairly tall.

VASQUEZ: Very articulate, wasn't he?

REES: Oh, extremely articulate. The guy was really an orator. In a group of five, he couldn't make it; in a group of ten thousand, he brought them to their feet. He was just something else. That became the central campaign, the campaign for state senator, because the state senator represented the whole county.

So we all got to Sacramento, where the fight for the speakership was intense. I would have assemblymen call me up and kind of hint that I could get all these things if I switched my vote to Smith. I was considered a Lincoln vote, votes were switching around, guys were going one way or

another. They were going around the corner to make a deal on chairmanships. Each of these chairmanships represented some kind of commitment that was made.

[Assemblyman Francis C.] Lindsay was on Conservation, Planning, and Public Works, that would be water and state planning, and I think I was on that committee. Well, later I was vice-chairman of it, but he was also part of the good guys. He was from Plumas County, I think. Each one was an interesting appointment. I finally got to Sacramento. In fact, I went up there a week early just to get away from the lobbying in Los Angeles.

There was one lobbyist by the name of Lynn Peterson who represented beer. He was a real old-time lobbyist, he really looked like a lobbyist. If you were with Actors Equity and somebody said, "Get me a lobbyist for a movie," you would say, "There's Lynn Peterson." He had these jowls, this soulful look, and these big bug eyes that would stare at you.

Right after the campaign I was really broke, and I didn't have any money. He came to my

office--a little office I had in the Philharmonic Auditorium building--he said, "That was an interesting campaign and I would like to help you with your deficit," and he peeled off several hundred dollar bills, I forget how many. I had never seen a hundred dollar bill. Staring at my eyes, he slowly pushed the one hundred dollar bills towards me across my desk, and I slowly pushed the hundred dollar bills back to him, saying, "I'm sorry we didn't have a deficit, so we don't need the money." It really killed me because I could have used some rest and relaxation. I was flat broke. I couldn't even go to Palm Springs.

It was a very intense campaign because it was for control of the state legislature. We would get together and have our caucuses, and there would always be two or three [assemblymen] that would go between two sides. They would have their signatures on both support petitions. We finally had the vote. As my prize they gave me an appointment as vice-chairman to Cap Weinberger's committee.

Rees's Committee Assignments

- VASQUEZ: You were on the Committee on Finance and Insurance.
- REES: Yeah.
- VASQUEZ: You also got on [the Committee on] Ways and Means.
- REES: I got on Ways and Means the next time because I became the Democratic negotiator in the conference committees. I was on the Committee on Transportation and also on the Committee on Public Health because I had a lot of doctors in my district.
- VASQUEZ: During your first term you were on Agriculture, Education, vice-chairman of Governmental Organization, Public Health, Transportation and Commerce, all which were committees interim as well. These are the committees you had your first term.
- REES: I got on Agriculture because I said, "What the hell, I'm from an urban area, but I have experience in agriculture peddling, farm machinery down in Mexico." So I decided to get on the Agriculture Committee. It was a big mistake; my two big mistakes were Agriculture and later Education.

VASQUEZ: Why?

REES: Education was terrible. All the martyrdom in the world is there. Everyone went to school so everyone is an expert on education. I wanted to be an expert in finance. This was the time when the California Teachers Association was fighting the AFT [American Federation of Teachers] so you had this silly battle going on with two groups representing teachers.

Rewards for Supporting Luther Lincoln for
Assembly Speaker

VASQUEZ: Getting back to the Lincoln Luther victory . . .

REES: Well, Lincoln won, but it was a very bitter fight.

VASQUEZ: Was it worth it?

REES: Yeah.

VASQUEZ: Was he a good speaker?

REES: Yeah, he was a good speaker. I always thought Lincoln had a lot of class.

VASQUEZ: Why?

REES: Well, he seemed to be fair; he seemed to be reasonable. He was in the mold of the moderate Republican or a Warren type. His district was in Alameda County. He knew Warren. I liked him

very much. He was always fair with me. Once we started developing a partisan operation up there he wasn't as kind, but at that time we were very bipartisan, nonpartisan. They had this kind of office annex area up in the sixth floor of the Capitol, and Gene Nisbet, myself, and Jesse, and Carlos Bee all ended up in the sixth floor. It was kind of Siberia, I guess.

VASQUEZ: I understand you complained bitterly to Allen Miller about that. He was the chairman of the Rules Committee.

REES: We were kind of unhappy because I started off with Charlie Lyon's old office which was right off the chamber floor. As a newcomer, you didn't want to be isolated on the sixth floor. You had a lot to learn, and I don't think any of us were happy. We thought we had stuck our necks out on the speakership, and what do they do with the four votes? The Rules Committee, for some reason, was dominated by the other side. It might have been a compromise that Lincoln had to make, but all I know is that four Lincoln Democrats ended up on the sixth floor.

VASQUEZ: How about Lester [A.] McMillan? What role did he

play in this?

REES: Well, Lester was part of the old, old guard.

VASQUEZ: He made his deals with the right Democrats?

REES: Lester always made interesting deals. He was part of the old system and he did well with liberals because he always had the bill to eliminate capital punishment, which was a liberal cause. This is the thing with the hairshirts. All you have to do is give them one cause, and you can steal the state blind. We liked Les, but we knew him exactly for what he was. It was a real business for him.

Building an Affinity Group among Freshmen

Assembly Members

But our group, once we got up there on the sixth floor, started getting closer together. We started communicating and spending a lot of time together. We kind of evolved our own thing, and I think we included Allen Miller and we had Bill Munnell. Bill Munnell at all times was the great conniver. He always had these plots, with subplots, and I think he was minority leader that year.

VASQUEZ: I thought he became minority leader the next term.

REES: Yes, you are correct. Allen Miller was with us, and he and Bill became kind of our mentors. But in a way, we developed our own operation because they were there before us, and we tended to be loyal to our class, the class of '55. We did spend a lot of time together, and, I would say the first two years, we were just kind of getting used to the assembly.

The overall strategy of our group--which would include Miller, Munnell and such--was to build a more partisan assembly. Our majority whip, it must have been [Vincent] Vince Thomas, was strictly part of the old deal. His great thing was to stand up and ask the speaker when the assembly was going to adjourn. It was a joke. Everyone would laugh. He was this very taciturn assemblyman from San Pedro; he was of Slavonian background and was close to his Slavonian fishermen. He didn't talk much, had been there for many years, and as minority leader never did anything.

We started trying to get something going and move the session along. My big bill was to give Beverly Hills a superior court branch, because

all the lawyers lived in Beverly Hills and were all lobbying. I had Jerry Giesler, the old, great trial attorney up there, and then Bentley Ryan, who was Conrad Hilton's personal attorney. They were all active in the Beverly Hills bar. The governor vetoed the bill, and I thought the governor vetoed it because I wouldn't give him a vote on a certain bill, which became an issue.

Getting Used to a Legislator's Social Life in Sacramento

It became the kind of session where we got used to Sacramento life. I would be at Bedell's--Bedell's was the big watering place--and Frank Fats, which is still there. Bedell's is no longer there.

VASQUEZ: Was Posey's [Cottage] there yet?

REES: No. And these guys would say, "Well, you're a nice kid, but you know you are not coming back. They're really going to give you a haircut in that district, they are really out to get you." This would always make me feel great. It would make me nervous too.

In those days, there was a lot of drinking

in Sacramento. You would go into a bar and didn't have to put your hand in your pocket, some guy would buy you a drink.

Jesse had a bill to outlaw draw poker. Draw poker was legal in California, and they used to have, they still do, the Gardena poker palaces. There was an old assemblyman, a Republican assemblyman by the name of [Herbert R.] Herb Klockslem from Long Beach. For some reason, he convinced Jesse he should introduce the bill to outlaw draw poker because he said it would give him a lot of good press. Jesse introduced the bill.

They used to have this very crusty old state senator, a very tough son of bitch named Earl [D.] Desmond, who represented Sacramento County. He was tough. He had balls of brass, and he was head of the Governmental Efficiency Committee in the senate. That's the committee that would kill bills. If your bill was sent there you just said, "Hail, Mary," and said good-bye to it. He didn't care who it was; he had no fears. And was a very conservative Democrat. He didn't even recognize the assembly, and especially young assemblymen.

Jesse and I were in Bedell's and ran into Desmond there. He had had a few belts and said, "Oh, Unruh, you are that son of a bitch who put that fucking draw poker bill in. Well, I would like to show you some draw poker places in Sacramento." So we said, "Oh, hell yeah, let's go." It was one way of getting to know the guy. He said, "Okay, I've got a committee meeting. I'll be finished at 9:00." I said, "We'll meet at my office because I face the elevator." I had just bought one of these tape recorders, you know, the old ones that are about the size of a suitcase.

I was just trying to figure out how to make it work. So Desmond comes storming in, "Okay, you assholes, let's go, goddamn it. I'm going to show you my district." And so we went with him, and we went in some of the toughest places I have ever seen. This is that whole west end that has now been cleaned up, and is now a historical district.

VASQUEZ: Old Town?

REES: Yeah, these were tough places. This is where

Juan Corona¹ went to get his farmworkers. Desmond was okay in the first couple of places. They knew him; he was drinking his Old Crow [whisky]. We went into one place, which I guess had been sold, and the owner didn't know who Desmond was. And he says, "Well, you son of a bitch, how are you? Let's set up some goddamn whisky. This son of a bitch is Unruh who wants to outlaw draw poker." I was sitting there, and the bartender was not laughing. The owner [was] not laughing, and I was thinking I'd better get close to the bar. If I needed a weapon, a bottle would help. I used to run this nightclub in Austria, and bottles were weapons.

We really felt we were going to have to fight our way out of that bar when the place got raided by the police. Of course, they all knew Earl Desmond and one guy from the sheriff's department said, "Senator, I'll take you home. Can you guys take Desmond's car?" We were in no condition to take Desmond's car but Unruh said,

1. Juan Corona, a labor contractor, was convicted in 1973 of mass murder of agricultural laborers.

"Oh, yeah, no problem." So we got Desmond's car and followed this captain, I think his name was Lagomarsino, back to Desmond's place out in the suburbs. I think Jesse knocked over a wall or something and then the captain brought us back to Sacramento.

We woke up the next day feeling terrible, and at noon, just as the assembly was adjourning, Earl Desmond comes walking in with [Senator] Hugh [M.] Burns, shouting, "Where the hell are goddamn Unruh and Rees? Those bastards drank me under the table last night. Where are you, I want to take you out to lunch." So we went to the senate lunching place, and were the honored guests of Earl Desmond and Hugh Burns, who was head [president pro tempore] of the senate. That's what it takes to get to know people in Sacramento. It was an odd thing, I'm not saying Earl Desmond voted all my bills out of committee, but at least I had communication with him, and I got some good bills out.

Relations Between the Assembly and Senate

VASQUEZ: What was the relationship between the senate and the assembly during your first session?

REES: It wasn't very much. I was worrying about what one of my [local news]papers were saying. Earl Desmond said, "Well, Rees, I'll tell you, today's newspapers are tomorrow's fish wrappers." He gave me a lot of good advice. I was complaining about something once and he says, "You ever read the motto above the door?" I went back and read. It said, "Give me men to match my mountains." I mean he was a pretty profound guy but he had this terribly rough exterior.

The senate then was a "cow county" senate. At that time it was beginning to make a transition, because some of the old guys were dying and we were picking up the special elections:

[Stephen P.] Steve Teale, [Stanley] Stan Arnold, [James A.] Jim Cobey, I think, went to Harvard and represented Merced [County]. Steve Teal was an osteopath up in Westpoint which is up near Mokelumne Hill. We worshipped the guy; he was something else. Stan Arnold was a good lawyer. He was way up in Alturas [Modoc County], way up in the corner [of the state]. We were picking these seats up. Virgil O'Sullivan, another lawyer. Two years later, [Joseph A.] Joe

Rattigan came in from Sonoma County. They were starting to change things, but when I first got there, there were a lot of the older types, and they were tough. They stuck together, they drank together, they ate together.

The assembly really was the creative body. They were the ones that seemed to come up with legislation. The senate was a different thing. They would tend to kill a lot of that legislation. They were more of the status quo, the chemistry was really completely different. Dick Richards was different. He thought primarily of issues we worked on and was really never part of the senate. He wasn't part of the boys, that wasn't his style. Other senators were very cooperative later when I became state senator but the senate had changed. It became difficult at times, because I didn't want them to be too cooperative. They were always cooperative with Dick, but Dick was never part of the club.

VASQUEZ: Why did they cooperate with him, because he came from such a large county?

REES: Yeah, they'd help him on his bills. They were very understanding as to the problems of

representing a county of six million people. I always enjoyed the senate because it was a smaller body, and had the characters, even though they killed most of my bills. I don't think you will ever see them again in American politics. It was a transition period. [Charles] Brown, hell, he could tell us about the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. He represented Inyo and Mono counties. The cow county people really fascinated me. I opposed senate reapportionment. I was against the one man, one vote rule in the state senate because it had been up before the people twice, and people wanted to keep it that way.

VASQUEZ: And the two Bonelli plans, the initiatives?

REES: I don't know what they called it, but I was just opposed to the one man, one vote in the senate for a lot of reasons. I can get into that later.

Lessons of Rees's First Assembly Term

VASQUEZ: Yes, I want you to.

REES: I did survive my first term, but as I say, it was very traumatic.

VASQUEZ: What was the most important thing you accomplished, learning the rules of the game or

passing legislation?

REES: I was young and immature, and there are just a lot of things I had to learn to operate in a body like that. I had to learn a bit about the art of politics. I think I learned a hell of a lot. It was interesting being vice-chairman of Cap Weinberger's [antiliquor] campaign. Cap Weinberger is another guy who was very aloof and had no flexibility. Generally, we were on the same side, so we had no problems. But Cap was not a guy that sat around telling jokes or had a beer with the boys.

[End Tape 2, Side B]

[Session 2, December 10, 1987]

[Begin Tape 3, Side A]

REES: The first term, as I mentioned a half dozen times, was traumatic. My major bill for my district was for a branch of superior court in Beverly Hills.¹ There was certainly a lot of legal business there, but there was a branch in Santa Monica. The governor vetoed the bill, and I felt he vetoed it because I didn't give him a vote on something else. I suspect, looking back, that courts should not be built for lawyers. They should be built for people.

I was also interested in labor management welfare funds. There had been some scandals, so I introduced legislation for a state audit of welfare funds.² The problem was it ended up basically with union welfare funds covered, which didn't make me happy. I got a lot of cooperation from the Teamsters. They had a very good guy up in Sacramento by the name of Vernon Cannon and I got to be very close to Vern and his assistant [Tom Harris]. His assistant was an economist.

1. A.B. 1519, 1955 Leg. Sess., vetoed May 19, 1955.
2. A.B. 1520, 1955 Leg. Sess., died in committee.

VASQUEZ: He was an assistant to the lobbyist for the Teamsters?

REES: Yeah. I thought the Teamsters did a damn good job. They really helped me with the bill, and the people who didn't cooperate were management, because they just wanted union funds audited. As you know in reading the paper, just as many management control funds are screwed up, especially if they loot the funds to pay for their deficits, and the whole burden is just put back on the taxpayers.

That was something that I worked in, and I also coauthored a lot of bills with Cap Weinberger. We took the power of liquor licenses away from the Board of Equalization, and we put it in a regular Alcoholic Beverage Control department. We tried to take the profit out of the liquor licenses, which I don't think we did too well, but I think we took a lot of the politics out of it. We cleaned up a lot of things that year. Usually as a freshman you don't author a bunch of major bills, but at least you get bills on the governor's desk and get them signed.

In congress for example, you can be there for ten years and not get anything on the president's desk; it's a far different situation. There are just a lot more bills in the legislature. There's probably more law at the legislative level, because it's the administrative area of government, it's the regulatory area of government. Alcoholic beverages, for example, are regulated ad infinitum. You have two or three sections in the United States Code on just one subject. And every special district in the state of California is created by state legislation, so there's far more opportunity to get into an area as a freshman, be creative, and write some of your own law. You don't have omnibus bills.

In congress we had one housing bill, for example, coming out of the Banking and Currency Committee in the House [of Representatives]. The equivalent would be maybe a hundred bills coming out of the state legislature, so it was a big difference, but that difference did allow [opportunities] for a newer member. You had a half-assed seniority system, but basically the

system was based on who won the speakership, and the seniority system really didn't exist.

Luther Lincoln Supporters on Key Committees

VASQUEZ: What was the payoff for supporting Luther Lincoln?

REES: Well, my payoff, I guess, was becoming vice-chairman of Cap Weinberger's committee, because the Governmental Organization Committee was very much in the spotlight. We had all the anti-corruption legislation. Why I never got to be a great hero of the liquor interests in the state of California, or the horse-racing people, was because all that legislation went through that committee and I wasn't one of their people.

Gordon [A.] Fleury, chairman of Judiciary, was a strong Lincoln person. [Frank P.] Belotti was another Lincoln person, of the Fish and Game [Committee], and he represented some of the north coast counties [Del Norte, Humboldt, Mendocino]. Finance and Insurance, that was a very heavy committee, all the financial institutions plus the big labor-management stuff, like social insurance programs. Bill Munnell was chairman of that.

Let me see, on the Education Committee,

Chairman [Donald] Don [D.] Doyle was another Lincoln stalwart. You had nothing but Lincoln people in the key committees. Chairman Lindsay, on Conservation, Planning, and Public Works, this was important. There were so many, I'm trying to figure out where Allen Miller was. Caldecott, on Ways and Means, was the number one Lincoln guy and a very class person.

VASQUEZ: Allen Miller was a supporter of Lincoln as well.

REES: Yeah, I'm trying to figure out what Allen ended up with.

VASQUEZ: He was on the Rules Committee.

REES: [Glenn E.] Coolidge was on Revenue and Taxation, He was another strong person. We all did well; we all had just about what we wanted. As a freshman I wasn't going to be chairman of a committee, and what the hell, I was interested in the Bonelli liquor scandals. I had lived through those.

Rees's Reelection Campaign

It got to be difficult. I was going to run for reelection, and raising money was a little bit easier because I was an incumbent. I'd have to go back and look at my statements to figure

out how much lobbying money I got. I don't think I got too much, because this was the number one target district of the Republicans, which it should have been. They lost it because their guy was put in jail. The guy running against me was a fellow named Robert [L.] Meyer, who was a person I knew at Los Angeles High School. He was a very good-looking guy, a champion debater; he was a lawyer. He was married and had two beautiful children.

VASQUEZ: You are talking about Robert Meyer?

REES: Yeah, I mean he was the ultimate Republican candidate. He was my age, so he was young. He was a good speaker and the whole thing, and he was from the district. I wish I could have had some old hack or some damn thing, but they threw their best candidate at me. He later became U.S. attorney.

It was an extremely difficult race because he had all the money, he had all the support. "Oh, look at this fine family man." I was a bachelor at that time. I didn't have any kids. All I did was look at his brochures with his wife and kids staring at me. He had all the money for

the mailings. We had a couple of debates that weren't very conclusive. For his experience in debating, I think I came out all right.

He was knocking me because I was a delegate to the '56 convention, but, hell, what was I supposed to be, a delegate to the Republican convention? He knocked me because I had a heavy labor vote, which I did. But you see, the labor vote is not based on labor issues. They pick the issues they think are most important, and that becomes the labor vote. It's like the ADA [Americans for Democratic Action], and sometimes those ratings can kill you. So it was an extremely tough race.

VASQUEZ: Did they build organization the way you had built it, and did your organization from '54 carry over?

REES: Yeah, my organization carried over, and I strengthened it a great deal. I concentrated on organization because I knew I was going to have a hell of a fight. I knew I had to have organization, and I got more sophisticated. I did a percentage analysis of each and every precinct, a percentage analysis of my fight for

the assembly, I did a percentage analysis of the Jackson-[Jerry K.] Harter congressional campaign which brought out the Democratic loyalty factor better.

We also did a study in terms of underregistered precincts and tried to find out if that was because the precinct was part industrial or people just weren't registered. So when I went in, I had a good road map of exactly what I wanted to do. My concentration was registration, registration, registration.

By then we could have walking registrars, and we would put our people through registrar school. They couldn't go door-to-door as Democrats, but they would just stand on the curb. If you were to meet someone who wasn't registered, you would say, "Joe, come here," and Joe would register them. But my concentration was infantry again, I did strictly infantry. Let Meyer talk about issues, I talked about the Beverly Hills court bill, all I had done for Beverly Hills, I tried to get the campaign into Beverly Hills again and sneak out to the Westside and build organization.

VASQUEZ: Why did he come within a 143 votes of beating you?

REES: Because it was still a Republican district. I would have been beaten if there had been only one candidate two years before, and also Eisenhower was running and that certainly didn't help. It was Stevenson's second shot, so that he was really kind of old hat. I still loved Stevenson but he was . . .

VASQUEZ: Not generating too much excitement?

REES: No. I forget the rest of the races that year. . . . I don't know if we had a senatorial race; maybe Yorty might have run that year.

VASQUEZ: [Senator Thomas H.] Kuchel, I think, ran.

REES: Yeah, well, if Kuchel ran, then we were destroyed because Kuchel was a liberal Republican and really cut into us.

VASQUEZ: Kuchel defeated Richard Richards that year.

REES: Yeah.

VASQUEZ: And Yorty weakened Richards's campaign, in spite of not getting the endorsement of CDC, by going into the primary anyway. Do you remember that?

REES: Yeah, now I remember that. No, Yorty, I never did like Yorty. He was a wrecker all the way

through, that's what his political career was. So it wasn't the greatest year for the Democrats what with that Eisenhower, plus Meyer was a good candidate and he had a lot of money. I did not have much money; I had strong CDC support. We had enough money for our own mailing. But again, I did all I could to build organization, and that's what won the campaign. Even when the recount came along using our percentage analysis, I figured out two or three precincts where they made a miscount in Meyer's favor, and by god I was right on the recount.

VASQUEZ: So initially the vote was even closer?

REES: Oh yes, 63 votes. I picked up a hundred votes on the recount. I was very depressed because I was behind, the first morning. My export business was in shambles, and I thought I had lost the election. Jesse talked to me later. He thought I had lost the election too. He had won. Then I finally got ahead by 63 votes. So again, when I hear people say, "I'm not going to vote, my vote doesn't mean anything," I want to tear their head off. Truman won in California by one vote a precinct.

I tell you, when I do precinct work I don't quit until they close the polls. If I get someone who says, "Oh, I'm not going to vote, I'm not going to stand in line." I practically say, "Look, asshole, you stand in line or I will beat your head in." And that's why when that jerk [President James E.] Carter conceded to [Ronald] Reagan an hour before the California polls closed, I know that defeated [Congressman James] Jim Corman.

It was a terrible feeling, until I got ahead by 63 votes. It's an honest district, no one cheated on voting. So I felt pretty good, but the limbo was between that time and when the recount was completed, which was about three or four weeks. I went down to Mexico--I was still pretty broke--so I got in my car and I went down to Baja California, and around San Quintin.

VASQUEZ: San Quintín?

REES: There was a ranch with a German name. Mehling, Mehling, the Mehling Ranch. It was just some old ranch, and they would take a few people in. I had heard about it from a friend of mine. I rented an old horse and I just packed sandwiches.

I would wander around all those mesquite hills and come back at night, just trying to not think about elections.

Then the recount came out fine. I picked up an extra hundred, and from then I was known as, "Landslide Rees." So things were good coming into the second session.

The 1955 Speakership Race

In the 1955 second-session [speakership race], H. Allen Smith was the candidate from southern California. Lincoln was from northern California, and [Ernest R.] Ernie Geddes, the 1954 candidate, was from southern California. And, of course, the pressure would always be on us because they would call us traitors to southern California [if] we weren't voting for these people. But our group stayed loyal to Lincoln. Our whole group, and then we picked up a few more. I think Bob Crown might have been elected then.

VASQUEZ: Crown came in for the '57 session.

REES: And they moved him up to the sixth floor. I forget who else.

Consolidating Rees's Democratic Partisan Group

VASQUEZ: So you had a cabal on the sixth floor.

REES: Yeah, now we had six people up on the sixth floor. There were three offices there and they were double offices by then. The second term, I think Munnell became minority chairman . . .

VASQUEZ: Minority leader.

REES: Minority leader, and I became vice-chairman of Conservation, Planning, and Public Works. In a way, that was more my field, that was state planning and water, so I became the southern California spokesman on the committee for water. Then I got on the Ways and Means Committee, and really did a lot of work on that.

VASQUEZ: Was that meaningful for you?

REES: Yeah, I ended up in the second term as the Democrat on the Conference Committee.

[Interruption]

Well, the '57 session brought in some new Democrats. I know Bob Crown was one of them, Bob was Jesse's officemate on the sixth floor and they got to be very close. Bob was tough and he was really perfect for our group. This was a time then when we really started taking it

over. We took over the Democratic caucus, Bill Munnell became majority leader, and so we built a partisan operation. Of course, in building a partisan operation, we started breaking some of the ties we had across the aisle. I got into some major battles with Luther Lincoln and Cap Weinberger.

VASQUEZ: Over what issues?

REES: Issues that became partisan issues; they weren't personal issues. We were trying to develop a partisan approach, because we felt that nonpartisanship in California had led to boss rule. If you have party responsibility, you could have a Democratic program and a Republican program on those issues that were party issues.

I would suspect that 80 percent of the issues were really bipartisan issues and had nothing to do with party registration. But there were 20 percent of the issues that did, and these were usually ignored by a bipartisan approach. You had no way of defining the issues on a practical basis. You would get all caught up [in] that fog called bipartisanship or nonpartisanship.

VASQUEZ: Did this always work to the detriment of the Democrats?

REES: The nonpartisan thing seemed to work to the detriment of the Democrats. The Republicans had the money, and they had the press, so that you know everything was just beautiful because of bipartisanship. If you fought it, you would be accused of being some terrible partisan ogre. So our whole strategy from the beginning had been to define a good, strong, Democratic position and to take over the leadership positions in the Democratic caucus.

And I think this is what gave us our strength, because it meant that we were able to define who our people were. A lot of the old-timers didn't like it and they didn't necessarily go along, but we had the votes. We were getting younger members coming in and we helped make sure that they were going to be our people.

Battles Over Oil Issues

There were a lot of battles that were going on at that time. There used to be horrendous battles within the oil industry. [Assemblyman Charles Edward] Charlie Chapel used to say it was

the millionaires versus the billionaires. There was a lot of money floating around the issue called "oil conservation."

VASQUEZ: Did this include the tidelands?

REES: We were never really quite sure what it was. One group of the oil industry wanting to limit drilling in California because they were more interested in bringing in foreign oil. The oil issues got to be very complex.

VASQUEZ: Let's try and sort them out. Compare for me, if you will, the [Assemblyman Rex M.] Cunningham-[Assemblyman Joseph C.] Shell Act of 1955, and the oil leasing act of 1957 sponsored by Allen Miller.¹

REES: I can't compare any of those things because I have forgotten them. As I said, they became kind of a fog; they were like reading the history of World War I. You look at eight battles on the Marne [River], they were like waves; they just kept coming through. Generally, there were very

1. Cunningham-Shell Tidelands Act. A.B. 3402, 1955 Leg. 2d. Sess., Cal. Stat. 1724 (1955); Tidelands Oil Leasing Act. A.B. 80, 1957 Leg. Sess., Cal. Stat. 1087 (1957).

large oil companies like Standard Oil, then on the other side would be . . .

VASQUEZ: The independents?

REES: The independents. Then on another side would be [Atlantic] Richfield [Company]. Now the independents would be the Keck interests; it would be Superior Oil and a couple of others. This was at the time when a lot of these oil guys had formed their own companies. And they were rough. They would have these battles, and we would all be bleeding in our own blood.

One of the senators [James McBride] died during that time, some think because of the pressure--because they put unholy pressure on you. Then they would all end up at the Petroleum Club in Los Angeles kidding each other three hours later. Meanwhile, we [in the legislature] were sitting there bleeding from every pore. They were spending a lot of money in campaigns, and there were some very scary things that would come up.

I remember Harold [C.] Morton of Superior Oil and Monroe Butler who was his lobbyist. Monroe Butler was a very suave person. Morton

was not quite as suave, but still very smooth. They came to my office--I guess I didn't give them a vote--and Harold Morton said, "Monroe, I can't understand this. You told me that Tom Rees was very friendly and we gave him some good campaign contributions and we discussed this whole issue of conservation." "Well, Harold, I just can't understand it myself. Tom is a fine young man, an up-and-coming legislator." It was like I wasn't there. [Laughter] It was kind of hard to figure the issues, because it really wasn't a conservation issue, it dealt with bucks.

VASQUEZ: And who was going to get it?

REES: Who was going to get the money? One side was trying to restrict the other, one side wanted imports, the other wanted domestic drilling. It was a real mishmash. But there was so much pressure, so much money, that the whole thing became kind of ludicrous.

You mention all these bills, I have no idea what they did. A lot of it was tied up with Long Beach oil, and it kept going on year after year. It was a battle I was still fighting in the state senate years later. They don't have

many oil fights today that you read about in the paper, except for offshore drilling. But then it was a very intense fight within the structure of the oil industry: the multinationals versus the nationals, the independents versus the nonindependents, the ones that had retail distributions and the ones that didn't, the ones that had heavy oil against light oil. You could never understand them. I don't think Shell, Cunningham, or anybody else that passed these bills knew what was in them.

VASQUEZ: Do you think that state legislators just became pawns in their game?

REES: Well, they did, because the forces were so huge that we were being manipulated as pawns. Some of us, I guess, were very friendly with Richfield because Richfield had an initiative on the ballot, dealing with conservation.¹

VASQUEZ: Didn't they also have popular legislators in their district, Richmond?

Developing Partisan Fund-raising Techniques in the Assembly

REES: Yes. We [Democrats] started thinking that maybe

1. Proposition 4, 1956.

we should take advantage of this battle because there was a lot of money around for campaigns. We figured if we could ever get a surplus going, we could help nonincumbent Democrats take Republican seats. I'm not positive, I think it was my second term that Jesse and I and a few others, including Munnell, started working with a lot of the campaign contributions.

At that time many contributions were in cash, and instead of putting contributions in our pocket--which was fairly routine up there--we would pool the money and recycle it.

I had the duty for northern California. I had cash with me, and I would spend a day with each campaign and give a seminar on precinct work and an analysis of voting trends, my own specialty. I remember I visited Bert De Lotto's district and [Charles B.] Gus Garrigus from Fresno both won. [Jerome R.] Jerry Waldie in Antioch, he won. Leo [J.] Ryan didn't win that year, but won two years later. I would spend a day with them, and give them two- or three-hundred dollars. At that time, if you are were not an incumbent, two- or three- hundred dollars,

meant a lot in a campaign. So I think that was probably the beginning of the recycling process, now the rage. We were philosophically very pleased with the whole thing.

VASQUEZ: Was this to expand that network of people that wanted good government, or at least had those affinities?

REES: Yeah, they were our kind of Democrats. They were liberal to moderate, younger; they wanted more than just a job in Sacramento. They were basically opposed to the Samish type of approach. We were supporting our kind of people. So I guess that was the beginning of the system that now you find with the speaker, who has several million dollars to pass out to various campaigns.

But then we were just passing out several hundred. We thought it was very good; we were all sitting there more or less as liberal Democrats, taking special interest money and recycling it to candidates that would beat the special interest candidates.

Jesse Unruh's "Praetorian Guard"

VASQUEZ: At least one political historian has referred to the group that included yourself, William

Munnell, Allen Miller, Eugene Nesbit, Robert Crown, Nicolas Petris, Tom Bane, and Jerome Waldie, as the "Cub Scout Den," with Unruh being the den leader. Is this the group that you are talking about?

REES: Yeah, this is the group that eventually took control over the legislature, of the assembly. Bane came later. There were several groups. The first group, Munnell was more or less the head of it; he was the majority leader. He had been there before. Then Jesse came into the forefront because Munnell was a little erratic. In 1960, he blew his cool in the Kennedy campaign. After that, Jesse became the acknowledged leader. About the time I was leaving the assembly, the "Praetorian Guard" came in. I left just in time because I don't do very well as a Praetorian guard. I'm a hell of a partner, but not a very good follower. This is when Jesse started having a lot of ego problems, locking people up overnight in the assembly, and things like that.

VASQUEZ: Do you think that was a mistake?

REES: Yeah.

VASQUEZ: Why?

REES: Well, it just didn't do him any good. My own view was that you could negotiate just about anything, especially if you negotiated from strength, and especially if you knew what you were negotiating. When I negotiated a budget I would negotiate knowing full well what was in that budget.

Once, [Assemblyman] Don [R.] Mulford from Berkeley was coming up with phony amendments to cut the state budget. I knew exactly what was in his recommendations, which were the recommendations of the Legislative analyst, and I knew [Legislative Analyst] A. Alan Post was going to cut the University of California budget. I said, "Well, Don, do you realize what you are doing to the University of California at Berkeley? You are cutting out four buildings and eighteen positions." He said, "No, I'm not," and I said, "Yeah, let me show it to you. You are making reference to Alan Post's recommended cuts. Here they are at Berkeley. I think you have a lot of courage to do that." Of course, he was so scared of Berkeley, he wouldn't cut anything.

I prefer to negotiate like that. Tom Bane

was one of those who was pushing Jesse, "Be tough," and Bob Crown was pushing him, "Be tough." I just think it is a lousy approach. All you do is solidify your opposition, and, in the end, you don't end up with much. No, I think that you negotiate, be reasonable, negotiate from strength, and know what you are negotiating. The whole "Praetorian Guard" thing was devastating to Jesse's image.

VASQUEZ: Do you think this contributed to the "Big Daddy" image he had statewide?

REES: Yeah, that was it. And, of course, he had a lot of weight on at that time.

VASQUEZ: But obviously it was more than his weight, because he lost the weight and was still being called that.

REES: Oh, yeah, you can never get rid of that. The second term, we started defining ourselves. Munnell had Finance and Insurance. The second time Jesse took it over, in the '57 session. Then the third term, I became chairman of Finance and Insurance. We never really hit it for any real contributions. Now it's a real money committee because [it involves] the banks,

savings and loan, and insurance companies.

We weren't really raising money the way they raise money now. We didn't have any fund-raisers in Sacramento. We really weren't beating these guys over the head.

VASQUEZ: Would you, as a group, negotiate with the speaker to rotate committee chairmanships or memberships?

REES: Yeah, it was part of the overall political dealing.

Rees's Political Objectives in the Assembly

VASQUEZ: If you were to summarize your objectives at that time, how would you do that?

REES: My objectives were getting pretty well defined. The objective was to define a solid Democratic party, a solid Democratic platform or program of what we would do once we got the majority. We were going to build a responsible party in the state of California. We were going to do something that hadn't been done since the days of [Governor] Hiram [W.] Johnson.

I have read Lincoln Steffens's autobiography, which I think is one of the greatest books in political science. You can have all the reforms in the world, but eventually they are going to

turn against you and become tools of the people the reforms originally meant to control. And this happened. Lincoln Steffens saw this very clearly. The Hiram Johnson reforms that were intended to clean up the state of California eventually were taken over by the people that were supposed to have been cleaned out during Johnson's period as governor.

It's the same thing in our process, where we collected money and put our surplus into a fund for Democratic candidates. Now you have this quota system with millions of dollars being cycled through the speaker and through the minority leader. It just puts too much emphasis on money in politics. This is the problem with reforms. I know Jesse, at the time of his death, was raising a substantial campaign fund to change and reform the fund-raising laws in the state of California.

IX. THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF POLITICS

Campaign Finance Abuses

VASQUEZ: To public financing.

REES: Yeah.

VASQUEZ: In the current issue of the California Journal, there is an article on one state senator who ran unopposed in his last election campaign but spent \$500,000. To what would you attribute that?

REES: I don't know. I would have to look over his campaign statement. I have no idea. Maybe he put all his friends on the payroll; I just have no idea.

VASQUEZ: How can something like that happen?

REES: It happens in congress. You'll have people who haven't had opposition in years collect hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign funds. I consider the money-raising to be the great blot on American politics.

Today you don't have the volunteers that I discussed before. You don't have the issue-oriented CDCers, you don't have the people who go out and cover precincts on a volunteer basis. You have a bunch of professionals, and everything they do is expensive. They get 20 percent commission on television ads, and radio ads, and newspaper ads.

VASQUEZ: Do you think this is moving politics away from

the grasp, comprehension, and effective control of the voters?

REES: Oh, yeah, it shifts the loyalty of the politician to the Third House or the lobbyists in Washington, D.C., and Sacramento. The major fund-raising is now done in the capital and the major fund-raising ought to be done in the person's district. It really means that your legislator is representing forces in Sacramento, instead of representing forces in the district.

I'm not saying this is general, I'm saying this is a tendency. I know a lot of people in office who are fighting the good fight. A lot of lobbyists are unhappy with the system, too, because they get hit up; they're innocent victims. A legislator comes up and says, "Will you buy five tickets to my fund-raiser for twenty-five hundred dollars?" What do you say if you are a lobbyist? And what do you say if you are fighting an economic interest that's ten times your size and these guys come in and start buying tables at fund-raisers? What can you do? Your members can't afford it.

I specialize in environmental law and I

don't have any money people on my side except some environmental groups. We might get a few dollars to give to candidates, but we certainly can't match the big chemical companies. So you get to a situation where you are almost looking at a bidding war. I know a lot of the lobbyists would love to see public financing. They would love to see the pressure taken off of them because they would like to deal with issues they are supposed to deal with. They could talk about the merits of their position when a bill comes up.

VASQUEZ: Do you think that the emphasis on money and on spending the money, which for the most part is on electronic media, is moving politics out of the district and into the state capital?

REES: Yeah, I do. I don't think that you have the strong district organizations that you used to have. I'm in a Democratic club here in Santa Cruz County. Maybe they have two or three clubs-- this is a very activist county--but there really aren't too many volunteer organizations around anymore.

Grassroots Organization versus the Professional
Media Campaign

VASQUEZ: Just a couple of days ago Assemblyman [Art] Agnos defeated Supervisor John Molinari in the San Francisco mayoral race. It seems, at this point anyway, that he did it by building grassroots organization, whereas Molinari, placed his efforts into buying expensive media. Does this represent a turnaround, or is it an anomaly?

REES: Well, it's not a turnaround. San Francisco has a lot of neighborhoods. San Francisco has a pretty good tradition of precinct politics. I'm delighted that Agnos decided to go to that, I hope it starts a trend. San Francisco is interesting because of its neighborhoods. A lot of them are tied in with Catholic parishes.

It's great to see that, because it is also a complete media market in itself; you're buying about a two million media market and that's not bad for a city election. It's good to see that the public paid more attention to precinct work than it did to Molinari's attacks. I just hope they get this excess professionalism out of politics and give it back to the volunteers.

Because it's not that complex. Anyone who can play with a computer can play with the figures. I think most of the figures on registered voters and things like that, you can buy by the deck. You get a reasonably good hacker, and you can put together a pretty good game plan.

The Amateur Lawmaker versus the Professional Politician

VASQUEZ: Let me ask you this question, what is your feeling about the amateur lawmaker versus the professional politician as lawmaker? Which of the two gives us better government?

REES: When I first got up there [to Sacramento], we had sessions that lasted six months one year, and two months the next year. We had a very interesting mix. Jesse was an economist, but he was working for Southern Pacific chasing boxcars. We used to kid: I sold farm machinery down in Mexico and I would say, "Well, Jesse, it beats chasing boxcars," and he would say, "It sure as hell beats selling manure spreaders." Steve Teal, a state senator, was an osteopath. We had a lot of people that had other experiences than just being in elective office. I think Jesse wanted to

professionalize the legislature, and started making it a full-time legislature. I don't think they get much more work done than we got done. All they do is delay the sentence longer.

I suspect there is probably too much legislation introduced, too many bills passed. I have to deal with these things in a practical manner, now that I'm out of politics. They even had a bill that [precluded] landlords from prohibiting waterbeds on the second floor of houses. I don't know if those things are what should be in the laws of the sovereign state of California.

When I practice law I look at my California West Codes. I also have cases in Pennsylvania, Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia. I'm only in the D.C. bar, but these were cases that had other jurisdictions, and on which I associated with other lawyers. You could take all their state codes, multiply them by five, and still not have as much space in the book shelves as we have with our California West Code. I think the legislative sessions are too long and I think it has gotten overprofessionalized. I

would say a good percentage of the members of the legislature were interns and administrative assistants. So you have people that are essentially oriented towards Sacramento politics.

In Washington you would call it "Potomac fever," and you could always tell the people that got Potomac fever. All of a sudden, they became great Washington luminaries, and a lot of them wouldn't come back, they wouldn't be reelected. They forgot that back there, some three thousand miles away, was a district.

VASQUEZ: Would people refer to them as "technocrats"?

REES: Yeah, that's it. I don't know if that's best, I think it's best to have a varied group. If you look at the early days of the republic, they didn't conceive of professional congressmen that would stay in office for twenty years. Davy Crockett served two years; [Abraham] Lincoln served two years. Then later, of course, people started staying, like [Senator] Carl Hayden from Arizona. He must have been senator for forty years. The seniority system in the Senate, of course, was great for staying in office for forty years.

[End Tape 3, Side A]

[Begin Tape 3, Side B]

How Professional Staff Can Isolate a Legislator

VASQUEZ: Some observers say it would be impossible for amateur politicians to legislate effectively, and that the professional staff Jesse Unruh was so instrumental in bringing about in California is essential to the legislative process. On the other hand, there are those who argue that the professional staff has become a buffer between the legislator and the people, that the legislator becomes too removed from the actual workings of government. How do you size that up?

REES: I have always had very strong feelings about that. I think there is too damn much staff and I think that staff isolates the member from reality. You call up someone, you say, "I would like to meet the assemblyman." "Well, I'm sorry, he's busy this week, can we get you an appointment maybe?" This is ridiculous. Assemblymen represent maybe a quarter of a million people, state senators represent a half-million people. There's no reason they shouldn't be accessible.

When I was in congress, I never closed the door to my office. I always kept it open, and if

anyone wanted to see me they could see me. I would always get mad at some of the lawyer lobbyists, because they would make appointments for my constituents. I would say, "Are you getting paid to set up an appointment with me, because if you are, I'm going to raise hell about it. This [constituent] has every right to come to me without paying anybody anything." Needless to say, I wasn't very popular with a lot of lawyer lobbyists. I just think that a member of a legislative body should always be available.

And I never found that I had to work fifteen hours a day. I worked normal hours and got home to my family and still saw everybody that wanted to see me. I get very unhappy on the rare occasion when I have to talk to someone, and first I talk to a regular secretary then I talk to an appointment secretary, and then I talk to an AA [administrative assistant]. This is what is happening in Sacramento.

If you have too much staff they are going to isolate you. Your staff is going to sit around thinking of great projects. I think a member has a duty to keep up with issues and I don't think

you have to have a whole bunch of staff people telling you about things. If you are a member and are on the floor to debate an issue, it's ridiculous if you don't know the issue and can't debate it. And you can't have a staff member debating it for you.

I used to see that in the house all the time. I was on the Banking [and Currency] Committee, [dealing with] very complex legislation. My own field was international monetary policy. I had to know my subject matter, I couldn't have an AA know it, I had to know it. Why should I have an AA spend four hours researching the thing so they can brief me when I can spend an hour researching it, know the subject, and not need a briefing. There are a lot of complex things where you do have to have staff, but today the legislature is inundated with staff. It tends to isolate the member from the issue, and it tends to isolate the member from the public.

VASQUEZ: What has this proliferation of political staff done to political discourse?

REES: I think it limits it. If a member has to get all

of his information secondhand, he is really not the master of that information. A lot of times you have staff that's very young. They have a very strong political bias, and it is very difficult in a complex issue, because they know it all.

I did some lobbying when I first got out of congress and I was dealing with some very complex tax matters [regarding] taxation of U.S. citizens working abroad. We would talk to these twenty-four-year-old staff members who knew it all. They had never been out of the country, they had never read the tax code, but they certainly had some preconceived ideas. Even when I was dealing with Treasury, trying to equate the conditions that someone lives in, say, in an oil camp in Saudi Arabia with the apartment they lived in in Alexandria, Virginia. It was ridiculous, because they would say, "These guys [in Saudi Arabia] have more square feet than we do." I would say, "It is not square feet, it is what you see when you walk out of your unit."

But I didn't like a lot of staff when I was in congress; I didn't have any issue people.

When I became a subcommittee chairman, I had to have issue people because we had to deal with a lot of information in a complex area other than creating legislation. I didn't have a person who advised me on education, another on foreign affairs, and all of that. It's a waste because there's certainly enough information coming in, it's not a lack of information that has ever hurt anyone who is a legislator. The information comes by the ton.

I just think once you get so much staff, it becomes kind of an ego thing, and the staff can dominate. Once they get control of an issue, then they're in charge. You have some people that can't go to the can without talking to their staff; they can't give an extemporaneous speech, the staff has to write the speech out, and I just don't like that.

Every year it becomes more complex, but I don't think it becomes that much more complex. The thing I found in the legislature is, you meet the same issues coming around the second or third time. One of the reasons I left the legislature and went to congress was that after about ten or

eleven years, you meet the same issues again. You want to get into a new neighborhood to see other things. The school crisis is still there, the north-south water fight is still there, I don't see any huge new issues in the state of California that weren't there when I was there. Now you have a lot of problems because of these initiatives that restrict taxation and budget. But other than that, a lot of the issues are the same. We don't have the oil issue anymore, but then the environmental issue has taken over.

The 1959 Speakership Battle Between Augustus Hawkins and Ralph Brown

VASQUEZ: I'm going to back up for a moment, to the speakership in the assembly. I want to deal with one particular race, one particular struggle that took place while you were there in 1959. That was the battle for the speakership between Ralph [M.] Brown and Augustus [F.] Hawkins.

REES: Yeah.

VASQUEZ: Tell me about that.

REES: Well, we started working on that very early. In fact, some of my visits to the other campaigns in the north were indirectly tied up with Ralph

Brown's canvassing because Jesse, Munnell, myself, and several others decided that we wanted Ralph Brown as speaker. We thought he was a very honest, sincere guy. He was from Modesto. It was a rural area, but he seemed strong.

VASQUEZ: Why did you choose him over Hawkins, who was [like you] also from Los Angeles?

REES: Well, because Gus we had more less put with the old group; he was from the old group.

VASQUEZ: By that, you mean?

REES: More closely attuned to the lobbyists. Our basic structure, from the beginning, from the original Lincoln-Smith fight, was the battle over who was to control the legislature. And we didn't want that group to control the legislature.

VASQUEZ: Why?

REES: Our thing was to build a strong Democratic platform, and a strong Democratic party in the legislature.

VASQUEZ: Did you feel Hawkins would take it back to the old ways?

REES: Yeah. We were always in this situation. It was very difficult for us because we were all from southern California. This was the third straight

speakership fight where we [Laughter] were voting for a northern speaker against a southern speaker.

But the north-south fight really was not that important in the state of California. The north-south fight, in a way, was a fiction. The basic north-south fight was over water. We had the votes in the assembly for the south, and the senate had the votes for the north. But once you got away from that--and maybe the highway formula between north and south--there really wasn't a schism between north and south. They always tried to build it; they always said, "Jeez, you have to vote for southern California," and we answered, "Well, give us a speaker candidate we can vote for."

We were for Ralph Brown and we were opposed to Gus Hawkins. Gus had the basic support of those people who didn't like our approach. Again, our approach was to build a partisan house. Much of the Third House did not want that, it wanted the old way. They were constantly trying to get back to cross-filing, and all that stuff.

VASQUEZ: As liberal Democrats from urban areas, did Gus Hawkins being black give you any problems choosing someone else?

REES: Being black worked to Gus Hawkins's advantage because it put us in a difficult position, but then the blacks in the legislature--I'm thinking of [Assemblyman William] Byron Rumford and Gus--weren't militant blacks. They weren't the kind of blacks I worked with in the civil rights movement later. They were just kind of part of the deal. I don't want to go any further. They would try to push this at us, but the people pushing it at us were not the people who were doing the marches for civil rights.

VASQUEZ: Did they try to push it?

REES: Oh, they were pushing it at us because we were liberal Democrats. Gus really wasn't considered black. He is; he's about one-quarter black. You are not talking about, say, [Congressman] John Conyers in the House or some of those that are out in front. They weren't like [Speaker] Willie [L.] Brown [Jr.]. Brown is a strong activist. A very strong activist was a different situation.

We were fighting against the old line, and

the old line was for no party designation, very weak party structure. The Third House could run both sides. Once we started developing partisan lines, we were able to develop a lot of economic issues and make them Democratic issues. A lot we couldn't, but a lot we did. This fouled up the lobbyists. It automatically took away half their vote. They had to run another deck of symbols.

VASQUEZ: This also raised their costs, I would imagine.

REES: It sure did. [Laughter]

Assessing the California Assembly

VASQUEZ: You served in the legislature for a little over a decade. How would you assess the assembly speakership as an institution? How have you seen that institution develop? How would you assess the more contemporary speakers, say from Jesse Unruh to Willie Brown?

REES: There's that great saying, "It's men and not measures." You can pass all the laws you want, but they don't mean a damn unless the human leadership element is there. This is forgotten by so many people. They think if you pass a law, you solve a problem.

We created a Department of Housing and Urban

Development when I first got to congress. It didn't solve the problem of housing, all it did was form a new department. They just [recently] formed a new Department of Veterans Affairs, which is kind of stupid because it is not going to solve anything. It just makes the American Legion feel happier, I guess.

It's the same with the speakership. I thought Lincoln was a good speaker; I thought he was a strong speaker. I thought [Ralph] Brown was too. But when Jesse came in, there was a very strong personality with a mission, who knew what he wanted. He really turned the speakership into a very strong institution. He started it [then] and this has been continued, certainly under Willie Brown. When I was chairman of the Finance and Insurance Committee, I ran that committee and I made the deals. Let me go back a bit.

Labor-Management Issues in the Assembly

During my first term as chairman of the Finance and Insurance Committee, the big battle was always [between] labor and management. We are talking about social insurance, unemployment,

disability, workmen's compensation. There would be several hundred bills introduced by labor and management. They would have this great fight. It was like a charade, like the shadows in Plato's writings. They were there, but what did they mean? The ballet was always to hold the bills up to the end [of the session], then force labor and management to make a deal. So I went along with this my first term because there were plenty of other things on my plate; I had a lot of other projects to legislate.

So we came to the end, labor and management cut their deal, and automatically we made an omnibus bill on each program, passed it through, and it went all the way to the governor's desk. So then I read the management paper and they say, "Rees is a sellout to labor and it's terrible. He's going to kill prosperity in the state of California." And I read the labor paper, "Rees is a sellout to management and doublecrosses the laboring men and women and this. . . ."

Well, this was their own deal they [had] put together. They did this all the time, this was automatic. So I said, "Well, I'm going to have a

little fun on this. I'm going to tell them that since both of them are so unhappy, I'm going to change the deal; I make the deal now. They don't make it, they don't get together and make the deal; I'm the chairman of the committee and I'm going to make it. And that's what I did. I found that the only people getting screwed in those previous deals were the taxpayers, because they, labor and management, would always make some agreement between them, and they would lay some of the cost off the state general fund. So I made the deal in my second term as committee chairman.

VASQUEZ: Can you give me an example of that? How would the taxpayer lose out, yet management and labor be able to come together?

REES: It's kind of hard. These formulas were so complex because it would be a relationship between labor, management, the insurance industry, and the state of California.

I like competition. We had a state workmen's comp [compensation] fund, and individual insurance companies. You also had people that were self-insured, so you'd get various interests.

One would try to put the private companies out of business, others were trying to put the self-insured out of business, and others were trying to put the state fund out of business. It was the balancing of these [interests] that took a lot of patience. If you kept taking all the bad risks and tossing them into the state fund, the state of California, the taxpayer would be the person at the end who would have to make them good. Or, you would have to raise the premium so high, that people would be uninsurable. You had that type of relationship.

VASQUEZ: Was the outcome dependent on the rhetoric at the time, or upcoming elections at the time of the debate?

REES: The unions were different too. The Teamsters had a lot of seasonal workers in the canneries, for example, and these people only worked for so much time a year--a lot of them were housewives--but they would try to get twenty-six weeks unemployment compensation. Well, for someone who is a bona fide seasonal worker, only going to work twenty weeks a year, should they be on the state unemployment insurance fund for another twenty-six weeks?

Technically, everyone has to be ready and available for employment, but that's kind of a fiction, because in a seasonal area like Watsonville there wasn't much employment once you packed your [product].

When I got into these fights, I found myself pro labor one day, the other day pro management, the other day pro state. But we did get a good program out that year [in 1961]. I got a lot of scars, but it was better getting away from the old deals and asserting yourself into the issue. What Jesse did, he centralized it so that I wouldn't have had [this power]. I didn't serve that long under Jesse's speakership. He hadn't formalized his procedures by the time I left.

Jesse Unruh and Campaign Financing

The Third House would go to Jesse and say, "We want to get this banking bill, we want to get the savings and loan bill out." And Jesse would make the deal. Then he would go to the chairman and say, "Oh, by the way, we want this bill out, this bill that Ahmanson has." Jesse was close to the [Howard] Ahmanson operation. That would more or less be the marching instruction; whereas

before, the chairman had the jurisdiction.

VASQUEZ: How would you control something like that? Could you?

REES: The lobbyist was not going to say no to Jesse. If Jesse said, "Look, I'll help you with your bill in that committee," the lobby said fine. But then Jesse would centralize the fund-raising so that a tremendous amount of the big money was starting to come into the speaker's fund. As Jess said, "Money is the mother's milk of politics."

VASQUEZ: Some argue that has gotten out of hand, and they use as an example Willie Brown.

REES: Well, I think it has, I think it has gotten out of hand, I think the speakership has gotten to be too strong. But it has gotten to be strong because of the people that are speakers. I doubt if you could pass a bunch of laws that would effectively weaken the speakership. I'm a great believer in having a strong speaker, because if you have a weak speaker, if you diffuse that power into a Rules Committee, you could create diverse power centers which would end up a stalemate.

VASQUEZ: Third House forces could get in and manipulate, is that what you are saying?

REES: Again, it's "men and not measures". With some of the campaign-financing changes, you might limit that. One thing, they have to prohibit switching money between various campaigns.

Assessing Speakers of the Assembly

VASQUEZ: Now against your standards of a good speaker, a strong speaker, how do people like [Robert T.] Bob Monagan, [Robert] Bob Moretti, Leo [T.] McCarthy measure up?

REES: I wasn't there when they were there. I understand Bob Moretti was a strong speaker, but I think he tried to be too tough, and that hurt him. I just don't know, I was in congress by then. Monagan, I just don't know. I knew Bob and had a lot of respect for him; he's a very fine guy. Leo McCarthy, I have no idea. I know that there was a great battle between Howard [L.] Berman and Henry Waxman. Willie, I think, has been a very strong speaker. He has a fantastic combination: he's black, no mistake about that; he's brilliant, no mistake about that; he's tough. In a three-minute speech, he can cut you

up eighteen ways. He's got a great sense of humor. He has a hell of a lot going for him.

VASQUEZ: Is the love of power a requisite for being a good speaker?

REES: I don't think so. I think everyone loves power, some are [just more] flamboyant. Sam Rayburn was a speaker and everyone talks about Sam Rayburn every time they mention the speakership in the House of Representatives, but he was not flamboyant. He was this old Texas bachelor, but he knew how to use power. He didn't jump up and down and say, "I'm the powerful Sam Rayburn." Power and its uses are very elusive.

I tend to like manipulated power. The ones that stand up and say, "I'm powerful and I'm going to knock you on your ass," I don't think that works very well. Of course, Lyndon Johnson did well that way. But he also was a complete master of manipulation and an excellent Senate leader.

VASQUEZ: Is the ability to manipulate a good quality to have?

REES: I think so. Hell, you could say that manipulation is also compromise.

VASQUEZ: One man's manipulation is another man's diplomacy, is that it?

REES: Yeah, I just think that when you go into an issue and hit it head on, unless you really plan, it can be very counterproductive. But in a lot of fights in the early days we knew we were going to lose; we didn't have the votes. But we knew we were right, and we ran at the opposition like we were going to knock them right through the wall. We really had some great fights. [Laughter]
Jesse Unruh's Contributions to the California Legislature

VASQUEZ: You were close enough to Jesse Unruh to answer this question. What do you think were, first of all, his greatest contributions to the California legislature, and secondly, his biggest mistakes?

REES: As for his contributions, there were just so many areas. Jesse loved power. He knew how to deal with the Third House. I don't think he was ever a sell out to the Third House. He would give them bits and pieces, but he knew how to manipulate the Third House, to use them. I think that he used them, really, to continue to elect his people. I think that's a hell of a talent right there.

I think he had a lot of vision in terms of legislation. I don't think he ever sold out his own feelings. He was a good liberal. He believed in civil rights; he believed in the consumer. He had the Unruh Act in consumer financing.¹ I had the Rees-Levering Act on automobile financing,² but he was there at the beginning.

There was never any doubt with the Kennedy [presidential] campaigns and such. He had his issues down very well. He was very innovative in terms of what he felt the legislature should be, or could be. I think that he started having second thoughts and was going to do something about it when he died. He was very creative. He took the office of state treasurer and really made it into a power operation and accomplished a great deal. It took a lot of insight.

Here was a guy, poor background and everything else, and he was elected state treasurer. They said, "Oh, god. Here's just another hack

1. Unruh Act. A.B. 2319, 1961 Leg. Sess., Cal. Stat. 1214 (1961).

2. Automobile Sales Finance Act. A.B. 2252, 1961 Leg. Sess., Cal. Stat. 1626 (1961).

politician elected to state treasurer who will ride around in his limousine." Anything he got into, he really made into something that mattered. And what he did with the state treasurer's office is beyond belief. This is a very complex field. I suspect he saved the state billions of dollars by his ability to deal with Wall Street and the big bankers. You knock an eighth of a point off a hundred million [dollar] bond issue, and you have saved a lot of money. The problem with Jesse when he was speaker was that he would lose his judgment. He would get into his tough guy mold, lose judgment, and just run at a problem. He used to listen to his sycophants a lot, and this used to bother me. [They'd say] "Come on, Jesse, you're right, boy, just be tough." I was along with Jerry Waldie, in disagreement within the group. Again, I didn't really want to get into [a battle] unless we had to. Then, of course, no holds barred.

Unruh's Misjudgments

VASQUEZ: Do you remember an example when you think he misjudged something or overstepped his judgment?

REES: He got into a big battle with the senate and it

just became a power thing. I think he was making a move against guys like Schults that were senate lobbyists; Schults was from Standard Oil.

VASQUEZ: [Alfred] Al Schults?

REES: But he got into some needless fights with the state senate, and ended up in just a complete stalemate; legislation didn't move. He got into some major fights with me when I became the state senator from Los Angeles County. As far as I was concerned, I was the state senator, he wasn't. We got in some major battles; I would kill his bills and he would kill my bills. So you know what was accomplished. Nothing. One time when I was in congress he threatened to reapportion me out of the district and I said, "Well, I hope you try, because I'm going to blow the sycophant you are going to run against me out of the water." Which I would have. He would do that; he would get all tied up with his ego. When he got the power, in the old days, he didn't know how to use it. It just became power as a raw tool. Then he would have people around him like Bob Crown and Tom Bane who would feed into that: "Come on, let's show him we're tough."

When I was in combat, I saw some tough guys saying, "Okay, boys, let's go, we'll show the Germans they can't do that." And they would leap out of the foxhole and get their heads blown off. And other tough guys sat in that foxhole and waited for things to quiet down, then came out and won the war. Having a battle just to have a battle doesn't mean anything. But he would do that.

When he locked up the assembly, it hurt him and it hurt his image. When he ran against Reagan for governor, his image was not the best. But he learned a lot; I think he got away from that quite a bit. In the early days, he didn't know how to deal with power, then he got to be excellent.

Edmund G. Brown, Sr., Democratic Assemblymen, and the 1958 Elections

VASQUEZ: You had this group of increasingly powerful younger assemblymen, with some alliances in the senate, along comes 1958 and Pat Brown's administration, only the second Democratic administration in this century. How did this group support, or respond, to Brown's

"responsible liberalism"?

REES: Pat Brown had been attorney general. He was the only constitutional officer the Democrats had. He was originally elected under the old system.

VASQUEZ: Cross-filing?

REES: Yeah, I remember Jesse and I visited Pat Brown a year before he ran for governor to urge him to run. He was very reluctant to run because he was attorney general, and he would have to give that up. We saw Pat as the one guy who had a state-wide reputation, so we were pushing him. He still didn't make his mind up for a long while, then he finally did run.

VASQUEZ: Wasn't he considering a run for the [United States] Senate as well?

REES: I don't know. That was the year that Knight was the Republican governor, and Knowland was senator and Knowland decided he wanted to be president. The best way to be president was to be governor of California, so he took all of his Republican machine and started beating Goodie Knight's head in.

I liked Goodie Knight, but he wasn't the strongest governor we have ever had; he wanted to

be loved by everybody. So he gave in, and ran for the Senate. Then Clair Engle got in the race to run for Senate, so the Republicans were in complete disarray, and I think the Democrats thought they could win. But it had been so long since we had won that there wasn't too much self-confidence. Glenn [M.] Anderson was the candidate for lieutenant governor and he was the CDC candidate, but he wasn't considered a strong candidate.

VASQUEZ: And [Henry] Hank López was the candidate for secretary of state against the perennial Frank [M.] Jordan.

REES: God, what is he doing now?

VASQUEZ: He's dead, he passed away a year ago.

REES: He was a fascinating guy. He was a bright guy, hell of a lawyer.

VASQUEZ: Yes, he was, and he didn't lose by much against Frank Jordan, who used to rack up incredible votes when seriously opposed.

REES: Yeah, Jordan always won.

VASQUEZ: López lost by less than a hundred thousand votes.

REES: Brown didn't like Anderson because Anderson was pure CDC. Then you had Burt [A.] Betts for state treasurer.

VASQUEZ: [Robert C.] Bob Kirkwood lost to [Alan] Cranston for state controller.

REES: Then Stanley Mosk was attorney general. Now Mosk was a strong candidate. [Maxwell L.] Rafferty was elected superintendent of public instruction [education]. Mosk was a strong candidate, but Betts, I don't know how he got in there. Cranston usually knows where he wants to go and that state controller office has a lot of power, because they appoint inheritance-tax appraisers. It gives them a great patronage system.

VASQUEZ: Your group, how did it participate in the '58 election?

REES: Well, we were very active in the '58 election because we figured we would get the Democratic majority in the legislature; we were close to a Democratic majority. In the state senate, we were practically tied. I think Senator Randy Collier switched from Republican to Democrat, so we could see victory right there. The Republicans were just cutting each other to pieces, it was great for us. My own races had eased up. I was not getting hot-dog candidates. I mean my candidates were not as tough as they had been in

the past. So I was spending a lot of time with our candidates, traveling the state, because we were basically interested in developing the speakership and taking over the assembly.

[Frederick G.] Fred Dutton was in there as Brown's executive secretary. Fred is a very bright guy, a partner in O'Melveny and Myers, a long succession of O'Melveny and Myers partners that get involved. He became the key guy, the executive secretary.

Governor Brown's Relations with Jesse Unruh and the Legislature

VASQUEZ: Then Hale Champion took over that position?

REES: Yeah, Hale was the press guy. It really became a battle between the executive and the legislature. Much of the Brown program was basically our program that we had been introducing and losing on: fair employment practices, equal housing, all the way through.

VASQUEZ: The state water plan and government reorganization?

REES: Much of this we already had been introducing. So there got to be a battle there. Fred Dutton is a classic manipulator. He is very good at that, and Pat Brown tended to like lawyers that were

better educated than he was. Howard Christopher was another one of his favorites, another O'Melveny partner.

VASQUEZ: Some people attribute that to an inferiority complex that Brown had about himself. Do you agree with that?

REES: Well, I think it is part of the thing Jesse had too. Jesse always seemed to collect O'Melveny and Myers lawyers, I don't know what it is. Those guys from O'Melveny and Myers specialized in that, and it has certainly paid off. Yeah, there was certainly an inferiority complex about that.

Fred didn't want the legislature getting really into the deal, and he actually prohibited members of the governor's office from going to Bedell's. Because that's where we used to hang out. He didn't want any of the governor's people dealing with the legislature; he just didn't want any interaction there.

It was very difficult because by then I was married, I was one of the young marrieds, and we knew other couples in the executive board [branch]. But everyone was always afraid that

Fred Dutton would come in and say, "Jeez, what are you doing, you're not supposed to socialize with them." Fred was the guy that liked power and wanted to manipulate it, wanted to control the governor. If you are [the governor's] executive secretary, you can.

VASQUEZ: When Hale Champion became executive secretary did that change at all?

REES: Well, it changed a lot because Hale worked differently than Fred.

VASQUEZ: But did it bring the legislature and the executive office any closer?

REES: I think it did, but by then there had grown to be a pretty big schism . . .

VASQUEZ: Between Jesse and Brown?

REES: Yeah, supposedly Brown had told Jesse he was only going to run for two terms and then Jesse could run. Then, of course, Brown changed his mind. Pat changed his mind all the time. I have got Pat Brown stories up my ears. At times I was ready to kill the guy because he could be very difficult, but he could be a very engaging guy. Everyone liked Pat Brown, but jeez, it [depended on who] was the last person to talk to him, and

it made it very difficult. But we made history in those years. Let me see, that year Jesse was head of Ways and Means, I had Finance and Insurance, and Munnell was majority leader. I mean, our group ran the goddamn thing.

[End Tape 3, Side B]

X. REES'S LEGISLATIVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN THE ASSEMBLY

[Session 3, December 11, 1987]

[Begin Tape 4, Side A]

Rees's Subsequent Terms in the Assembly

VASQUEZ: Last time we spoke, we had gone over your first two terms in the assembly. Would you tell me a little bit about the 1959 and 1961 terms in the assembly? In 1959 you were chair of the Finance and Insurance Committee.

REES: Yeah, in the 1959 and 1961 terms I was chairman of the Finance and Insurance Committee. It was a committee that had a great deal of jurisdiction and dealt with all the financial institutions: banks, savings and loans, insurance companies. We also dealt with labor-management problems in social insurances: workmen's compensation, disability, and unemployment insurance. I did a lot of work following up on some of Jesse's legislation, in terms of consumer protection. The Rees-Levering Act on automobile sales and finance was one of them.

The Rees-Levering Act

I had a fascinating time with that one. I got into it when my mailman dropped by, and he

was very unhappy because he seemed to have two or three cars he was making payments on and only one car. I asked him what happened, and he said he went to Felix Chevrolet [Los Angeles] just to look at cars. He parked his car in the lot and told the salesman he was going to look at cars. He looked at cars and decided he couldn't afford any at the time. So he went back and he couldn't find his car. They said, "Well, look, we'll give you a loaner, just sign this piece of paper."

So they gave him a new car and when he brought it back a couple of days later--my factual situation is probably not entirely correct--they say, "Well, you bought that car, we can't find your other car but we'll make a deal with you. We'll give you credit for your other car and you can borrow money." He said, "Well, I don't know, I don't really have a bank." And they said, "Well, don't worry."

They had one of these small loan companies just around the corner owned by the same people. We used to call them, "Mickey Mouse operations."

Of course, the poor guy was really strapped. He ended up paying on two cars and he still

couldn't get his old car back. So I subpoenaed the owner of Felix Chevrolet, [Nickolas] Nick Shammis. I had never subpoenaed anybody at any of my hearings, but I was having a hearing on my bill in Los Angeles.

Pressure from Party Finance Committees

I started getting calls from the state [party] chairman saying, "I understand you're subpoenaing Nick Shammis," I said "Yeah," they said, "Well, he is a big member on the Democratic state finance committee." I said, "Well, that's too bad." And they said, "Well, you know you have to quash the subpoena." I said, "I'm not going to quash the subpoena. I'm going to find out what the hell happened to this guy's car. This is ridiculous." Then I got a call from three or four other people, telling me I couldn't do this to Nick Shammis, and I told them that I certainly could. So he came up under subpoena, and as if by magic they found the guy's car and [returned] the car, and quashed the previous contract.

I remember during that session, there was a really creepy lobbyist by the name of [David]

Davy Price. He had Coke-bottle glasses. He was very short. You could be talking at the bar in Bedell's and all of a sudden he'd pop up between you. So he started saying, "Well, Rees is dead, Felix the Cat is gonna get him." And some of the lobbyists I got along with were saying, "You know, we're really worried, because you don't win elections by that many votes. We just hope that this doesn't do you in."

Well, it didn't do me in. I started winning elections by bigger and bigger votes. But it shows you some of the pressure that you get from people in [party] finance committees. They hope this will ease their way with government and frankly I didn't really believe that.

It was very interesting in Finance and Insurance. I talked about it in the previous tape, about how I started making the deals myself on the labor-management package. At that time, I was very active with the budget and was generally a pointman for the Democrats on the state budget.

Confronting UCLA over Student On-campus Parking

I was chairman of the Subcommittee on Capital Outlay, which dealt with all the state

building programs. At one time I held up all the funds for UCLA because they wouldn't come up with a parking program. UCLA is in Westwood, a very high-rent district. And there's no parking for students. Administrators had parking, professors had parking, but the students didn't.

VASQUEZ: Who brought that to your attention?

REES: Number one, the students, number two, the residents who could never park in their own area because students were parked there. Students were mad because the police were ticketing them. Everyone was very unhappy, except the professors and administrators who had free parking on campus. So I said, "No more buildings here until you come up with a parking plan. This is ridiculous; this is a commuter campus, it's not a live-in campus."

That just raised hell, because everyone had their own favorite little building project. I remember they gave a big presentation for me. The architecture firm, I think, was [William P.] Pereira and [Charles L.] Luckman, I'm not sure. The architect came in. They had a master planning contract for UCLA. They had the bow

tie, Harris tweed, with leather patches and the pipe, you know, the uniform master planner architects always have.

I was very close to the architectural profession because I had been fighting the state architect for years to allow outside competition for buildings. The buildings we had looked like institutions; they all looked like prisons. I finally broke their toehold and was able to get competitions, for example, for the state colleges. We started having better looking state buildings.

I was very oriented that way, and I had already also heard these master plan pitches. They all sound good. They have the renderings and they're pointing out all this stuff--a real dog and pony show. I said, "That's fine, but where's the parking? You are not going to take any more parking space and put buildings on it, because it's a commuter campus and the students have no place to park their cars. Our public transportation system doesn't exist."

It went along, and along, and finally I said, "Well, look, the only way we are going to do this is to build parking structures and

amortize them out of parking fees." Well, that just drove everybody up the wall. Then representatives of the faculty stood up saying, "This is terrible. We are so underpaid. It's a terrible thing if we have to pay for parking (like most ordinary mortal human beings pay for parking.) It would mean we wouldn't be able to subscribe to a key intellectual journal that's absolutely necessary in our field of thought." I'm sitting there, "Oh, God, save me." Then the administrators said, "You know, we're underpaid and we need this." Everyone wanted the taxpayer in Plumas County to pay for parking structures at UCLA. I finally won. I developed a state parking plan so that we started having paid parking at all state institutions, geared to amortize at least part of the cost of all these structures.

VASQUEZ: Now I think it is probably one of the best moneymakers on campus.

REES: It costs money; someone's going to have to pay for parking. I don't want to pay for someone else's parking. I pay for my own parking when I go to work. I think it's ridiculous that I should pay for someone else's. That attitude was

not appreciated at that time. I remember, later, UCLA wanted to put a football stadium on campus, one of these big things [seating] 80,000, and I killed that. All the [regents] fly up, Regent Ed [Edwin W.] Pauley flew up to lobby me. I said, "Why do you need an 80,000-[seat] football stadium for six games a year? You're going to spend I don't know how many millions of dollars for a football stadium?" I said, "How about the Coliseum?" But they didn't like the Coliseum, because it was on USC's turf. This was for six football games.

Working on the Master Plan for Higher Education

One thing I worked on when I was in the legislature, the one time I was on the Education Committee, was the Master Plan for Higher Education. The president of Occidental, Arthur Coons, was head of that, and I was a good friend of Arthur Coons. I spent a lot of time with him on that. The state colleges [were instituted so] we could really concentrate on the four-year curriculum. Some of the pressure on the four-year curriculum was to be taken up by the junior colleges or the community colleges.

A person could start by going to a junior college, with college in mind for two years, and then transfer to a state college for two years and get a degree. The emphasis of the university system would be in the area of graduate work. This was the Master Plan for Higher Education, This was how we were supposed to integrate all these systems.

It became a shambles; here was UCLA wanting to have the number one football team in the country, wanting to build an 80,000-[seat] stadium. I said, "You know, we spent a lot of time on this Master Plan for Higher Education. Are you going to use graduate students on your football team?" So it got to be a big battle. As you know, the alumni that are dedicated to sports first are very difficult to deal with. Usually, they are very headstrong and have a lot of money. At that time, I could care less, because I was on the Elections and Reapportionment Committee, and no one was going to hurt me.

The 1959 and 1961 Legislative Sessions

The Pat Brown sessions were very interesting, I really passed a lot of legislation. I started

doing work in the area of state and regional planning. I think one of the first planning laws, was the [Senator Fred S.] Farr-Rees Planning Act, a weak bill, but it was the first statewide approach to planning.¹ Much of it was just trying to coordinate local and state plans so that you didn't build a park one year in the county and then run a freeway through it the next year. I was very hot for regional government trying to attack problems on a regional basis. Later, when I was in the senate, I wrote the legislation creating the Southern California Rapid Transit District.²

Rapid Transit in Southern California

VASQUEZ: What role did you play in the still nonexistent Beverly Hills Freeway?

REES: The Beverly Hills Freeway was planned even before the Pasadena Freeway. Then all the opposition came in, and they built the Pasadena Freeway. Later, they kept talking about a Beverly Hills freeway. Then they decided, I guess, not to

1. Regional Planning Law. S.B. 856, 1963 Leg. Sess., Cal. Stat. 1811 (1963).

2. S.B. 41, 1964 Leg. Sess., Cal. Stat. 62 (1964).

have it.

What is frustrating about Los Angeles is that about 1910 they had one of the most efficient rapid transit systems in the country--the old red cars. I grew up around Burton Way and La Cienega, and they had a red car stop there. It had its own right of way. I would be downtown in a little over twenty minutes on the big red car. If I wanted to go out to the San Fernando Valley, if I wanted to go way out to Van Nuys, I got on the big red car, there I was. If I wanted to go to the Pacific Palisades, if I wanted to go to Venice, there they were.

We had a terminal in Los Angeles that went through a tunnel at about Hill Street and Fifth Street. We had the other terminal, which serviced the San Gabriel Valley and Long Beach, on Main Street at about Eighth or Ninth [streets]. I remember; that's where I was inducted into the army. It was great. I could go to the [Los Angeles] harbor and it would be no sweat. Then slowly, in the thirties, with pressure from the automobile lobby--well, and with people starting to buy their own cars--the

Southern Pacific [Railway Company] started abandoning these lines as quick as it could. They still retained the right of ways. Eventually, the state or county formed the Los Angeles Transit Authority. They proceeded to foist off on the taxpayer, at a big chunk of money, the junk that was left of the transit system. But none of this junk included anything that ran on a rail.

We started off with one of the best inter-urban rapid transit systems in the country, and we ended up with the worst. I remember one time in the legislature I was trying to develop a line that would go from the subway terminal building on Main Street down to Long Beach. It was a good line, because it fed all the way through the industrial towns of Bell, Maywood, and areas like that. There were some preliminary negotiations with Southern Pacific. The deal was the state, the city, or the authority, would have to redo the roadbeds, because they had been beat to death with freight cars. You had to strengthen them. If the state did all of this, then Southern Pacific said that they would have to charge more

money because it was a better line. We got ridiculous things like that from Southern Pacific.

I'm like Hiram Johnson when it comes to Southern Pacific and this was a tragedy that happened to Southern California. You asked me about the Beverly Hills Freeway. I was [recalling this] because we had the line that went right through Beverly Hills. I thought it could be used for a high speed road. I said, "There must be something between a full freeway and a city street. There should be an expressway." It could be underground with streets going over it because you already had the right of way. One of the worst [traffic] signals in the world was Santa Monica and Wilshire boulevards in Beverly Hills.

VASQUEZ: It still is.

REES: You can spend forty minutes there. And it [an expressway] would have gone just right down Santa Monica Boulevard all the way down to Ocean Park. But, oh, no. For the highway people at that time, it was full freeways forever. They had strong support in the senate with Senator Randy

Collier as head of the Transportation Committee. They had everyone bamboozled.

VASQUEZ: Is that right? How?

Freeways over Railways

REES: It was freeways period, that's it. They had their own money. By the constitution, the legislature had no real control over them, so it was extremely difficult to deal with the freeway. They finally built the Santa Monica Freeway, and I said, "Why don't you build it down Venice Boulevard, because you have another right of way there?" There was kind of a ricky-tick development on Venice Boulevard, but, oh, no, they had to go through the Westside and they split up school districts, church parishes. In terms of coordination with the community it was a terrible freeway, just in terms of what it did to the community.

I got in a horrendous fight. I wasn't against freeways, and I knew that the freeway was going to have to come through. But there was absolutely no consideration for how the community was going to react physically to a huge freeway. The highway people were very arrogant. It was

freeways, that's it: "We're coming through."

The whole transit thing was very frustrating, knowing that we once had a system, and the powers that be let that system be completely dismantled. And it didn't have to be. No more red cars. A lot of them, incidentally, are at the bottom of the harbor. They use them for fish sanctuaries. That's where our rapid transit system is.

The red car went where the growth occurred. If you look at the various old stations like Beverly Hills, Palms, or Sherman Junction, that's where the growth went. If we still had that system, saved the automatic signals and everything else, I'll bet you we wouldn't have the crisis we are having today with traffic. It was very difficult to legislate when you had to have cooperation with other levels of government.

I got a lot of money for the Mulholland Drive Scenic Highway, because it is a rather spectacular drive. I wanted to integrate that with a series of parks in the Santa Monica Mountains. There's a lot of public land there. UCLA has land in there. I even got the money out

of the gas tax for it. The city could never make up its mind on details; we lost the money.

I did the same thing for Olvera Street. I got a lot of money to make it a state historical monument, which is what it should be. I love Olvera Street. I think they fouled that up. I wanted to take a ten-block area; I didn't just want Olvera Street, I wanted all the plaza and some of the surrounding buildings. They're used for auto-body shops and everything else. They should be restored and preserved.

Resisting the Real Estate Lobby

But it was terribly difficult. The real estate lobby has always been a terribly powerful lobby in California. They were responsible for my getting into politics in the Bowron campaign. I know when they sponsored the equal housing recall referendum I was in the state senate. I had a free ride that year and because I didn't have to run--I had a four year term, that was 1964--so I became chairman of No on Proposition 14 or whatever the proposition number was then. I used to debate them, I would go to the Real Estate Association and tell them how wrong they

were. I got very involved in that. I sponsored a black guy. He was an engineer, and they wouldn't let him buy a home in the Torrance area.

I told him, "Okay, you got yourself a friend. You know, we are going to blow these people out of the water." And we really got into some mass battles on that. Again, it was the real estate lobby and their power; they are always around. And if you got a combination of the real estate lobby, the gasoline lobby, and the car lobby, it was impossible to develop [mass] transit.

Rees's Group Consolidates Its Influence

VASQUEZ: Now, in 1959, Bill Munnell became majority leader and Tom Bane and Waldie went on to Rules as your group consolidated its hold.

REES: Well, we all had power. I was sitting very well, because I was on the tax committee. I was on the Ways and Means Committee and a senior member. Jesse was chairman, we worked very closely. Then I was chairman of Finance and Insurance, so we had a fairly small group with a great deal of power at that time. Carlos Bee was never that much of a factor. He wasn't an alley fighter.

We were. We had to fight hard to get a lot of things done. But Carlos was made speaker pro tem, which was not a power position, but for someone who loved to preside it was just great. He could smile at the crowd and pound his gavel.

Joe Shell, a former USC football player, was the minority floor leader. He was kind of thick. Munnell, of course, was shorter in stature; he was like a terrier, and he would just tie up Shell. Levering and [Bruce V.] Reagan, the other Republicans, he would just tie them up in knots. It was fasci-nating. It was an interesting session because we were really writing the Brown program, we were passing the Brown program, and we accomplished a hell of a lot of things. I would have to do a little research to figure out exactly what the complete program was. Everyone mentions the FEPC [Fair Employment Practices Commission], but civil rights was just a part of it.

I was starting in on state and regional planning; Jesse was making history with consumer protection. We were starting to work on the California Water Plan. It was really the genesis

of so many new lines of legislation. We had developed as a political party, we had developed as a party with a program. When Brown was elected, this was the fuel that got the program through, but the program had been there. If we had gone through this great bipartisan and nonpartisan stuff, the whole thing would have been floundering because Brown would not have come in with a big program.

The program was very much a legislative-team program. Pat didn't work that way; he came up through the old system. I know many of the people who take his history course will say, "Oh, everything was Pat Brown or Paul Ziffren," but I think it was very legislative. We were the ones who were in the trenches, we were the ones who were making these things go, so it was an extremely satisfying session and Ralph Brown was a good speaker. We cooperated and worked together.

In 1960, both Jesse and I were very close to the Kennedy operation. I had met [Senator John F.] Kennedy in '56.

XI. REES'S TENURE IN THE CALIFORNIA STATE SENATE

Why Rees Ran for the State Senate

- VASQUEZ: Let's come back to that when we talk about the national campaigns. I want to ask you about the senate. Why did you decide to run for the state senate at the time that you did?
- REES: Number one, I got married in 1960. That started a completely new orientation. It meant I was not out with the boys every night putting bills together, things like that, which was just as well. It was just different. I brought my wife up to Sacramento for the session. I was still on [chairman of] Finance and Insurance, still on the same committees. By then, we had put together a small group and we would meet every Monday for lunch.
- VASQUEZ: Who was in that group?
- REES: Oh, Jesse was there, Bob Crown, I was in it; a couple of others.
- VASQUEZ: How about Jerome Waldie?
- REES: From time to time; he really came a little later. Munnell didn't seem to be part of it.
- VASQUEZ: Nick Petris?
- REES: Thomas Bane might have been; I don't think Nick

was. The luncheon was at the room of a lobbyist by the name of [Vincent D.] Vince Kennedy who represented retail people [California Retailer Association] but he was not present at the luncheons. We would talk strategy, where we were going, and try to guide this thing. It worked out pretty well.

Jesse Unruh's Campaign for the Speakership

The problem is, it eventually developed into Jesse's so-called "Praetorian Guard." I was having a great deal of difficulty with that. I didn't believe in being a Praetorian guard. I didn't do very well in that. I'm a hell of a good partner, but I'm not that good a follower, especially when I think the person that I'm following is not right. I had my own way of operating. I preferred to compromise from strength as I told you before. But others, like Tom Bane and Bob Crown, were saying, "Let's be tough," kind of a macho thing. It started developing that way at the same time Jesse was running for speaker and we were busy getting votes for Jesse. It was pretty tight. Gordon Winton, I think, was a candidate. There were

several candidates, and it was a very early fight. I think it was during the '61 budget session. I know we were very active in developing both.

One funny story, we were in Bedell's with a Republican assemblyman, [William T.] Bill Bagley, who is now practicing law in San Francisco. Bill is quite a character. He's a moderate to liberal Republican. He had a shirt on with French cuffs, and Jesse was giving him heat. He said, "You know, Bill, you ought to become the forty-first [vote]. You become the forty-first and, hell, you name anything you want." He was kind of kidding him. So Bill reached and pulled, ripped this part [motions] of his shirt off, starched French cuff and everything. He said, "I, Bill Bagley, pledge myself to the candidacy of Jesse Unruh for speaker." He gave it to Jesse, [and] he said, "Okay, there's my pledge." [Laughter] I saw Bill a few months ago in Sacramento, and reminded him of that time.

It was a tough fight because some people gave their word, then two minutes later they gave their word to the other guy. In politics, the

only currency you have is your word. I just couldn't understand them, because my feeling was, look at the thing, decide where you're going to, and you go. No one is going to hate you. The people that you didn't go for are going to say, "Well, Rees is at least honest, at least he said he was for the other guy, and went that way." The guy you finally go with, if you wait till the last minute, is mad because you kept him on tenterhooks: "SOB, he was going to both sides and pedaling this way and that." I always found it was a lot easier on controversial issues to come out early and strong; you end up a lot better. But some of these guys would wait until the last minute. By then there wasn't much to deal with because we had the votes.

About the time that was happening, I decided I had to leave the assembly, not because of Jesse or anything, but I had been there eight or nine years and I couldn't afford to spend the rest of my life in the state assembly.

Economic Reasons for Rees Leaving the Assembly

By statute we were limited to \$6,000 a year. My export business had collapsed because farmers

in Sonora bought farm machinery when they had money. They had money when the legislature was in session, and I wasn't down there. I lost some of my sources that went to other agents. I was married, I was making \$6,000 a year with no possibility of an increase, working practically full time, so I had to expand. I thought I might run for the U.S. Senate. Kuchel's seat was coming up and Dick Richards was a state senator. He had run against Kuchel a couple of years before, but this time Dick had no free ride. He had to run for one office or the other.

Rees's Campaign for Los Angeles County's Lone
Senate Seat

So I started running very early, doing my kind of a campaign again, which was grassroots. I went to every town there was, slowly building up organization. My idea was to hit all the outlying areas, such as Imperial County, come up to the Central Valley, hit Kings County, the Modesto area, Manteca, Los Baños, Fresno, the whole thing. Then I would converge on the large metropolitan areas.

I remember I was giving a speech in December

and my wife, Leanne, was pregnant with our first son, Evan. I was making a speech at the Beverly Hills Democratic Club and the tough question was, "What are you going to do if Dick Richards decides to run for the U.S. Senate?" This was a no-win question. If I said, "I don't care if he runs or not, I'm going to run," Dick was really liked by a lot of people. If I said, "If he runs, I'm not going to run," they would say, "What the hell, we're tired of Richards, we think you're stronger on the issues." So it was a very difficult thing; I couldn't win.

Ronnie Solomon, whom I have mentioned before, came running up to the podium waving her arms, saying, "Tom, Leanne is in labor," and I said, "No, that's all right, Ronnie, I know you are trying to get me off this question, but I have to answer it." And she said, "I am not trying to get you off the question, get out of here." Evan was born the next morning. I kept running, and then Pat Brown and all these people were nervous, because this was in 1962.

Rees's Original Intention to Run for the United States Senate

VASQUEZ: You ended up running against [Assemblyman] Patrick [D.] McGee?

REES: [The Democrats] wanted to build a pretty strong state ticket. Pat was running for governor, and as an assemblyman from Beverly Hills, I was not considered a strong statewide candidate. Also, they didn't think they could keep my [assembly] district if I left. They thought the Republicans would take it back. It was very difficult, but they couldn't find anyone else who would run because Kuchel was a bear to run against. A liberal Republican used to just murder us, Warren, Kuchel, and that group. But I figured, "What the hell, I will run it all out on one string, and if I get beat running for the U.S. Senate in California, I suspect there might be something for me in the [President John F.] Kennedy administration. I had already been back to Washington, and I knew they wanted me to go into the AID [Agency for International Development] program because I spoke Spanish. Most of the people that came back there for a position in . . .oh, what is it. . . .

VASQUEZ: The Alliance for Progress?

REES: Yeah, the Alianza para el Progreso, but they didn't speak any Spanish; no one speaks foreign languages in this country. I thought I would rather run for the [United States] Senate first, just because you never know what's going to happen.

I think Dick Richards thought I knew something he didn't and he was getting very nervous. It would have been very embarrassing for me to run for the U.S. Senate and get elected. Finally, he decided to run. Pat Brown and all the others were just delighted. The state senator representing 40 percent of the state was gonna run and strengthen the ticket. Then Pat called me up and said, "Now, Tom, we have decided the best thing to do [is to support Richards]." I was so mad because by then I was so emotionally involved in the race. I was talking to a guy in the Bay Area. I remember picking up an ashtray--I was in my hotel--and throwing it. I don't think there was a piece left of that ashtray that was more than half a centimeter. I was furious.

Then I started getting calls from some of the liberal Democrats saying, "We don't want Richards because you're stronger on the issues." I said, "Okay, I'll tell you what you do. I have to have guarantees of money to campaign on, and I have to have guarantees of votes at the CDC convention. That's what I want, I want you to get me pledges of both, and I want the money put in an escrow account." This happens all the time. These guys get hot-eyed, they promise you the moon, and once you file, where is everybody? I didn't think it would be forthcoming, and it wasn't, so I decided to run for Richards's spot. It was no problem because all my campaign buttons said, "Rees for Senate." [Laughter]

There were several [people] that wanted to run for the spot. Dick had a good friend, [Donald] Don Rose, his AA [administrative assistant], and Don wanted to run. But I came in very strong and took the local CDC convention. There were a bunch of Democrats on the ticket, but they were all just lightweights. McGee was the Republican candidate, and he was extremely weak. He used to be in the assembly; I knew

him. I didn't get along with him, but I knew the guy. He was very weak, I thought an alcoholic, so it was an easy campaign.

I won, and it was great, because if I had run for the U.S. Senate I would have gotten killed. That was the year of the Bay of Pigs [invasion], I think [actually, the Cuban Missile Crisis]. The front page of the Los Angeles Times, the week before the election, was a picture of Kuchel putting on his air force togs, to be flown back to Washington, D.C., for a special session of the U.S. Senate. Dick, unfortunately, lost by a big vote. And I won by a big vote, so I became the Los Angeles senator, which I liked. I really wasn't looking forward to being in the assembly, because I could see the way Jesse's operation was going. I don't think I would have fit in too well. I just had a different approach to things.

VASQUEZ: What would you mean by that?

REES: He was getting into his "Big Daddy" phase and his closest friends were those that were feeding that. And that made it very difficult. As I say, I like being a partner, I like being

consulted, I like my input, and once we make a decision, I'm willing to battle to the death for it. But I just didn't feel like following a leader, no matter what the issue was. This was starting to manifest itself. There was a lot of competition to get close to Jesse once he got the power.

Regional Occupational Training Centers

VASQUEZ: Now, you spent nearly two sessions in the state senate. What do you think you were able to accomplish there?

REES: I spent three years there and I think I accomplished a great deal. There was one bill I got through, I'm not sure if it was the assembly or the senate, creating regional occupational centers. I don't think there is nearly the training that is needed in this state to train people for fairly high-skilled positions in the trades.

I remember, once I was going through a minimum security prison, I think in Corona [Corona Rehabilitation Center], and they had this fantastic trade training program. There were youngsters, prisoners, that were learning dry-

walling, plastering, carpentry, and electrical work; I was really impressed. It was not like the old vocational schools, where you sat and looked at the saw for an hour. You know, a Jacob Riis high school for kids that were in trouble.

I said, "Well, this is an irony. I guess if you want to get a good vocational, a good professional training course in California, you go to Beverly Hills with a ball-peen hammer and start knocking off hubcaps. They'll send you to Corona, because that's a capital crime in Beverly Hills. [Laughter] Then you get this great training, and because you are a troubled youth, they have this fine labor-management council that places you in a good job."

That's a hell of a note I thought. We must try to develop something on a regional basis where someone who wants to go into a trade, they can. I got that through, that was my bill. I wrote it and everything else.¹ It was regional, too; it wasn't tied into districts, and it

1. S.B. 1379, 1963 Leg. Sess., Cal. Stat. 1783 (1963), and S.B. 930, 1965 Leg. Sess., Cal. Stat. 760 (1965).

mandated labor-management committees. It allowed management to donate equipment and things like that. They were very successful. I went through one in the San Fernando Valley and visited a course where they were training people to be gardeners. I'm talking about trained gardeners, not people who cut lawns. It's fantastic. There's a waiting list; the minute these guys get out they get a good position. Now they are very heavy, of course, in computer technology, but also the trades. It was just fantastic to see that happen. That was something that I thought up which worked.

Southern California Rapid Transit District

I spent two years trying to create the Southern California Rapid Transit District and it was a pain in the ass, because of the whole problem of labor versus management. I believe in compulsory arbitration in strikes that affect the public interest. I think it's terrible, where the public interest is [involved], that labor and management are allowed to blow the whole thing apart. I have an interest in the transit system, I have an interest of the mail service, I have an

interest of the gas company because they serve me; I need those services. I really felt that the public had a right to be privy to those negotiations.

Labor Conflicts and Compulsory Arbitration

VASQUEZ: Some would argue that compulsory arbitration, ends up helping management over labor.

REES: Well, I know there's that argument. I did a lot of study of it. I think it's a false argument. Look at the air traffic controllers, how dumb they were violating an actual agreement and going on strike. I was furious with them. When that union went down, I celebrated. Of course, I celebrated because they were the only union that supported Ronald Reagan.

They are jeopardizing my life and my family's life by going on strike and I don't think they should be allowed to do that. I see no reason why you can't have an arbitrator figure it out, depending on the form of arbitration.

It's not like baseball salaries, where you either take one offer or the other. In arbitration you can get the two sides together. A lot of it is ego; a lot of it is silly work rules

that don't mean anything; a lot of it is management ego, some guy [who is] tied into a process won't move. We always think that in these negotiations everyone is rational. That's completely false; when they act that way, they're not, and the public is injured. I had a huge fight on that and I couldn't win. Then I had a fight on bonds. I spent a lot of time on that.

[End Tape 4, Side A]

[Begin Tape 4, Side B]

The Growing Distance Between Rees and Jesse Unruh

REES: He was trying to take over the whole operation.

VASQUEZ: Jesse Unruh?

REES: Yeah. The assembly has always been the more aggressive and the more creative of the two houses. The senate is more stately, "We are senators," and they are treated that way. It used to kill me. I would go to a party or something and they'd say, "Oh, here's Assemblyman Rees. Oh, Assemblyman, how do you do?" At that time I had a lot of power; I was one of the three or four people running the operation. Then you would say, "Here's Senator [Leland M.] Backstrand," and Senator Backstrand didn't have

any power, he had nothing. "Oh, Senator, my goodness, how wonderful," you know, it was that kind of an attitude.

The assembly generally were the ones that came up with more of the legislation; it's an odd relationship. But Jesse tried to move in on the senate. He would kill senate bills as part of a battle. I lost my transit bill. We got in an argument, and he killed my bill. I got pissed off and came back and killed about ten of his. I had a lot of leverage on that senate floor and they just loved two L.A. County people slugging it out.

VASQUEZ: Two Democrats; did that struggle weaken you?

REES: No, it strengthened me in the senate. I got along very well in the senate; I was part of the club. I couldn't be part of the club all the way, because I was still from L.A. County, but I never had any problem in the senate. If it came to water or highways, of course, I didn't have the votes, but I had the votes over in the assembly. I could always kill an appropriations bill in the assembly with a two-thirds vote. I always had about thirty-seven, thirty-six

assembly votes. So if my delegation stuck with me, hell, we could kill any senate bill there was.

VASQUEZ: Did your conflict with Jesse erode that delegation?

REES: Well, it did because he was running such a heavy hand. I got furious when he killed my transit bill because I had been working on it for two years. And it got to be kind of silly.

Why Rees Opposed the One Man, One Vote Mandate

In my senate term, the Baker v. Carr decision came out of the U.S. Supreme Court. You had to have one man, one vote districts.¹ Despite the fact that the state electorate had voted twice to keep the old county system, this was the supreme law of the land.

VASQUEZ: Were you against this?

REES: I was, because I could look at it and see I wasn't really being discriminated against [representing] L.A. County, because I had the votes in the assembly, and I thought that geographical area needed more representation than

1. Baker v. Carr, 369 U.S. 186 (1962).

just people. For example, [Senator Charles] Charlie Brown represented Inyo, Mono, and Alpine Counties. Hell, I could stick that into ten of my precincts. But look at all the problems he had in those three counties. He had to deal with all the county governments, all the town governments, all the special water districts, all the problems he had fighting off the Metropolitan Water District that was draining his district of water. There is just a hell of a lot of problems there. I could have a district ten times his size, a regular assembly district in a metropolitan area, and I wouldn't have many of those problems. I would have just a little slice of the city of Los Angeles.

It is the same thing for the U.S. Senate, for example: We have two senators from Nevada and two senators from California. No one ever goes around complaining about it; it seems fine for them. I just thought it gave some balance, plus the fact [that] we had a hell of a good senate then. We had great people in that senate. You know, Joe Rattigan, Fred Farr, Virgil O'Sullivan, Stan Arnold, Steve Teale, Jim

Cobey and one of the most amazing politicians I have ever met, George Miller, and Hugh Burns. I loved that senate. The Democratic members still have reunions. They were tough, very bright people and moderate to liberal. The senate used to be conservative, and we turned that around.

Adding Democrats to the Senate Through Special Elections

VASQUEZ: When did that turnaround come about and how?

REES: Oh, about two years before I got there. The turnaround came when we started picking up special elections. There must have been five special elections we picked up; this was a good part of Don Bradley's doing. He was working with the state [Democratic] committee, and when a special election came up, he would move into the area to run the campaign.

I worked with him in Santa Barbara, where we elected [John J.] Jack Hollister [Jr.]. Santa Barbara had always been a traditional Republican state senate district. [Senator James J.] Jim McBride died. He was the one that died in the middle of an oil fight. I think the oil fight led to his demise, because Santa Barbara was very

involved in oil. We had Hollister against [Stanley T.] Stan Tomlinson, who was a Republican assemblyman. We won. Again, it was good tough work, good precinct work, and good organization, so we kept winning time after time, like in Plumas County and Del Norte County, etc.

VASQUEZ: And Don Bradley masterminded these campaigns?

REES: Don seemed to have been involved in most of them, yeah. Don and I, from time to time, were roommates in Sacramento. This was during my bachelor days. [Richard] Dick Tuck was a roommate, and [Assemblyman] Jack Knox. I always liked to get a pretty big place. Sometimes I wanted to do a little entertaining. I had a big house on the [Sacramento] River a couple of sessions which could hold the whole legislature.

Don really had a lot of things going with the senate. The small counties were great for us. Stan Arnold was [elected in a] special election in 1955 from Susanville. Randy Collier wanted to stay as chairman of the Transportation Committee and changed his registration from Republican to Democrat. Carl [L.] Christianson [Jr.] we ran in '56 in Humboldt County, another

Republican county, and took that. Frank [S.] Peterson was another that we picked up. I think it became an open district. He was district attorney [for Mendocino County], then ran for the legislature in 1963. [Ronald G.] Ron Cameron, I think, was another guy elected in a special election.

VASQUEZ: So with this series of special elections you were able to incrementally take over control of the senate?

REES: It all came at that period of time. We started actively pushing people that were, say, on the board of supervisors, district attorneys, whatever it might be.

XII. CHANGES IN CALIFORNIA POLITICS DURING THE 1950s AND 1960s

Consolidating Campaign Fund-raising and Distribution of Campaign Funds

VASQUEZ: Another thing going on at this time was the consolidating of campaign funds and distributing them amongst party allies and party loyalists, is that right?

REES: Well, several things happened. When Dick Graves

ran for governor in 1954, the state committee was very weak; it didn't have any financial base. The county committee, as far as I am concerned, has never been a factor because it doesn't raise money. I don't know what it does. I don't know what the national committee does either, except have meetings.

There was not a strong financial base. Much of the party seemed to be concentrated in San Francisco, in terms of money, maybe the [Eleanor and Edward] Hellers or [Benjamin H.] Ben Swig. When Pat Brown came in, we took over both houses of the legislature.

Political Power Shifts from San Francisco to Los Angeles

A whole new power game came to pass in California. And we developed a very strong southern California operation in the finances area. You have to remember that while I might appreciate spending a week in San Francisco because it's a delightful city, the power is in Los Angeles. The power was growing in Los Angeles when I was in office. This is where things were done. This is where the banks were

moving. This is where the foreign groups were locating. This is where major manufacturing was going. This is where UCLA was developing into a university supporting the engineering and technical businesses that we had in southern California. There was this tremendous growth and everything was going the right way.

We developed the educational institutions to support the growth of industry that was geared toward the technical area. San Francisco was kind of a living museum. If you said that to people from San Francisco, they would die. But the San Francisco delegation to the assembly was kind of a joke. The characters they had really weren't part of the power game. They just lived the little San Francisco [scene].

They reapportioned on the basis of parish districts. One of these days, I would like to cover the 1961 reapportionment because I was on the reapportionment committee, and [because of] my encounter with Jack Kennedy when we designed twelve new seats. But Los Angeles was really the force. We developed a base in Los Angeles. Most were very wealthy Jewish business

people. There was Mark Boyer, who was a developer. He and his brother Lou Boyer developed Lakewood and that area. There was Bart Litton, who is one of the most flamboyant people I have ever met. He was a savings and loan guy, and I knew him pretty well. There was [Manning J.] Manny Post; Gene Klein, who later owned the San Diego Chargers for a while; and several others. It became known as the "poker club."

Raising Funds Through the "Poker Club"

VASQUEZ: The poker club?

REES: The poker club. Manny can go into detail on that. Litton was really a character because he was so flamboyant. He bought this fantastic house in Holmby Hills and had it all decorated for the 1960 convention. He had a mike [microphone] on his coat and he had this plugged into his PA [public address] system. He would be greeting [guests], so you would hear Bart Litton's voice all over this huge Holmby Hills house: "Well, hello, Senator Dennis Chávez. Here we have Senator Dennis Chávez. Senator, it's certainly. . . ." I mean, you could hear this all over the Holmby Hills area. I read an

old story about Litton. Someone said after visiting the house, "This place is fantastic. This is the kind of place God would have if He was vulgar." [Laughter]

VASQUEZ: Now this group of money collectors and money-makers, who controlled them?

REES: Well, there was no real control. There were other . . .

VASQUEZ: Who guided them? Let me use that term.

REES: We were very heavy with the savings and loan industry so we had guys like [Charles] Charlie Welman, who was one of the best operators around. He was really solid.

VASQUEZ: Was [Howard] Ahmanson part of this group?

REES: Yeah, well, Ahmanson was not part of the group, but he was part of the new money operation for the Democratic party.

VASQUEZ: He supported Jesse Unruh?

REES: You know, I couldn't really see Ahmanson sitting down with the "poker club." I mean, he knew them, because they were in the same field-- finance and development. We had a lot of fundraisers. I knew Ahmanson because I was chairman of the Finance and Insurance Committee and I

worked with [Robert M.] Bob De Kruif on some legislation. But Ahmanson really was Jesse's private preserve; he had a very close relationship with Ahmanson. Ahmanson would get him into the so-called Los Angeles establishment. The poker club were not part of the L.A. establishment. Ahmanson brought you into the Chandlers and the Carters and the older Los Angeles establishment.

Tapping the Los Angeles Establishment

Now, this was an establishment I knew. I knew Asa [S.] Call. Asa was very much kind of the guru of the Los Angeles establishment, and he was a very outspoken guy. I loved him. He was a crusty old Republican, but we both liked Jack Daniel's [whisky]. He was president of Pacific Mutual Company. I would go up to his offices and have lunch with him--I was his favorite Democrat--and we would sit and argue, but we accomplished a lot.

I also did a lot of work in developing the Music Center [of Los Angeles County]. We tried to finance it through bonding programs, but the problem with L.A. County is that everyone is fighting the downtown. This is another reason we

don't have mass transit and a lot of things. If we try to get transit, the Wilshire area or Long Beach will try to kill it because they say it's a plot to put everything into downtown Los Angeles. L.A. County is extremely difficult to work with because of that. The regional jealousies are fantastic, especially with Long Beach, and especially after they had their oil. They were always fighting the center. This was something for L.A., and that's why we kept losing bond issues for a music center.

To set up, I worked very closely with Mrs. [Dorothy Buffum] Chandler and Asa Call. I won't call it Mickey Mouse. It was legitimate, but a very creative system of financing and I got the bill through and signed by the governor. I worked with Asa Call very closely when we were actually developing the center. The liquor laws were very complex in California, and we had a problem with the music center in that kids would have to walk through the bar area to go to the restroom, and that was supposedly illegal or something. We had nitpicking things like that that had to be resolved.

How the System of Fund-raising Functioned

VASQUEZ: Tell me about the poker club and how it functioned. Again, who were the members?

REES: It very much came out of this so-called Jewish fund-raising technique, if you have ever seen it. I always had problems in the East when I got elected to congress, because I would try to get groups to raise money the way they would raise money for the City of Hope or Cedars-Sinai Hospital or Bonds for Israel.

You get twenty of your closest friends in a room, and say, "Okay, Saul, you give the pitch"; "Okay, Saul, now, how much you going to give, I got your pledge for four thousand dollars." "Four thousand dollars, oh, come on, last time you hit me for UJA [United Jewish Appeal] for six, now goddamnit, come on." "Oh, crap, okay, I'll go five." "Now look, if Saul will go five, Manny, what are you going to give?"

It would be this type of pitch. You would presell your stuff. Then you would fill your place and have a great dinner. Sometimes even at the dinner you would go around again and hit these guys. Or, you would allow these guys to

make the pledge that they made at the small dinner, so everyone at the big dinner knew that they are heavy hitters. It was the type of fundraising I used because that's all I knew.

You go for your big pledges first and then you bring new guys. Of course, when you have the governorship and two houses of the legislature, you're in pretty good shape; you're going from strength. Pat [Brown] just loved it, because this was something completely new. It was far different from what he was used to in San Francisco. You had money people up in San Francisco, you had the [Eleanor and Edward] Hellers, and that was old, old money; you had Ben Swig; and then [Walter] Shorenstein came in later. With Shorenstein, they started to build up a "poker club, except up north." So it was always this combination of traditional old Democratic money, but new money was coming in because these were the sixties, and the economy was moving. California was booming and people were making a hell of a lot of money, and a lot of the people that were making money had a tendency to be Democrats.

VASQUEZ: Now, did these people expand into their own personal networks to make money available to you?

REES: Well, in a way they would. You always have people that are collectors, that develop their own network, and this is what you want to get in major fund-raising. You want to get someone who has got the chutzpah to really go out and put the arm on [people]. I consider fund-raising to be the most disagreeable part in politics, because the people who have the money generally know they have the money, and they make you crawl on your belly to get it.

VASQUEZ: So were these people a buffer between you and the money people?

REES: No, I was always trying to build my own base. My base was not with the poker club. Oh, I would get a contribution from Manny, or a contribution from Boyer, or a contribution from Litton. But they are basically interested in the state power operation. I kind of had my own separate base.

VASQUEZ: By state power operation, do you mean the executive branch?

REES: Yeah, and Jesse.

VASQUEZ: The assembly leader?

REES: Yeah. But it was fascinating. We really started developing good fund-raising operations. We had, for example, the Jefferson-Jackson Day dinner. They got to be good dinners with good food. That's when I first met Fred Heyman, who later started Giorgio. He was the catering manager for the Beverly Hilton Hotel. It was really the first instance that someone came in and really put together a good operation. I mean, you usually get breaded veal cutlet, or overburnt chicken, or steak that was like leather. Fred really was an artist; he really put together great fund-raisers. I used to go there for mine. Later, he advanced into the high fashion area.

VASQUEZ: How long did this poker club stay together?

REES: It kind of fell apart after about five years. Finally, Pat Brown left the governorship. Then, eight years with Ronald Reagan. And then, [Governor Edmund G.] Jerry [Brown, Jr.] got in. Jerry was a different piece of work.

I remember during the [Senator Edmund S.] Muskie campaign there was a guy, Joseph Sinay, who was in the furniture business. Very

aggressive guy, very sharp, and he was very interested in the Muskie campaign. I was working the Muskie campaign very heavily and Joe wanted to talk to me. So he gets on an airplane and flies back to Washington, D.C. Well, I was just amazed. I mean, usually people don't do that. He said, "Well, let's get this damn thing going." Good businessman, he was tremendous to work with, but the Muskie campaign fell on dire straits and Joe could not understand why campaigns were so screwed up.

Well, this one could have been screwed up because Paul Ziffren was in it, and there was that game that Paul always plays: diffuse everything so he remains the power. And Joe just kind of got disgusted and I don't think he ever participated again. It burns you out after a while. It was very glamorous. At the time when the Kennedys were around that brought in, oh, the "Rat Pack": [Frank] Sinatra, Dean Martin, Peter Lawford, and all that bunch. So you had this great combination, a lot of glamour, a lot of the Hollywood people coming in on Kennedy. Fund-raising was rather fascinating in those days.

VASQUEZ: Because it was enjoyable as well as productive?

REES: Well, it was.

VASQUEZ: There was glamour to it?

REES: Now, it's, just. . . . terrible drudgery.

Paul Ziffren's Role in the California Democratic
Council

VASQUEZ: Tell me a little bit about the role that Paul Ziffren played in the CDC and in California state politics.

REES: Paul came on at a time when we didn't have much leadership, and he got to be national committee-man. That was about the time I was first running in '54. He came out of Chicago with his brothers, and he practiced law. He sounded good and looked good and we felt that we had a more national personage. But Paul was really a manipulator.

VASQUEZ: In his oral history he complains that he was treated as an outsider and with quite a degree of suspicion. He had a hard time breaking in.

REES: Oh, he didn't. He practically became national committeeman overnight.

VASQUEZ: How?

REES: Because there was just a power vacuum in 1954. We were down and out. I walked in and took over

a district; they begged me to run. They were trying to fill a slate. Remember, the Democrats didn't run anything in 1954. But Paul's problem is that he kind of took credit for everything. He had a very good relationship with the press. He loved the press; he loved articles about himself. I think one article that did it was an article in Collier's magazine after Pat Brown was elected--it must have been about 1961, '62--where Paul really kind of took credit for everything that happened in California. He took credit for the CDC, took credit for the Democrats winning the assembly, the state senate, and the governorship. Nothing will drive an elected official wilder than having some guy taking credit for thousands of hours of work that one spent walking precincts. Paul always is able to position himself in that area. He did it in the Muskie campaign. He's very good. He has a huge network of people that he can call on, but it's a keep away situation. He's extremely adept at that, diffusing any other power source around. It would be a great fight between Paul Ziffren and Fred Dutton; they could do an Olympics on the

diffusion of power. [Laughter]

VASQUEZ: Who do you think contributed most to the Democratic party, Dutton or Ziffren?

REES: Probably Paul, because Fred was strictly tied into Pat Brown and the Sacramento power play. Dutton was not that hot for Kennedy. He thought that if there was a tie in the convention, being in Los Angeles, Pat Brown might sneak in.

Paul was more oriented towards CDC, because he used that for his base. When [there was] that big fight for national committeeman between Ziffren and [Stanley] Mosk, I think everyone agreed that Ziffren's time had come and gone. But he started picking up every IOU in the place, and a lot of us had to vote for him. But we were extremely reluctant to because we felt that a national committeeman has to be supportive of the elective officers, and not vice versa. But Paul wanted to be the big show.

Ziffren's Role in the 1960 Presidential Campaign

VASQUEZ: What role did he play in the Kennedy campaign, the presidential campaign?

REES: He didn't help us. I don't know if he played any role in the Kennedy campaign. I don't really

recall it because he wasn't our friend at the convention.

VASQUEZ: He was strictly a Stevenson man?

REES: He had a lot of control over tickets. You know, we will always wonder how those Stevenson people got on the floor.

VASQUEZ: The story goes that Dick Tuck had a lot of bogus tickets that he was passing around.

REES: Well, Paul Ziffren had control of a lot of tickets, as the national committeeman, and all I know is there were hundreds of people on that floor that weren't delegates all demonstrating for Stevenson. It was painful for us because it blew our count right out of the water. Here I told Kennedy personally not to come into the California primary, that we could guarantee him a delegation, and the thing blows up a day before the convention. Then Jesse Unruh tells me after we lost the preliminary count, "Go see [Lawrence] Larry O'Brien at the convention hall quick, and tell him what happened." I said, "You screwed this up, I didn't; why don't you see him?"

VASQUEZ: So who took the fall for that with the Kennedys?

REES: Do you want to get into the '60 convention?

Rees's Summary of California Politics in the
1950s and 1960s

VASQUEZ: Why don't we--before we do that--summarize in your own words the 1950s and the 1960s in California politics.

REES: Well, I think the fifties and sixties were fascinating times. They were very creative times. Most of us were World War II veterans. They wanted one thing, and that was security. They didn't want to make waves or anything. They didn't want to demonstrate, all they wanted to do was to get a job and get married. All they wanted to do was get their college degree and become a teacher, or executive in the phone company, or whatever it might have been. So it was an odd political operation. You didn't have a lot of political activism, for example people reacting against the [Korean] War. And it was very frustrating. When I had my export business, I couldn't find anyone to be a partner in my business. I would be down in Sonora selling farm machinery, and I didn't have anybody in my office filling orders. That's one of the reasons I didn't do as well as I should have.

But they would say, "I'm married now," or, "I'm thinking of getting married." I got all these lame excuses why they couldn't do something different. Security was the whole bag. This was the period when they all bought a house in Lakewood and proceeded to make babies. There has been a lot written about this.

So the political arena was stagnant because Eisenhower was president and he just wanted to keep the nation fat and happy, no great innovation. Probably the nation wasn't ready for innovation. Eisenhower was probably considered a great president because he didn't try to innovate much. You didn't have these ideological battles that later started tearing apart the Republican party.

The Democratic party was half dead because of all the ideological fights it had been having. It was just blown out of the water in '52. I mean, the Republicans had everything. It was a period of real transition, so when the Democratic party revived, it was really with a new cast of characters, rather unique people. The last thing I wanted at that time was

security. The last thing I wanted was a house in Lakewood, a wife and two kids. I believe, like Francis Bacon, that a wife and children are hostages to fortune. It was the same for Jesse [Unruh] who had the house and about four kids, but that didn't matter, that was not Jesse's major motivation. Jesse was a political type.

We had kind of generational outlaws that became involved in politics; you look at Jesse's group, people like Sam Hartog or [Marvin] Marv Holen, new people. We really came into a legislature that was stagnant. It hadn't moved. The members were old. Hell, I was twenty-nine, I was the youngest member. That's ridiculous to be twenty-nine and the youngest member. Even when I went to the state senate, I was thirty-five and I was the youngest member. That's silly. We have people that are senior members now who are thirty-five. It wasn't moving. It was kind of a stagnant period; you didn't have the ferment. Everyone wanted to do their little job, live in their little house, and not pay attention to problems. They had fought a war, and that's it.

That was kind of the atmosphere we were in in the fifties. In my district I was very fortunate because it was a very intellectually stimulating district. I could go to a meeting and could have some damn good discussions; people were geared on issues. We were probably more geared than any area, except a place like Berkeley. It took a while to really get the ball rolling.

VASQUEZ: Did the Korean War stimulate any of that?

REES: No, the Korean War didn't do a damn thing. At least with the Vietnam War we had a reaction against it. In the Korean War we lost as many people, but the Korean War had no impact. People didn't like the Korean War, but it didn't have the impact. Did you ever see or read of a demonstration during the Korean War? I never did.

It was just an odd time. It used to drive me crazy. I wanted to get going. The Bowron and Poulson campaign for mayor of Los Angeles was the most boring campaign ever conceived by the mind of man. So most of us that were getting into politics kind of had to claw our way through this

malaise. We didn't mind. There wasn't much competition.

The Impact of Adlai Stevenson on Democratic Party
Politics

VASQUEZ: What was the turning point in the fifties? The Brown campaign in '58?

REES: For me, the turning point was Adlai Stevenson.

VASQUEZ: His first or second campaign?

REES: First. When he first ran I was a registered Republican, an Earl Warren Republican. I switched my party in 1952 when I decided I was a Stevenson man. I respected Eisenhower; I couldn't stand Nixon, but Stevenson was the first candidate I can recall that ever gave eloquent speeches that had body to them. He talked to me like I was an intelligent human being, and I don't think there has been anyone since except the Kennedys. Adlai Stevenson, I thought, could walk on water. I mean, if you thought at all, you loved Adlai Stevenson. All of a sudden, this new concept of the Democratic party started coming through. This guy was the pied piper. I think, in a way, he was the spiritual father of the CDC, because it brought a whole new dimension

to politics.

VASQUEZ: What was it, activism rather than just being a spectator?

REES: Yeah, it gave me a vision of what the Democratic party could be. Truman was great, and I was very fortunate because I was able to spend some time with Truman. Jesse and I cornered Truman [at the] Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner. We were up in Ed Pauley's suite, and we talked to him for about forty minutes. I worshipped Harry Truman, but Harry Truman's politics were the old politics, and Stevenson was the new politics.

For those of us that were fairly young and looking for some vision, Stevenson gave it. Stevenson started people saying, "My god, here's someone wonderful, here's someone who is thinking, here's someone with vision." It is amazing because he came out of Chicago. He was governor, with the support of Jake Garvey and the Chicago machine.

Paul Ziffren, of course, was close to Adlai Stevenson because he came from Chicago. I had a chance to meet Stevenson on several occasions and talk to him. The first time I ran, he came to

California to help Democratic candidates and god I was just in awe! Here I was running for the assembly, twenty-nine years old, and I was with Adlai Stevenson. He had a great sense of humor. I think that kind of built a new concept, that we can build a party that's not composed of a bunch of hacks.

VASQUEZ: Do you think the resurgence of '58, '59 was directly tied to momentum he put in motion?

REES: I would think so. I'm not going to say Adlai Stevenson did the whole thing. I think people that were Democrats were ready for an Adlai Stevenson. If he had never existed, they probably would have to invent him. But Stevenson developed this new perspective of politics, especially in a state like California where we didn't have political machines. Stevenson was something.

Stevenson really got me going, and it's one of the reasons I ran for office. He continued to inspire, and we started taking up the slack.

VASQUEZ: How would you summarize the sixties, and what were the watersheds of the decade?

REES: I'm not going to get into Vietnam because we

haven't gone that far in these tapes. The sixties were really a resurgence of the Democrats. We had had the very quiet years of Eisenhower, and I think people were really ready for a change. They were really kind of recovering from the trauma of the war. They were getting a little tired of their house in Lakewood, and the kids were starting to get on their nerves. They started reaching out a bit more to get involved, and I think this is one of the reasons. The Republicans had been in power for a long time, like the arrogance of Bill Knowland beating poor old Goodie Knight to death. I mean, that blew the Republicans in . . .

VASQUEZ: 'Fifty-eight.

REES: 'Fifty-eight. There was that arrogance and they had had it easy with Eisenhower who could do no wrong. I think people were just ready for a change, and the Democratic party was it. Politics tends to be a cyclical thing, and our cycle was moving then. Pat Brown got elected; most of our state officeholders were Democrats. We were passing our program, and things really hit. Then the Kennedys came in and this built

another dimension. Dynamic, forceful candidate, hell of a speechmaker, a real neat human being to be around. There was joy. It was the politics of joy.

Some Contrasts Between East Coast and West Coast Politics

VASQUEZ: Who translated the Kennedy "magic" into California politics?

REES: I don't think anyone from the East ever understood California politics. I remember [Congressman William] Bill Green came in. He was the boss of the Philadelphia machine. I always tried to explain to him Democratic clubs and things like that and he always wanted to know, "How many jobs have you got?" I would talk to out-of-state [visitors] often because everyone always loved to come to California to try to help us run our campaigns. We didn't particularly want them here but they always came. "We've been sent out from Washington to do this and that." They just didn't understand.

We had had the CDC volunteer operation. We had the old-timers that didn't like the CDC. We had new people coming in who were for Kennedy and

didn't know anything about the old-timers or CDC. We actually had to have two series of Kennedy headquarters in the campaign: one for the volunteers, and the other for Jesse's group. It made it extremely difficult. It was extremely difficult for me, because I was appointed to coordinate the two things. I was cochairman of the Kennedy campaign and I was the liaison with the volunteers and Jesse, with the so-called "pros."

Why Ronald Reagan was Elected Governor

VASQUEZ: Let me ask one more question: what went wrong, or what soured, so that a Ronald Reagan [got elected] in 1966?

REES: We had been there too long. I think eight years with a governor is kind of a bewitching hour. We have had two terms with Brown. You get all the magic the first term, and the second term is like a marriage with partners that just barely tolerate each other. You got more battles between the legislature and the governor. You had a huge battle between Jesse and Hale Champion and Fred Dutton, mostly Hale Champion. Jesse wanted to run [for governor] and started running

his power plays. Pat, who said he wouldn't run, decided to run again. It's the arrogance of power.

VASQUEZ: Do you think Hale Champion ever wanted to run for governor?

REES: I don't think so. I don't think Hale ever wanted to run for office.

VASQUEZ: Some people identify him as the cause of the conflict between Brown and Unruh. Would you go into that?

REES: It was a conflict between the governor's office and a very powerful speaker. When you have that combination, you're always going to have a conflict. I mean Jesse wanted everything; that's how he got into a conflict with the senate. He wanted the senate. So it got to be a real tough ego fight, and once you get into the ego fight, there is absolutely no rationality. I think Pat had a tired campaign. I thought his campaigning with Reagan was rather scurrilous.

VASQUEZ: Why do you think he lost?

REES: I think people were just tired of him. They wanted a change. He had been there for eight years and all the magic goes. You don't have any

new programs. The programs you do come up with are programs that are really jerry-built. There's always a time. It will be interesting to see if Deukmejian runs for a third term.

[End Tape 4, Side B]

[Begin Tape 5, Side A]

The 1961 Legislative Reapportionment

VASQUEZ: Tell me about the 1961 reapportionment.

REES: This was fascinating because California was going to get, I think, at least ten new [congressional] seats because of our huge [population] increase. So the Elections and Reapportionment Committee at that time was very much leadership-oriented. We had our people on it. Bob Crown was chairman. I was on it. Jesse was on it, and we were going to make damn sure that we . . .

VASQUEZ: You were going to make up for the '51 reapportionment?

REES: Yeah, we were going to make up for the '51 reapportionment. Let the Republicans have the three-assembly-seat [congressional] districts. We were getting up all our statistics and everything else, and starting to draw lines.

It's very difficult because some people have

no concept of how their districts come together, how they fit together. I used to disagree at times with [Assemblyman, later Congressman A. Philip] Phil Burton because I wanted districts to represent more than just population. I wanted to represent like communities, and I didn't like communities split. And a lot of the minority groups were for my view. But the other view was, if you took a black district and you split it into four white districts, the blacks might have more influence because they would get four assemblymen instead of just one.

VASQUEZ: Some people call that gerrymandering.

REES: Yeah, but there is the other thing. If you do that, you might not have any black assemblymen. There were some black assemblymen, who if you ever got below, say, 50 percent black, they would claim you were trying to defeat them. This is kind of ridiculous, because as long as they have the Democratic primary tied up, they're in. They would have 60 percent in the Democratic primary, but there were some people that just would go crazy if they didn't have this overwhelming vote.

Gus Hawkins's district is an example. I would have liked to have run part of Gus's district into a couple of surrounding districts in order to strengthen the Democratic vote. It might leave Gus with, say, a 30 percent white vote. A 30 percent white vote will never prevail against Gus Hawkins. And even the ones who weren't a minority. Jimmy Roosevelt was petrified when his Democratic registration got below 70 percent. This is ridiculous because Jimmy had the best Democratic loyalty district in the state of California. They were heavily registered. They represented a lot of the old middle-class Jewish area around [the] Fairfax [district] where you mention the word Roosevelt or FDR and everyone, you know, just flips.

That's where I used to bring candidates to build up their morale. They would give a speech and these people just cheered them to death. Fairfax rallies were wonderful. Every time I would find someone who was really depressed, I would say, "I'll set you up a Fairfax rally," and they would come flying out of there. They really felt good.

Jimmy Roosevelt always had the attitude that everyone was trying to beat him. His administrative assistant, Ed Lybeck, told me at that time, when we were trying to spread Jimmy's district to make three Democratic districts, including Jimmy's, "You're trying to defeat Jim, that's it, you want a seat." The last thing in the world I wanted to do was run for congress, because I considered that a dead end. My first memory of congressmen was an embittered group of people sitting in the back of the CDC convention saying, "You can't do this." They were just out of state politics; they just weren't involved with it. Or, at national conventions it would be the same, since we were the ones that put together the delegations. It was something else trying to get people to have a realistic view of the demographics of the districts and how the numbers worked. We had so much to pick up by tilting the balance in the marginal districts.

It would be just terrible. We would get a lot of assemblymen who wanted to run for congress: [Richard T.] Dick Hanna; Sheridan [N.] Hegland; there were half a dozen of them. We had to

protect their old legislative district, plus we had to give them a good district to run for congress. And it got extremely difficult because people would make a deal, then they would talk to their wives or their administrative assistant or something, and they would come in Monday and say, "I'm sorry, it won't work." And then you would have to change the lines. You could make a line change in Del Norte County, and that thing has to be manifested all the way down to San Diego County. The one man, one vote rule wasn't in, but we still tried to keep them reasonably within population standards.

VASQUEZ: They had to be contiguous as well, right?

REES: Yeah, a big battle we had was San Francisco, because of [Charles W.] Charlie Meyers, who was not overly bright. He always thought in Catholic Church parishes: "Here's Saint James and here's Saint Paul's." So we gave him a district and he agreed to it. We'd say, "Thank god, we got Charlie settled." He came in Monday and said, "No, I can't do it." I said, "Why not?" "Because Eddie O'Day is out of my district." I said, "So he's out of your district!" "Well,

Eddie O'Day's got to be in my district. He's a big politician in San Francisco." And we'd go back and forth. The people that had overwhelmingly Democratic districts just got panicked when we started running their registration down.

VASQUEZ: So the method you used for the '61 reapportionment was consolidating Democratic districts and trying to expand them where possible. It was a partisan approach?

REES: We would try to take core Democratic areas that had party loyalty and spread them into surrounding districts to tip those districts into the Democratic fold; the Republicans had done it to us, and we were going to do it to them.

VASQUEZ: [Assemblyman] Laughlin [E.] Waters, who was the chairman of the '51 assembly reapportionment committee, argues that, in fact, partisan politics played a very small role in '51 as compared to the way the Democrats did it in '61.

REES: Well, that's what the Republicans always say, whatever they do is bipartisan. Why did Jimmy Roosevelt end up with the largest congressional district, by population, in the state of California? He picked up the best loyalty core

in the state. I think Jimmy's district created three or four Democratic congressional districts in 1962. I have a great deal of respect for Lock. He's a good person, but when they [Republicans] do it to us, it's for good government; when we do it to them, it's a dirty partisan trick. I don't think we were that outrageous, but we were obviously partisan. But we had been so gerrymandered in the 1951 [reapportionment] that we just had very large districts. Why should we have the three-assembly-district congressional districts? Why not let the Republicans have those?

So we were able to spread things out. We gave Gus Hawkins a district where there hadn't been a black congressman. I think we gave Ed Roybal a district in the Mexican-American area; we did very well in that. It was fascinating. We finally had the committee vote end at 11:00, one night. Of course, the Republicans were mad and we were happy.

Delivering the Reapportionment Results to
President Kennedy

I had a rather crude map. It wasn't a

detailed map--about the size of a legal tablet--of California, and it was decided that I would fly back to Washington to talk to Larry O'Brien to show him what we were going to do. Kennedy had a very tough time that first year as president. He did not have an ideological majority in the United States Congress, and he was losing a lot of votes, and his birthday was coming up.

So I drove through the night to the San Francisco Airport and got on a 9:00 plane--that's before we had jets--and flew to Washington with this plan. I had all the Democrats on the committee sign it. [It said,] "Happy birthday, Mr. President, here are eight to twelve new Democratic seats in California." I went in to see Larry O'Brien and we went through this in detail: who was going to run, what seats we thought were marginal, and gave him some idea of what our candidates will be like. Most of them, of course, were strong Kennedy supporters.

He was very happy with that, and said, "By the way, come down the hall with me." I went down the hall, and sitting at the end of the desk was [Kenneth P.] Ken O'Donnell.

One thing with the Kennedys, if you're with them there's a tremendous amount of loyalty there. Bill Munnell cut himself off, because they believed in loyalty. Even now when I see [Senator Edward M.] Ted Kennedy it's like old home week. I was one of the first; I was one of their people. [A] very strong kinship was always there. So Larry said, "Ken, is everything fine?" And he said, "Yeah, go on in." I walked in, and there was the Oval Office, and there was Kennedy sitting on the edge of the desk. He said, "Hi, Tom, how are you?" That's the first time I've ever met [an incumbent] president of the United States. I spent a lot of time with Jack Kennedy before his election. I'd flown around with him; I've had beers with him; I had been with him campaigning. But here he was the president of the United States; you just die.

He was laughing, and he said, "Tom, you know the funniest story I ever heard? You did more for Frank Sinatra's morale than any other person alive." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "He [Sinatra] came up to me once and said, 'You know, Jack, '---this was before he was president--

"that assemblyman [Rees] is one of the greatest guys. You know, he paid me the greatest compliment.'"

It had been at Peter Lawford's place in Santa Monica [California] in 1959. They were starting to put together the people for the campaign and, of course, Lawford was there and Sinatra and the Rat Pack. I was single then and [when] I saw Sinatra, I said, "You know, I have got this record of yours, 'Only the Lonely.' It's the damnedest record I've ever heard." I said, "I put that record on, and before the record is even half over I've got this woman in the kip." And he said, "Oh, gee, that's fine," and asked for my name and [thought] that was the greatest compliment. From then on I was good friends with Sinatra--although I haven't seen him for twenty years.

After Jack told that story, I said, "The Democratic members of the assembly want to give you a little birthday gift." I gave him the reapportionment map signed by the Democratic members on those new seats. He was just delighted and he gave it to Mrs. [Evelyn]

Lincoln, "Take this and have it framed; this is just what I want for my birthday." I was just walking on air for a week.

So that was the great reapportionment. There was a big change in the legislature at that time, because a lot of the legislators were running for congress, and we had new people coming in.

VASQUEZ: Were there any other issues that were particularly important to you during the time you were in the assembly or senate that we haven't covered?

Rees's Civil Rights Legislation in the State Senate

REES: I was active in civil rights legislation.

VASQUEZ: How was that?

REES: I coauthored the bill on fair employment practices;¹ I coauthored the bill for fair housing;² things such as that.

VASQUEZ: Give me some of your impressions of the Rumford [Fair Housing] Act and the ensuing repeal.

1. A.B. 91, 1959 Leg. Sess., Cal. Stat. 121 (1959).
 2. A.B. 1240, 1963 Leg. Sess., Cal. Stat. 1853 (1963).

REES: Well, I got very involved in that. Did I go through this before?

VASQUEZ: You mentioned you supported a black engineer in Torrance who was not allowed to buy a home.

REES: I got very involved in the case and I threatened to litigate.

The Rumford Act Repealed: How and Why

VASQUEZ: What do you think was wrong with the Rumford Act? Do you think California wasn't ready for it? Do you think [Governor] Brown overread the acceptance fair housing legislation would have?

REES: Again, it was our nemesis, the real estate lobby; they came in tough. Lyndon Johnson was running [for president]. With the Lyndon Johnson landslide, which was a huge landslide, the Rumford Act repeal just blew us apart. I think we lost two-to-one.

It was a lousy campaign. I was not responsible for that. It was the media people that took over and tried to make people feel ashamed [by using] pictures of Lincoln on billboards. It was not a very good campaign. They made me the southern California chairman because I wasn't running and I had a free ride. I would bait

these real estate people and did a lot of debating on the issue.

I guess we moved too far. This is a problem; you lose a little perspective when you have the votes. It was the case of going too far, too fast at a time when there was some very active crisis, the one down in the Torrance subdivision, for example. Another was the real estate lobby moving in with both feet flying; we eventually won in the courts, but that was at a time when people were very goosey about owning their little home and they were afraid black people were going to come through and just decimate the neighborhood.

I have several stories about that. I grew up around La Cienega [Boulevard] and Third Street, near the Fairfax district. I own a duplex there and I get twenty-five or thirty dollars a month for oil royalties. I have been getting them for years. At the time the Rumford Act [repeal] was going on, part of the problem was that some black realtors were really unscrupulous--we called them blockbusters--and would run a reign of terror against the older

white Jewish people living in that district, saying, "Hello, we want to buy your place. Our people are moving in." They would try to panic them to get them to sell. I was very worried about this, because it was essentially a middle-class neighborhood (I didn't see any great problems) and I figured it would be good to have an integrated community.

The thing I miss the most in Santa Cruz is that there are not many blacks here. I'm used to blacks. My law partner in Washington is black, my friends are black. I don't see any here. I just felt at that time that you couldn't hold up barriers forever.

I didn't want the blockbusters to come through, because that just emptied the neighborhood and "For Sale" signs were all over the place. Then the Standard Oil guy came knocking on doors, saying, "By the way, ma'am, you're sitting over an oilfield and we would like you to sign over your oil rights. We will pay you royalties on the oil under your lot." The homeowners would say, "Oil!" And all the signs came down the next day, and that stabilized the

neighborhood. So I was going to form a fictitious oil company, and whenever we had blockbusting I would set up a fictitious oil company with a fictitious oilfield and pay people fifteen to twenty dollars a month in oil royalties to stabilize the neighborhood.

There was a lot of panic at that time. My father owned some land at Malibu Riviera. He had bought it with all of his savings and nurtured that land and was going to build a house. It's beautiful land. It's right near the ocean, and every weekend he would go out there, all through the war, and tend to his trees.

But this black attorney--I forget his name, might have been Sinclair--moved in and was going to build a house. The local people were just livid. "We can't have a black move in. It's going to be terrible." This guy finally moved in. I told my father that no way should he join any protest [movement]. It was not going to hurt his property. But he was scared because it was his major savings investment.

About four years later, the state was going to come in and condemn some of this beach land,

and the same guy that was fighting this black guy moving in was saying, "Well, we have formed a citizens-committee and Mr. Sinclair is going to be our attorney and we are going to show them they can't take our land." [Laughter] This was the attitude that was going around and, of course, the real estate industry was fighting it all the way. As I say, we ran a lousy campaign. The other side ran a good campaign, but fortunately the courts sustained us.

Working on the Master Plan for Higher Education

VASQUEZ: What was your involvement in educational issues?

REES: Well, my major educational issue, of course, was dealing with the Master Plan for Higher Education (because of Arthur Coons's involvement). And that's the one term I was on the Education Committee. I couldn't stand the committee. I got off and went into another committee [Finance]. The regional occupational centers was something I was very emotionally involved in. I also wrote a good part of the air pollution control legislation.¹ I worked very closely with the Air

1. S.B. 325, 1963 Leg. Sess., Cal. Stat. 20278

Pollution Control District and we wrote some of the first laws in the country. I worked with Dick Richards on this, in California on air pollution, strengthening the Air Pollution Control District, trying to deal with air pollution on a regional basis. And I had just about the first hearings on this problem.

VASQUEZ: How did the sides break down on that one?

REES: Again, the automobile industry and the oil industry were fighting us because they said it [air pollution] wasn't caused by automobiles. I went to a national meeting sponsored by, well, the equivalent of what the NIH [National Institute of Health] was then in Washington; first time I had ever taken a junket.

I would just listen to those paid flacks from Detroit saying it was not them. That was the battle because the automobile industry, with the Automobile Club of Southern California and the AAA [American Automobile Association], were very powerful in California. And we had an extremely difficult time trying to get anything on regulating auto emissions because of the cow county senators saying, "Look, it's not our

fault, it's your fault." And we said, "Okay, but if you try to drive into L.A. County with an unregulated car, we're going to impound it." I mean, we got into this type of situation: "You better rent a good car at the border." [Laughter] It was a huge battle and it was a real tough battle in the early days.

The California Arts Commission

VASQUEZ: In the long run, did you win or lose?

REES: Well, in the long run we won, and we won in congress, also, a few years later. We had the same fight in congress, and we were able finally to get legislation through allowing California to have higher standards. It was a huge fight. I also carried the legislation forming the California Arts Commission, because it's something I had been interested in. I carried the bill in the senate and I was a member of the initial commission.¹

At that time, we were trying to develop a program to get more traveling exhibits and sponsorships into the more rural areas and the

1. A.B. 1, 1963 Leg. Sess., Cal. Stat. 1742 (1963).

smaller cities. I don't know what's happened to the commission; I was active with the Commission on the Two Californias, working for more cooperation with "Alta" California and Baja California.

XII. THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC CONVENTIONS OF 1956, 1960,
AND 1964

VASQUEZ: Let's get into some of the national campaigns. You were a delegate to the national convention in 1956, in 1960, and 1964. Let's talk about the 1960 convention and the problems with the delegation.

REES: Well, in 1956 there weren't any problems. California at that time had a winner-take-all primary, so whoever won the primary got all of California's votes. Adlai Stevenson won the primary and I had been on the [California] delegation as a Stevenson delegate, and that was it.

There's nothing worse than being a pledged delegate, because no one pays any attention to you at the convention. You go to another delegation and they give you the glad hand, "Where you from?" "I'm from California." "Oh, nice to meet

you, good-bye." You're out of it. Plus we always seemed to have the most unprofessional delegation at every convention because of the way California politics is.

In the New York delegation, I remember [Carmine] De Sapio was the big man at that time. They all dressed the same: they all had hats and a vest, a dark suit, a white shirt, and a dark tie. They all turned in unison to look at De Sapio to see which way he wanted them to go, and then they all turned to the front and held up their hands. I mean, it was just fascinating. They all looked like the same--they were all out of the same cookie cutter. Of course, we would have these crazy delegations with these outlandish dresses and suits and everything else. It looked like a traveling circus.

VASQUEZ: Did you split your votes?

REES: Well, I don't think we did that year; we did in the '60 convention, which was really cruel and inhuman punishment. To me, 1956 was fascinating because I had never been to a convention. It was in Chicago and the bands played "California, Here I Come" as our plane came in. And, of course,

they played "Happy Days Are Here Again." I met Harry Truman at that [convention].

You meet people you have been reading about all of your life. I met [James A.] Jim Farley. I said, "How do you do, Mr. Farley, I'm a great admirer of yours, I'm Assemblyman Tom Rees from Los Angeles." I met this guy about eight years later. And he said, "Tom Rees, how are you? You still in the assembly?" The guy had the most phenomenal memory for faces and names, because I was just a remote [acquaintance].

I met Harry Truman at that time. I remember [Albert B.] Happy Chandler. He was running for president too. He would go out of his hotel room with all of the press following. He would take the elevator down, the press would all be jammed in there; he would walk around the block, the press would talk to him; he would get on the elevator and go back to his suite. Ten minutes later, he would go down. That was his way of campaigning. But [it was exciting] just to talk to people you had heard about for years. Actually, convention floors are extremely boring. You sit there and these speeches go on forever

and ever. This was really before television became a major factor; I think it was televised, I'm not sure.

VASQUEZ: Yes, it was.

REES: But it was a minor factor. What happened was, when Stevenson had the nomination, he said, "Well, I'm not going to choose a vice president, I'm going to throw this open." It was a very boring convention up to that time because Stevenson had the votes. And so he threw it open and [United States Senator Estes] Kefauver was the leading candidate. He had a good base in California. Jimmy Roosevelt was the big man for him and the votes were all over the place.

Supporting John F. Kennedy in 1956

I was for Kennedy and so I contacted the Massachusetts delegation and met some of the people. Orville [L.] Freeman, who was later [United States] Secretary of Agriculture, was governor of Minnesota. He was big for Kennedy. And so I started working with a few other people, I think Mrs. [Eleanor] Heller and [Joseph] Joe Hoteling and some others, building up Kennedy support. I had met Kennedy the year before. We

had this huge battle and the whole convention floor was in a shambles.

[House Speaker Sam] Rayburn was presiding, and Pat Brown didn't know quite what to do. I think he was our delegation leader because he was attorney general. And I was fighting Jimmy Roosevelt for the microphone because I felt with the count that we had a majority for Kennedy. I don't know how I could ever think that, because everything was so chaotic. And Pat Brown and Jimmy and I [were] fighting for it and Rayburn recognized Roosevelt because he knew him. Then Pat Brown, I think, grabbed the microphone and gave a count that didn't mean a damn thing; it was about even. And it was another state that came through and went over the line for Kefauver. I'm just as happy that Kefauver got it, because if Kennedy had lost as vice president he might not have gone on in 1960. So that got me into the 1960 campaign because in 1959, when Larry O'Brien was coming to California, I was one of the names on his list.

VASQUEZ: So your actions at that 1956 convention kept you in people's minds for 1960?

- REES: Jesse, too, was very interested in Kennedy.
- VASQUEZ: In 1956 already?
- REES: No, 1959. I don't know; I don't recall what Jesse was doing in 1956. We were both delegates. The California Delegation to the 1960 National Convention
- VASQUEZ: Tell me about the 1960 presidential campaign.
- REES: I was working on it; Munnell was working on it; Unruh working on it. We were all Kennedy people, and Pat Brown wanted a favorite-son delegation. Fred Dutton was pushing for that, and we were a little worried because Pat would be running for governor in two years, and strategically it would be difficult if Pat was a favorite-son candidate and an attractive candidate like Kennedy came in and beat him.
- VASQUEZ: What negotiations did Pat Brown have in mind with that favorite-son campaign?
- REES: Well, supposedly the Pat Brown delegation would be an open delegation, but Pat Brown was nominally for Kennedy. Dutton was playing his game and Ziffren was playing his game. Munnell, Unruh, and I and [some] others were for Kennedy. There were others for Lyndon Johnson, mostly the

congressional delegation.

VASQUEZ: House members?

REES: Yeah. We tried to balance the delegation, to have pretty strong incumbent representation, but we had a lot of volunteer participation, especially in my district. I always had a problem because I had so much money in my district. I had to balance [delegation members] between my activist and my money people, and I was very proactivist. I prefer the infantry to these fancy guys with the money.

Of course, I was fighting Ziffren on that because Ziffren always preferred his money people, and he would [tell them], "I will get you on the delegation."

VASQUEZ: What do you think Ziffren's agenda was?

REES: Well, Ziffren's agenda was to help Ziffren. A lot of this is hearsay, but it is my understanding that Ziffren was really the person behind the Stevenson push. Stevenson was not a candidate in 1960; he hadn't gone to any primaries. He had already lost twice, and he was getting to be kind of old hat because a new group was coming up. And part of the problem was that

a lot of the real hot-dog liberals were opposed to Kennedy. Some of it was because he was Catholic and Catholics were more conservative.

VASQUEZ: Was there anti-Catholicism in the California delegation?

REES: It wasn't anti-Catholicism, it was just that the Catholics were perceived as being more conservative, which was [the case] in southern California with Cardinal [James Francis] McIntyre. I don't think it was anti-Catholic per se. Also, he was a little weak on HUAC [House Un-American Activities Committee].

He was representing a lace-collar Boston district, and he did not have the most outstanding liberal voting record. You do have to vote your district sometime. Also, his father, [Joseph P.] Joe Kennedy, had a lot of power, and a lot of that power was money power. The liberals had built up this thing that Kennedy was trying to buy the nomination. We had the meeting--I didn't go to that meeting--where we put together [a] delegation. I knew my people would be on, so I left it up to Jesse and Bill [Munnell].

A Split Delegation

So we came up with a delegation that we thought would go for Kennedy. A lot of them were pledged-prepledged. I was prepledged, Jesse was, and Munnell. Our people we put in there, a lot of assemblymen, were prepledged. I got pledges out of my people, my CDC people. I said, "I'm for Kennedy, will you give me support for Kennedy?" At that time Stevenson was not a candidate. "Oh, yeah, you bet, you bet, just get me on the delegation."

So I put them on the delegation. That's the year I got married, 1960, and we had a CDC convention in spring of that year. It was usually [held] in the spring, and Jesse said, "Why don't you fly with Kennedy to the CDC convention in Fresno, and convince him not to come [into California]?" I didn't want him to-- none of us wanted him to come in--because we were afraid it would blow our whole state operation. We did have a balanced delegation; we thought we could deliver the balanced delegation. If Kennedy came in as a candidate on the ballot, it would be embarrassing for a lot of us that were

already on the Brown favorite-son delegation.

If Brown took a beating, it would jeopardize a lot of things we had been working on with the state legislature. So I got on the "Caroline"¹ with my wife and introduced her to Kennedy. We talked for a while, and she got off. She wasn't going to go to Fresno. I was flying to Fresno and they had me go back and talk to Kennedy. I said, "Look, you are going to go to the CDC convention and just feed them raw meat in your speech, that's what they like. I have been talking it over with Jesse and the others and I don't think you should come into California because I think we can give you the delegation. We put it together, we're good craftsmen at that." So he agreed and didn't come in.

So then we come to the convention, and we had our headquarters at the Hollywood Knickerbocker [Hotel]. And all of a sudden, we find out that Adlai Stevenson was being pushed for the nomination.

VASQUEZ: By?

1. John F. Kennedy's personal airplane.

REES: All the hot-dog liberals, and this just killed us. I told you how I admired Adlai Stevenson. But we didn't want him to be the William Jennings Bryan of the twentieth century, and that's what he was going to be.

We were convinced that he couldn't beat Richard Nixon and he shouldn't be a candidate. He had been a candidate twice and lost, and we had a great candidate with Kennedy. It just blew California apart because a lot of the CDC types were just looking for a way to get at Kennedy. I guess they didn't like to have an organized campaign, or they had to fight against something.

So everything started blowing apart and I was getting nervous as hell. We were dealing with half-votes, so we had half the state of California on the delegation. We would have a meeting up in Pat Brown's suite, talk about our pledges. Then we had a caucus. It was at CBS [Columbia Broadcasting System], which is around the corner, just to get the delegation together for delegate business.

Jimmy Roosevelt wasn't for Kennedy; he was for Johnson or someone, I forget. Maybe [he was

for Senator Stuart] Symington. And so there was this wrangling going on and Jesse was in his "Big Daddy" mood. Roosevelt made a motion that we could beat. We didn't want to have a vote on the candidates at this time. We needed to do more work because of the Stevenson thing; we had to shore ourselves up.

Jesse Unruh's Poor Timing

So Jesse ran his "Big Daddy" [speech], "Mr. Chairman, I demand Roosevelt's motion be tabled." Everything bad came through; I mean, this is the worst place to do a tabling motion. And it just blew us out of the water. His tabling motion lost, we had a vote on candidates, and we were behind five votes. Stevenson was ahead of us by five votes. I was sitting there just dying. I mean, Jesse, if he just hadn't said a thing the Roosevelt motion would have died. But when he became "Big Daddy," there was an instant revolt, just like that.

And then Jesse said, "Tom, I guess you had better go over to the [Los Angeles] Sports Arena and tell Larry O'Brien." I said, "Why me? I didn't make the tabling motion." "Well," he

said, "I had better get back to Pat, we have a lot of work to do." I said, "We sure in the hell do."

I met [David] Dave Broder then, he was a young reporter for the Washington Star, and he said, "Are you going to the Sports Arena?" And I said, "Yeah." So I gave him a ride in my car, and all of the way I was cussing. I was so fucking mad I didn't know what to do. "That asshole," I said. "Six months of work, here it is, two days before we are supposed to be nominating the president, and here's the largest delegation, and we come out with Stevenson five votes ahead of us."

The guy couldn't win, couldn't win. He didn't have Illinois, he had California. I got on the floor, I found Larry O'Brien, I said, "Larry, I have got a little problem. Unfortunately, there was a forced vote, and Stevenson came out five votes ahead of Kennedy in the California delegation." And Larry, who is a pale guy anyway, got paler, just like that. He sighed and said, "Tom," he put his hand on my arm, "look, I know you and Jesse have really worked

your ass off for us. See what you can do to turn those five; get us back five so we will be ahead, even by a half-vote."

At that time, Larry O'Brien to me became a saint, because most of these guys would just have had a catatonic fit and, you know, I could just hear it. As far as I was concerned, I was going to lay my body on the barbed wire. I mean, that was it.

So we went back and we slowly started working people over, half-votes. I remember Tom McBride, who was an assemblyman, head of the Revenue and Taxation Committee, later became a federal judge, he had a big Stevenson button. We said, "Tom, you are one of our votes. Why do you have the Stevenson [button] on?" "Well, I have a lot of people in my district for Stevenson." "Well, you have a cinch district." I mean, this is the problem we were getting.

I would come downstairs and I would come walking towards, say, Milton Gordon from my district--and the television cameras were always on at conventions--and he would say, "Get away from me, Rees, I'm sick of your pressure. You

and Unruh, what do you think you are?" I hadn't talked to Milt for a month. All of a sudden we became the bad guys, we became the pressure people. I still have a stack of telegrams from my district saying, "I'm sorry you were paid off by the Kennedy millions for support." I mean, it was vicious. "How could you not support Adlai? How did they get to you?" They were the nastiest things in the world. I saved them. After Kennedy was president, I showed the senders a few of the telegrams they sent me.

Going Against One's Constituency

VASQUEZ: In a case like that, what does it take for someone to go against his district and against his immediate political support, to take a political position like that?

REES: Well, I didn't have too much of a problem because I had already won the primary and there was no way they could defeat me in the final [election]. I just didn't scare that much.

VASQUEZ: What do you attribute it to, vision, pragmatism?

REES: What?

VASQUEZ: That you stuck with Kennedy.

REES: No, I was committed to him. If I gave my word,

that was it; that's all you have in this business, your word. Munnell was for Kennedy and then he switched. He was the majority leader of the assembly and he double-crossed Kennedy and Kennedy never forgot it. I mean, to his dying day it was, "The only guy who finked on me was Bill Munnell. Not just who finked on me in California, who finked on me around the country." Bill was playing some arcane game. He wanted to be national committeeman. He was already state chairman. He got so that he wanted everything and I think he felt he could get something better because much of the power was already for Kennedy. I don't know why he did that but he did, which simplified a lot of things for us.

No, I was right, I mean, I'm a believer in the great Edmund Burke, you pay attention to your district, you listen to the problems, but when it comes right down to it, by gosh, it's your judgment and your conscience that you vote. I had that quotation on my office wall from day one. If anyone talked to me about voting against my district, I said, "Well, look, read this, this statement from the great Edmund Burke."

When the convention finished and Kennedy won, Kennedy gave a hell of a speech. He won on the first ballot, but a lot of us were really mad because we suspected Ziffren loaded the floor with Stevenson people. They were all local people; they weren't delegates. So there was a huge demonstration for Adlai Stevenson. What they wanted to do was to stampede the convention, which did not stampede. Then we had the campaign against Nixon and we won.

Impact of the National Convention on State
Politics

VASQUEZ: What was the aftermath in state Democratic politics as a result of that convention? Did any of it carry over, any of the divisions, any of the hard feelings?

REES: Not much. Brown appointed Munnell to the superior court, so he was out of the assembly, and in 1960 our leadership or power base still existed in the assembly. Jesse got to be very close to the Kennedy operation. He was invited back to the inauguration and was considered the Kennedy person [in California].

This helped Jesse a great deal because the

Kennedys felt that Pat Brown was very weak. They had a very difficult time understanding why a governor could not deliver people that normally should be beholden to him. Part of it was that Pat was weak. There was a certain ambivalence there, and you had Dutton praying for a dead-locked convention so that Pat could become a dark horse. It really consolidated Jesse as a national Democratic figure, and then he subsequently became speaker. So he had consolidated his power base on a national level and at the California level.

The 1964 Race in California for a United States Senate Seat

VASQUEZ: In the 1964 campaign, why was the Democratic party unable to translate the Kennedy magic to a successful [Pierre] Salinger [senatorial] victory?

REES: Well, when was it Clair Engle died? Let me see, 1964, that's when I had my free ride.

VASQUEZ: George Murphy beat Salinger. It was a close race, but he beat him.

REES: Well, for a fair amount of reasons, the CDC was starting to disintegrate.

The Disintegration of the California Democratic
Council

VASQUEZ: As a result of what?

REES: You just weren't having new people coming in. CDC was a great organization when the Democrats weren't in power. But then they had this identity crisis because we started winning everything. When I first got in, in 1954, we didn't have anything.

[End Tape 5, Side A]

[Begin Tape 5, Side B]

In six years, which is a short time, we had everything. We had the presidency; we had the U.S. House; we had the U.S. Senate; we had the governorship; the state senate; I mean, we had everything. We had the assembly, we swept the board. At that time, the CDC leadership was getting weaker and weaker and we were starting to get into the Vietnam War, and that became a very divisive issue. I don't know if it was that time that [Simon] Sy Casady was head of the CDC. You might, one of these days, want to do an oral history of Sy Casady. He's down in San Diego County. He's a fantastic figure in this period

of California history.

I pushed him for head of the CDC because I figured we needed a more mature guy. He was in his fifties, had gray hair, had his own airplane, good liberal. [He] wrote for Ramparts magazine, was a journalist. He got to be chairman of the CDC and he was just like a loose cannon on deck. My district was needling me all the time, "Well, I'm glad we got a nice, solid, mature guy heading up the CDC." They would tell me Sy went off on his own crusades and it really caused a split. He was alienating a good part of the incumbents, and this is at the time when Jesse wanted to destroy the CDC. He had his own organization that he was going to use to undermine the CDC.

VASQUEZ: What was your relationship with Jesse at that time?

REES: In 1964?

VASQUEZ: Yes.

REES: It wasn't very good. See, I was in the state senate then and he had been making power moves on the senate. I had been fighting him, and we were killing each other's legislation and I did not

like the Praetorian Guard. I wasn't afraid of Jesse, but this whole thing got to be kind of ridiculous because we were essentially good friends. But those were his "Big Daddy" years.

Why Pierre Salinger Lost a United States Senate Race

I remember Salinger was brought back to Washington and then he came out and became a Californian again and he got the carpetbagger issue that was plaguing him. He never had much of a chance to get to know California or the organization, because he was always in session in the Senate. It just was not his year. Murphy looked good. He had twinkling eyes, and Salinger's image was not good. He didn't deserve the bad image he got, but it just wasn't good. It was this hot dog was moving in from Washington to run. Plus the whole Engle thing was very bizarre; I think Clair had a brain tumor.

VASQUEZ: Stroke.

REES: He really was nonfunctional, and his wife, Lou [Lucretia], would not recognize that and she was keeping everyone away because she wanted to be the wife of a United States senator. This made

it very difficult, because he should have resigned. He should have allowed us to have a normal primary election.

But it was this deathwatch that went on month after month after month. Everyone was speculating. I mean, it made it . . . bizarre. Politics is very cadaverous, almost like "Dia de los Muertos" [All Souls' Day] We revel in death. You can go to the funeral of a prominent politician and you will find some guy coming up to the governor, saying, "Who are you going to appoint for this guy's spot?" Before the corpse is cold. Nothing was good about that race, nothing was good. Clair should have resigned. He should have resigned like in January and the seat should have been declared open with a temporary appointee, and then allow the Democrats to have a normal primary. I think we would have won under those circumstances.

VASQUEZ: Who do you think would have run?

REES: Back to the image, you know Pierre smoked those damned cigars. I smoke cigars. I smoke about five or six a week but I always do it in the closed confines of my office. Pierre was kind of

arrogant in his manner. He had that big cigar, and by then he was thoroughly imbued with "Potomac fever." In a way, he was the Potomac fever candidate, not the California candidate.

VASQUEZ: Do you think that's what hurt him?

REES: He was really running a high because he was part of the Kennedy operation.

VASQUEZ: Was there a conflict with [Lyndon B.] Johnson forces in that campaign?

REES: I don't recall it. I was busy dealing with equal housing. Plus, I was state senator of a county of over six million people and I had a lot of things to do. That was more than a full-time job.

XIII. THE 1968 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

VASQUEZ: What role did you play in the 1968 presidential campaign?

REES: God, 1968!

VASQUEZ: You were already in congress.

REES: Oh, god, yeah. I was in congress by then and I was part of a small group in congress that a few years before came out very publicly against the Vietnam War. It was very difficult, because

Lyndon Johnson was president and he knew damn well what my views were.

VASQUEZ: Who were some of the other members of this group?

REES: [Donald M.] Don Frasier, he's now mayor of Minneapolis; and Phil Burton, he was part of the group. William [F.] Ryan, [and] [Jonathan B.] Jack Bingham from New York, we tended to be the urban liberal types, heavy with New York; some midwestern.

Opposing the Vietnam War

It was extremely frustrating, because under the rules of the House, we could never get an up and down vote; on the Vietnam War, even on amendments, we couldn't get an up and down vote. You used to have teller votes where you walked through a line and you weren't recorded individually. You just counted people as they walked through the line. That's what they do in houses of parliament. You had to have so many people demand a roll-call vote and we could never get enough people to get a roll-call vote. On amendments most of them were called out of order because the parliamentarian was always at the speaker's side and he had all the precedent books.

I think it's unconstitutional to have the parliamentarian working for the speaker. If you have a motion, you can't win because he's got the law books and all the precedents. The precedents weren't printed up past 1938, so you had to go to the parliamentarian to find out what the latest precedent was and he knew damn well what you were trying to do. He was advising the speaker. I was very active. I probably worked more on congressional reform than any other issue when I was in congress, and one was to try to get the damn precedents up [to date] so we didn't have to show the opposition what our game plan was. We could never get a straight vote on the Vietnam War. It was extremely difficult; Johnson, of course, was sailing along.

I was basically for Lyndon Johnson. I voted for all his Great Society programs, but I was finally opposed to that war. Hell, I was opposed to it before my district was, and it was just an extremely frustrating situation because we were fighting the Democratic House establishment. I mean, [Thomas P.] Tip O'Neill really was the first to come out against the war. He was the

whip then; he wasn't the speaker. But [Speaker John M.] McCormack and Carl Albert and all the old committee chairmen, [like] Mendel Rivers, we just couldn't get past them. It was an impossible situation, and then [Eugene] McCarthy got [into the presidential primary] and everyone just laughed at that. And when he beat Johnson, or at least got real close to Johnson. . . . It was considered a defeat [for Johnson] in the New Hampshire primary.

The Robert F. Kennedy Campaign

I was for McCarthy in a way, but I wasn't for him as a presidential candidate because he's kind of strange in his own way. I could never figure out if there was a there there. I had a difficult time with the guy, but I certainly did communicate with Bob Kennedy, who I knew well. We campaigned together. I wasn't part of any inner decision-making, but when he decided to run, some of us were immediately alerted because we had to get the California operation together. The three incorporators of Bob Kennedy's campaign were Phil Burton, Tom Rees, and Jesse Unruh in California. And we had to do that right away to

get on the primary ballot and set things moving. I think I was the first member of congress to come out publicly for Bob Kennedy.

Again, it was a pain in the ass in my district because they were very heavily for McCarthy. It was a tailor-made district for McCarthy, and here I was coming out for another candidate.

VASQUEZ: Did this cause you any problems?

REES: I don't think so. You know, I had been on the [assembly] Elections and Reapportionment Committee, so I had a pretty good district. I didn't carve it for myself; I carved it for someone else, Jimmy Roosevelt, but it was a good district.

Then we really started moving very quickly on the Kennedy campaign. That was before we had any [United States] Secret Service or anything like that, and it was a great campaign. It was a wonderful campaign; it was a crusade. Kennedy had so much fire. We set up a lot of things for him.

Kennedy's Primary Election Defeat in Oregon

I remember he got beat in Oregon and he

really felt terrible. Oregon was a state we should have gotten but I think McCarthy beat him. We had planned to take him through the garment district, and then around Olvera Street, and then out to the Beverly Hilton [Hotel] with our motorcade. The garment district is great. You've got Jewish garment workers, all members of the [International] Ladies Garment Workers Union; you've got blacks; you've got Chicanos; all our people were in the garment district and we ran the motorcade down Los Angeles Street.

RFK's Reception in Los Angeles

Kennedy was very depressed because of Oregon, and when we got close to Los Angeles Street, this guy yelled out in this Brooklyn accent, "Don't worry, Senator, those people from Oregon are a bunch of jerks!" We started rising from there. The crowd started building and the applause, and that son of a bitch [Mayor] Yorty was ticketing our caravan because of how we had to go through some signals. We didn't have any police protection in Los Angeles. He did everything he could to foul us up.

The advanceman was Jerry Bruno. I don't

know if you have ever heard of Jerry Bruno but he was this little guy, about five-foot-two, kind of a cherubic-looking face, and he was the toughest most foulmouthed guy I ever met. I remember he said, "Screw the fucking cops, get your goddamned car through, let's get this thing going." And the cops were saying, "You can't do this." "Well, I'm doing it." He was a tiger. He wrote a book afterwards and he got to be just a fabled figure.¹

I was working partial security; a guy who was an investment banker from New York, he was in charge of partial security; we didn't have any professional security and we were big guys and in [good physical] shape. We needed to be because our crowds were fantastic. When his campaign got going, people would do anything just to touch his [Kennedy's] hand.

VASQUEZ: When would you identify the moment when it really got going, what month?

REES: Oh, I don't know. It would be April or May.

1. Jerry Bruno and Jeff Greenfield, The Advance Man, New York: Morrow, 1971.

VASQUEZ: Before or after the [Martin Luther] King [Jr.] assassination?

REES: Well, I forget when the King assassination was.

VASQUEZ: April.

REES: It was about that time. [Kennedy] must have run through ten or fifteen [sets of] cufflinks, because people would rip off his cufflinks, anything. I would get home after two days of campaigning with him, I would be black and blue. I looked like I had been running through the Chicago Bears line all day, but you didn't feel it; it was really something.

I remember once I was having a problem with this women's Democratic club on the Westside. They were mad at me for some reason, and Kennedy was going to speak there. I escorted him to the head table and I started leaving the table when he said, "Where are you going?" And I said, "Well, I'm sitting down there." And he said, "You're the congressman, aren't you?" And I said, "Yeah." So he told the chairwoman, "I want Tom Rees at the head table." And she said, "Well, that's not our practice to put congressmen" He said, "I'm not going to give a

speech until he's at the head table."

He was that kind of a guy. Once you were with him, you knew he would have done anything to help you. I remember the last day I campaigned with him. It was about three days before the primary. We were going through Venice. We had, oh, who was that black guy?

VASQUEZ: Rafer Johnson.

REES: From Mississippi, later became one of the first mayors down there.

VASQUEZ: [Charles] Evers.

REES: Not Evers, he was the guy that was shot.

VASQUEZ: No, that was Medgar Evers.

REES: Oh, yeah, it was Evers. Now, he was a tough guy. If I was ever in a fight, I would like to be with him. He would be a good guy to have next to you. Yeah, we had [Roosevelt] Rosie Greer also, and we hit Venice. They were going to drop me off and then my administrative assistant was going to pick me up somewhere on Lincoln Boulevard. I was in the car with Ethel and Bob [Kennedy] and he kind of leaned back and had his head on her lap, just exhausted. I was just talking to him, I said, "Well, I'll see you next Tuesday over at

the Ambassador Hotel," and "Thanks again, this has just been great."

RFK's Assassination

VASQUEZ: You were there the night he was assassinated. In fact, in the picture I have seen, you were standing right behind him moments before you went out to the kitchen. Some people argued that there was a conspiracy involved, and you very early rejected that notion. Why?

REES: Well, again we didn't have any police protection.

VASQUEZ: Even at that stage?

REES: We had some security people, one or two, but at that stage we didn't have any security provided by the city of Los Angeles.

VASQUEZ: Was this primarily Mayor Yorty's doing?

REES: Yeah, yeah, Yorty was a, well. . . . We were going to move to the right to go downstairs because we had an overflow crowd on our floor and we were putting the extra people downstairs in another room. He was going to go down there and thank them. Jesse and I were right there and at the last minute the decision was made to go through the kitchen for a short press shot. But that was at the last minute. I had already

actually started to move over towards the stairway to block off the crowd so he could get through to the downstairs room.

Oh, god, I mean it's the worst time I ever had in my life because about three minutes later you heard shots. It sounded like firecrackers, and then you heard some people scream. We had gone through Jack Kennedy's assassination; we had gone through Martin Luther King's assassination. I was sitting next to a pillar. I beat my hand; I don't know, I apparently broke my hand hitting this damned pillar, it was really a deathwatch.

And it just wasn't Bob Kennedy getting killed, it was just about everything else I believed in. I think I started going downhill in politics after that. Then to go through the convention and the Chicago police riot; I don't know, it was too much to take, it was just too much. I called up a good friend of mine, Dr. [David] Dave Solomon, to ask, "What about the wound? Is there anything, anything that can be done?" He said, "No. No, in terms of [the] type of wound, there's nothing."

I went to the funeral in New York and I was

just a mess, just a mess. Politicians love funerals, and of course, all my colleagues were there. "Oh, boy, here we are at a political funeral." I couldn't stop crying. I mean, I wasn't screaming but, I just don't know. It was just terrible, it really was.

The 1968 Democratic National Convention

VASQUEZ: What role did you play in the California delegation at the convention that year?

REES: That got to be a mess.

VASQUEZ: You were inside, and the antiwar protestors were outside getting beaten up?

REES: What happened is that Jesse wanted to hold the delegation together and I didn't want to be any part of a power play. Jesse would love to say, "Okay, Jesse Unruh, the boss, is going to deliver the California delegation." To hell with this, the one thing I would never do in politics was to have someone deliver my vote. I didn't like that; I wasn't elected to have someone deliver me.

There was only one candidate I could go for, that was McCarthy, despite my reservations. I wasn't going to go for [Hubert H.] Humphrey; he

was Lyndon Johnson's person. I liked Hubert Humphrey a lot, but he was so enthusiastic for that war. I remember one of the first meetings I ever had after I got elected. It was in 1966. I was a member of the Democratic Study Group, which is a moderate-to-liberal group of Democratic congressmen, and Hubert Humphrey was our speaker. He had just come back from a week or so in Vietnam and he had stars in his eyes. What a wonderful crusade this was. Well, that's what everyone thought then. If you talk to people now, no one was for the war. But that's a bunch of baloney. People were for the Vietnam War and he was just so enthusiastic about it; he was even more [Vice President] George Bush than George Bush. I just didn't trust that. He was Lyndon Johnson's vice president, and Lyndon by then had completely flipped on the war. The only thing he would do was go to bases and talk to soldiers; he wouldn't talk to anybody else. I can remember those times in White House briefings. That war destroyed Lyndon Johnson. He went crazy on it.

The Traumatic Impact of the Vietnam War on American Politics

VASQUEZ: Why was that war so traumatic to the American

people? And to American politics?

REES: It was one of the first media, television-covered wars. A good friend of mine, [Charles] Charlie Murphy, I think it was ABC [American Broadcasting Company], he was a television guy. He was in Vietnam and he felt just the way I did about the Vietnam War. I think Lyndon Johnson called up ABC and said, "You have got to do something about Charlie Murphy."

In fact, Charlie was in my office when he got a call from ABC saying, "Come over to the office." And he got transferred to another situation.

Johnson was so intense. Number one, you had a different attitude in the Korean War in 1951 than you did in the Vietnam War. I talked about the way people in 1951 were kind of settled that the Korean War was something that was just very far away. But a whole new generation of activists had grown up since then. So by 1968 you had very strong feelings about the Vietnam War. It was very well covered. Every time you turned on the six o'clock news there was the Vietnam War. It was the most covered war in history.

VASQUEZ: Usually hearing the scores, the body counts?

REES: Yeah, and it was also a time of this great new awareness and you had all these hippies and the feeling of protest and the feeling of frustration, I think. I remember the Kent State [University] murders. This congressman was sitting next to me in committee and said, "Have you heard the news?" I said, "No, what is it?" "National Guard, five; Kent State, zero."

This was a Chicago congressman. So when I got on the floor, I think I made a speech about [Mayor Richard] Daley and the police riot, and this guy wouldn't talk to me.

VASQUEZ: What was it that American politicians who supported the war thought that they were doing? Because liberals got involved in supporting the war.

REES: Some people in hindsight try to make those that supported the war such ogres. But the supporters sincerely thought that there was a communist threat; they believed in the domino theory. I went to a White House meeting and I sat next to [Walter W.] Rostow, and he patiently explained to me the domino theory. I didn't believe in the

domino theory. I felt it was useless to get into a ground war in Asia. I didn't think we could win it. I was thinking just like an infantryman, a PFC; I wasn't thinking like a general. But enough generals, like Eisenhower, said we could not win a ground war in Asia, especially on such hostile terrain. It was basically a civil war.

I don't think ideology really has that much impact. I think ideology is used as a weapon. It's used as a symbol to get people involved. I don't think being a communist country has really changed Russia, in terms of what they would have been if there hadn't been a revolution. It's a symbol that's used; it's a power symbol, if you can become the good guy saying you're for the people, or whatever it might be. Look at the Spanish Civil War, look at the symbols that were used in war, the "People's War," and then the others saying, "We're fighting for God and country." All these things are wonderful: God, country and people.

We were in a type of war which I figured was strictly a civil war, but we had the symbols of godless communism fighting against these poor

free-enterprisers that wanted to be independent. All of this I thought was just gobbledegook. We were there getting killed. I figured if they were so damned good in South Vietnam, let them fight their own battle. Why should we be there? I still have this thing about the sanctity of human life.

I think the greatest war memorial ever conceived is the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, because it shows that war is fought by human beings, by individuals, and these individuals get killed. It isn't some heroic statue raising the flag over Iwo Jima. Combat is a very messy, lousy thing and the people who get killed are eighteen- or nineteen-year-old kids who had nothing to do with starting the war. In Plato's Republic, it was suggested that we ought to take the old people and let them do all the work after they become about fifty. Let them go to war. Look at the young lives that were lost in my war [World War II].

People that I knew who lost their lives-- what they could have done as vital human beings, I don't know. I just think in that year there

was so much awareness, and it was for a lot of different reasons, the frustrations and everything else that all came out. It first started with the radical wing, but then it built up across the board.

Supporting Eugene McCarthy at the 1968 Convention

I came out for McCarthy after the primary, and Jesse was very unhappy with that, but I was a United States congressman and an elected delegate. I was close to Bob Kennedy, and at least McCarthy was right on the war. I remember at the state convention people were still wrangling, trying to figure out where the delegation was going to go. Jesse wanted to come in with a set deck. His purpose was to push Ted Kennedy. Well, Ted Kennedy was not ready and I wasn't ready to push another Kennedy for president; I didn't want to lose Ted too. I have never been for Ted Kennedy for president. He's a good friend of mine, but there's going to be some nut someplace that's just going to say, "Oh, boy, I'm going to get the last of the Kennedys."

So when we got to Chicago, Jesse was trying to run his play and the convention was completely

fouled up. I got there a day late because I wanted to be with my family in Malibu. I was still down. I had been thinking of running for mayor and that was about the time one should have started doing the spade work, because the mayoral race is in the year after the presidential [elections].

I got to Chicago and I had a new pair of shoes and my feet hurt. I was depressed. Then you would walk through downtown Chicago and all you could smell was this Mace. It smells like vomit. The hippies were out there and they were obnoxious, and the police were obnoxious, and you got to the convention and it was filled with vitriolics. Compared to 1960, it was very depressing, the whole police-state atmosphere.

Why Hubert Humphrey Lost the Presidency

I left Chicago early. I was not there for the final speeches. The ballgame was over as far as I was concerned. That was it. I worked hard for Hubert Humphrey; I certainly preferred him to Nixon. Hubert Humphrey I thought was a great man. His problem was he was so goddamned enthusiastic. I was afraid of that. He finally

came out with this program on Vietnam, but he was so afraid of alienating his good friend Lyndon Johnson that it was kind of a half-assed statement.

I think if he had given a real strong statement, he would have won the election. He was closing strongly; if we had four more days, Hubert Humphrey would have won, but we didn't. I was with them the night before, again at the Beverly Hilton, and we were talking. He wasn't overly friendly with me because I had been for Bob Kennedy and then I had been for McCarthy; he was the third choice. But he was very gracious.

Then we had the election. We lost, and Nixon became president. I bought a harpsichord kit and built a harpsichord in my basement that winter to take my mind off all those things.

XIV. REES GOES TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

VASQUEZ: You served in the assembly, the [state] senate, and the congress. Can you succinctly compare the three levels of government and which was the most fulfilling and why?

REES: The least fulfilling was congress because the

system, as far as I was concerned, was stultifying. The issues were better, for me. My specialty was finance, and I had been an exporter, so I got involved in international monetary policy. Anything complex like that you want to dominate and develop your strengths. But congress was just a huge impersonal body. I loved the state senate because it was small and intimate and you could do a lot there in terms of the pure joy of combat and being creative.

Why Rees Ran for Congress

VASQUEZ: So why did you run for congress? Did you have great expectations of what . . .

REES: I will tell you why I ran for congress. It started off with the United States Supreme Court [decision] on Baker v. Carr which called for one man one, one vote in the legislature, and I was devastated by that because a lot of our real good, strong Democrats were from the rural areas.

These guys are fascinating. I mean, they were different from the big city Democrats and they were just a lot of fun to be with. They would fight the good fight. Joe Rattigan is one of the most fantastic people. You should

interview Joe Rattigan, a state senator, an excellent attorney who didn't shove down your throat the fact that he was an attorney. He was really an Irish poet; we had some fantastic Irish people there. We had Virgil O'Sullivan, who was the brooding black Irishman. You had Hugh Burns, who was the gregarious mortician. The characters were something else, and they stuck together. It was a very close operation.

Average Week of a California State Senator

I don't know if I mentioned it, people would say, "Well, what was your week like?" My lunches were all tied up and very structured. Bedell's had closed by this time so we moved our establishment down to Posey's.

Mondays I would always have lunch with Francis X. McLaughlin, the lobbyist for L.A. County, and Mac was another black Irishman. He had been at Normandy. He was one of the guys that directed traffic at the beachhead. There was something about the infantry. Once you had been through it, you developed a strong feeling to your fellow infantrymen. There weren't too many people that I knew in college that were in

the infantry; most of them were in other services. I guess most of the infantry went back and got jobs in the coal mines or the assembly-line. So there was this great McLaughlin. He was the lobbyist for Los Angeles County, and since I represented the whole county, I would have a very fine lunch with Francis and we would figure out what our county priorities were for that week, and what bills were coming up.

Tuesday was Derby Club, and we all wore derbys. This was an organization of select lobbyists, select legislators, and select members of the administration, and it was a very good place to communicate. I would be beating some of the lobbyists over the head who were opposing some of my bills, trying to figure out how we could resolve some of the problems. I was carrying a lot of the regional planning stuff, regional bills, and I was having a little battle with the League of California Cities. [Richard] Bud Carpenter, a very high-class guy, was the lobbyist for the League of Cities. I would be negotiating with Bud Carpenter. Here we [were] in these silly derbies, "Now come on, Bud, you

know you don't want to kill this bill. It's going to be good for your cities. Now, what do you want in the bill?" And so we would all be interacting. This was before the restrictions, so that legislators never paid for any of the drinks or the lunches.

And then Wednesday was Clam and Choral, which was strictly a senate group sponsored by the medical lobby. Now, I wasn't close to the medical lobby; in fact, I couldn't get on the Public Health Committee the second term in the assembly. I had been on it my first term, but I threw them a few votes they didn't like, and that was the end of my career there. It's just as well, because I really didn't like the way they were trying to dominate everything. They were fighting the Kaiser [Permanente] people. They didn't like Kaiser doctors practicing in hospitals, tax-supported hospitals, things like that.

This lunch was sponsored by the medical lobbyists and we all got along well. [Benjamin H.] Ben Read, we used to call him Dr. Read, was their lobbyist. So again, it was the open bar

and lunch and we all would talk. I would be talking to [Senator] Luther [E.] Gibson, head of the Governmental Efficiency Committee, because that was the graveyard for legislation. Earl Desmond had died by then and Luther Gibson took over, so I would be trying to hustle my bills that were before his committee.

Thursday was what we called Moose Milk. It was on the top floor of the El Mirador Hotel and all the legislature was invited to that. So what you didn't take care of Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday, you took care of at Moose Milk. Then Friday we were out of there, so that was the week.

I enjoyed the legislature because you could get bills through, you could be creative, you could go into a field like air pollution or state planning or vocational education, and, by god, you could write laws, you could make history. You could get these things going. You could see a problem and you could try to find a solution for that problem. It was really a tremendous amount of satisfaction. As I say, I think the assembly was more creative, but it was a larger

house, eighty members.

The Effects of the State Senate Reapportionment

VASQUEZ: Did the reapportionment eliminate some of your group?

REES: Reapportionment got rid of about half, more than half, of the senate. And it got rid of the group I was closest to. And I didn't particularly want to serve in a senate that was heavily loaded with ex-Los Angeles County assemblymen. The whole flavor of the senate was going to change. But as far as I was concerned, I was going to run for reelection. What I did was set up in my office an operation to reapportion Los Angeles County under the court's guidelines.

Fighting the One Man, One Vote Mandate

First, though, I fought the one man, one vote thing. I got the senate to agree with me that we ought to get a resolution through the [California] legislature and through other [state] legislatures to call a constitutional convention so we would deal with that situation.

Again, my district was a little unhappy with me because they were very much for one man, one vote, and I tried to explain that frankly I could

get more done for Los Angeles County as one senator than, say, eighteen senators going eighteen different ways.

There was a lot more pressure on me as the sole senator because I had to make the decision between three or four conflicting viewpoints. At least I had to make a decision so we would have a unified county policy. Now we get whipsawed and cut off and things like that. It's very subtle. People think of it as just votes. It's a lot more than that, plus the fact that the cow county senators always sympathized with me because I had such a big district; I even had problems getting them to kill bills I was carrying for assemblymen which were bad bills.

Problems Killing Bad Bills

I had a bill, Les McMillan's bill, which rezoned one piece of property on Crenshaw Boulevard from residential to limited commercial. It seems someone opened up a music store there and the city said, "Well, you can't do that, it's residential." I agreed with the city on that. So Les got a bill to have the state overrule the City of Los Angeles zoning on that parcel, and he

kind of conned the bill through the assembly. He told [Assemblyman Anthony C.] Tony Beilensen, "Look, I just want to get the bill through committee and on the floor and that will be it, you can kill it."

Then, when Tony wasn't there, Les moved the bill on the floor and it came over to the senate into the Local Government Committee. I was trying to kill it, but not to kill it directly by saying it was a bad bill. I just tried to kill it with kindness, by saying, "This bill doesn't do much, it merely states that the City of Los Angeles doesn't have any jurisdiction over zoning on one parcel in a residential area of Crenshaw Boulevard." I thought coming up with that kind of an argument, they would kill it. But they were so used to voting for my assembly bills because I had such a heavy workload, that they voted the thing on the floor. So here it was on the [senate] floor. I gave my same argument that it merely allowed the state to completely negate local zoning ordinances and to rezone one piece of property in a residential area in Los Angeles, completely alien to the concept of home rule. I

figured my friends would hear me, they would hear my message. They didn't; they voted the damn thing out.

I was going crazy and I ran to Joe Rattigan and I said, "Give me a Notice of Motion of Reconsideration." That's how you brought a bill back. And I said, "Jeez, didn't you hear my explanation?" And they said, "Yeah, but you know this isn't the first bad bill you've had that we have voted for."

It was interesting. There were two different houses and personalities and my function in each house was different. In the assembly, I came up with a small group and in six years we took over the operation. In the senate it was different; I came into a good senate. I came into a senate that was thoroughly Democratic, [though] it was a cow county senate and they had an innate suspicion of Los Angeles County senators.

[End Tape 5, Side B]

[Begin Tape 6, Side A]

Being More Effective in State Government than at
the National Level

VASQUEZ: Then you felt you accomplished more, and were

more effective as a public servant, at the state level?

REES: Oh, yeah, I really had a great sense of accomplishment in the legislature. I wrote a lot of, I think, good law. The personal interaction was a lot different. I have a lot more friends from the legislature than I ever did from congress. Congress is a--I don't know--different situation. This was before all these various changes. We didn't have fund-raisers during legislative sessions, things like that. You spend a lot more time together, I mean everybody, lobbyists, people from the state government, people from the [legislative] houses. [There is] a lot of interaction, and you start understanding other people's problems. It's more of a human-type relationship, and really, there's no comparison in terms of enjoyment.

The reason I ran for congress was that I wasn't that anxious to continue as a state senator because many of my friends were not going to be running for reelection. But I still figured I would be in pretty good shape, but then again I had my traditional fight with Jesse. I came up

with one [reapportionment] plan for Los Angeles County. The plan was good for me. I ran the district from my office downtown practically to Coldwater Canyon to pick up my house. I didn't want to move my house and I didn't want to lose my new office. In the assembly, of course, the L.A. County assemblymen wanted to run for the senate.

So we got into a huge battle and the reapportionment was held in abeyance. They didn't reapportion until after I was in the congress. What happened was that Jimmy Roosevelt decided to retire from congress in the middle of his term, which was the summer of 1965.

VASQUEZ: Then went to the United Nations?

REES: Yeah, and then later went with Bernie Cornfeld. No one could really figure it out; I won't go into any speculation. The district was open and I had a lot of people urging me to run for congress. I had never had much desire to run for congress. I liked the legislature, I liked the power situation. It was a pond that you could accomplish something in.

In congress, I knew the seniority system.

I didn't have many illusions going to congress. But then my children were coming along and I needed to stabilize my family. It was more difficult to stabilize life in Sacramento, because, again, I would be out nights in Sacramento--this was part of the business--and I would be commuting between L.A. and Sacramento. "Do I have a house in Sacramento, do I have one in Los Angeles? Once my kids start going to school, do I start taking them out of one school putting them in another?"

Also, the salary was a lot better. That wasn't a major motivation. I had been eleven years in the legislature and the issues start coming around again and again. There was nothing very new, just variations of the regular issues. You start getting a little bored the second time around. I was having a hell of a time trying to make up my mind because there were pros and cons on both sides.

Jewish Opposition in Rees's State Senate District

I preferred to stay in the legislature, but in terms of stabilizing my family life, Washington won out. Plus, I would be getting into a new

environment. I would be going to the national capital and dealing with a greatly expanded series of issues. So I finally decided to run for congress. By then, Leonard Horwin, who was mayor of Beverly Hills, was running too. He was Jewish, and my district was Jewish, and I had kind of grown away from my assembly district because I had to represent the whole county.

I would spend months of my time in the state senate really trying to consolidate my support in the black area in Watts, in the harbor, out in the San Gabriel Valley, and the San Fernando Valley. [In] the San Fernando Valley they have kind of an inferiority complex. You have to pay a lot of attention to them. That's why Yorty always had strength there, because he played to the San Fernando Valley, and you really have to pay a lot of attention to them.

So I really hadn't paid much attention to my own base, and in a way I was kind of considered the outside candidate. It was a miserable election because it was a special [election], and Steve Allen wanted to run. He was going to run, but he wasn't registered Democratic; he was

registered as "decline to state."

VASQUEZ: Yet he was considered to be your most worthy opponent, is that right?

REES: Yeah, but Horwin worked his tail off. Leonard was a very, very aggressive campaigner and physically he was very imposing and he was very tough. Steve Allen found that he couldn't file as a "decline to state"; you have to either file as a Democrat or Republican, which meant if they had the election in 1965 he couldn't run. The governor would have to call a special [election] in January or February. And he [Brown] was about to do it and I said, "What are you doing?" He said, "Well, Steve Allen wants to run." And I said, "Yeah, I'm running too,"

I said, "Look, governor, if Steve Allen runs we are going to have a split ticket, and with Horwin's base in Beverly Hills and his glitz, I could be squeezed out. You know if I'm squeezed out I will remain in the state senate, and you had better beware if that happens." I like Pat, but, gee, he could drive you crazy. And there is one anecdote I have to remember to tell you.

VASQUEZ: Now would be a good time.

REES: What happened was, the election was held in November and it was a very tough election. Horwin was sending out precinct kits on how to be a Jewish precinct worker, and I got furious. I complained to the Jewish Community Council, where I had a lot of good friends; it was a very tough campaign because that issue did come up.

VASQUEZ: Did the issue of supporting Israel come up at all? Did that ever cause you any problems?

REES: Not too much; no, not at that time, because the Israel issue had not really, really gotten big until around 1975-76. We were all basically in support of Israel and Israel's independence.

It was a very tough campaign. I won, and I won by more than I thought I would win by. We had to cover non-Jewish areas like Culver City and Venice, and they were low-voting areas. Horwin was sitting on my production area, which is Beverly Hills. He beat me in Beverly Hills, but only by a couple of votes. I did a lot better in Beverly Hills than I thought, but in areas like Beverlywood and Fairfax I didn't do well at all.

VASQUEZ: Then he really played up the Jewish question?

REES: Yeah, he did--I got pretty mad because if I had played up the opposite in Culver City, you know what would have happened. But I wasn't about to do that. So I won the election and we moved to Washington, D.C., in the middle of winter, and I started my illustrious career as a congressman. Governor Edmund G. Brown, Sr., and the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority

There's one anecdote about Pat Brown, when I was a state senator. The transit district was the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority and an authority has no bonding capacity. It's just an authority, and it runs and operates a system. It didn't have any money because, of course, all the money that came from the original bond issue to create the authority was spent buying an existing decrepit transit system; I mean, the taxpayers really got shafted.

The members were appointed by the governor. What had happened was that the [Los Angeles County] Board of Supervisors, namely a guy named Warren Dorn, who was a supervisor from Pasadena who specialized in always blaming everybody else for problems, or the county. . . . He was kind of

a good-looking guy and was very sanctimonious. He was really cutting up the governor and the governor was afraid of Dorn because he was a Republican and might become a candidate for governor. Dorn's base was in L.A. County and he was always going after the governor, "Why isn't the governor doing something about transportation?".

The governor called me and he said, "Tom, we got to do something about this. This guy is cutting me up every day in the papers." And I said, "Well, I could change the authority into a district and have the district elected by local people, nominated by local officeholders, and that way he wouldn't have anything you do as a target. I'll make it strictly a local district." I did a lot of that type of legislation because I was on the Local Government [Committee] and I'm big on creating districts and dealing with bond issues.

So I did that, and spent a year on this bill, and the bill finally started moving. I finally got enough consensus to make it move. I had a city-selection committee and a county-selection committee and I got outlying areas that

always fought transit, like Long Beach and Pomona, to support the bill. Finally, I got this consensus in the county so that the board would be appointed both by cities and the county and it would be a local board--which it should have been all along. It had general obligation-bonding authority and it had revenue-bonding authority. Now, unfortunately, the GO [general obligation]-bonding authority was a two-thirds vote, which is difficult to get. And we didn't have enough coverage of the revenue bonding to make revenue bonds work. The coverage is, you take your income and you multiply it by one and a half and that's what you have to have to cover your bond issue.

And it seems that the governor's appointees to the transit authority started complaining. One of them was a guy named [A. J.] Al Eyraud and and several others--including my friend, Martin Pollard--came up to the governor to complain about Rees who was abolishing the Metropolitan Transit Authority and trying to set up this screwy district. So I walked into Pat Brown's office and there was the board sitting in there,

and Pat looked at me and he said, "Tom, what is the matter with you? Why are you trying to abolish the Metropolitan Transit Authority?"

Now, I had been in the trenches for a year writing this bill because this guy, the governor, pleaded with me with tears in his eyes to get rid of the authority and set up a locally appointed district. I said, "What the hell do you mean? You asked me to do this." "Now, Tom." And I said, "Oh, shit!" And I stomped out of his office. We were in session. First, I went to my office, and I threw something at the wall. I forget what I threw. My temper is a lot more even now, but I was just incensed. I went to the [senate] floor and Senator Steve Teale, who's a doctor, looked at me and I was beet red. "Tom, Tom, come here, let me have a talk with you. What's the matter? Tell me your problems." Steve had a calming effect.

Rees's Role in the 1972 Presidential Campaign

VASQUEZ: This oral history is really meant to emphasize the period you were in the state legislature, but you participated in the presidential campaign of [United States Senator Edmund S.] Muskie. Can

you tell me something about that?

REES: Let me see, that's 1972. If you can remember, in 1970 the campus unrest was still going on. Nixon was president; he had been elected in 1968. The 1970 elections were very crucial in terms of the House and the Senate, and Nixon really was giving very tough fire-eating speeches, kind of going back to his [House] Un-American Activities [Committee] days, equating protest and Democrats to the Communist party and the whole thing.

He gave a couple of very obnoxious speeches right before the November election. I think it was decided by the Democrats to have Senator Ed Muskie answer Nixon. And Muskie, who is a wonderful looking man, has a great voice, and is a very reasonable person, gave the most beautiful speech on television, just blowing Nixon out of the water.

I mean he was so reasoned and so rational, and Nixon had been so irrational. It really caught on. I had people calling me up, "This Muskie, he's great, he should run for president." And so 1970 was really the beginning of a Muskie boom. I liked him and I knew him and so I became

very active in the Muskie campaign. What I tried to do was to organize the California campaign. Of course, Ziffren was in that, playing his normal game of "keep away," and I was trying to develop congressional support. What I would do was to try to find out how each congressman was reacting. Most congressmen do not want to get involved. They run away from early commitments; I tend to come out early.

VASQUEZ: Who made up the core of the California group around Muskie?

REES: I'm not positive. It was an odd thing. Moretti was speaker; I think Jesse was out of office. I don't think Jesse was treasurer then. And Moretti was trying to hold the legislature together and have the legislature again come in as a block of support, so that those of us from Washington were not welcome. It was almost déjà vu of the time when we were trying to build the power in the legislature and we didn't want any congressman messing around with California politics.

Jerry Brown was for Muskie. I spent a lot of time with Jerry Brown. I liked him. I

thought he was very intellectually honest. I just don't recall in the congressional delegation. . . . I know I was very active and I was [also] working the congressional [elections]. Then I was also setting up meetings with Muskie and groups of congressmen throughout the country. Muskie had a hideaway in the office basement of the Capitol. Then we were trying to deal with California, setting up headquarters and everything else.

The Problem with California's June Primary

See, the problem with presidential politics in California is that our primary is too late. By the time the first Tuesday of June comes along, everything has been decided. Naturally, I mean our election just doesn't mean anything, so that the emphasis in California is to raise money, and to hell with everything else. And that's always very frustrating because my thing is grass-roots politics and field operation, and I had to concentrate on fund-raising. But in reality, the only purpose of coming to California is to raise money, or to pick up maybe a key endorsement. Because by the time the first

Tuesday of June comes along, the whole ballgame is over; usually these presidential primaries are decided by April.

Muskie was blown out of the water in April, I remember the date very well. The Red Chinese sent over their Ping-Pong team. That was the very beginning of the opening of relations.

Edmund Muskie's Downfall

VASQUEZ: Of "Ping-Pong diplomacy"?

REES: Yeah, and they were being honored at a reception at the Ankrum Gallery in my district, and all the Hollywood types were there like Jack Nicholson and Marlon Brando. That was the night of the--I think--Massachusetts primary and Muskie lost. He really lost when the press found him sobbing for about two seconds in New Hampshire. I mean, the guy was physically and emotionally exhausted because he had been across the country several times. And you know that scum [William Loeb] that ran the New Hampshire paper [Manchester Union Leader] was taking Muskie's wife on and he tried to defend his wife.

Let me tell you, having been a candidate, I never would talk about my family or my war

experiences because I would tend to choke up. I just didn't talk about that, and I could get through my speeches. 'Cause you get really wound [up] in those personal matters and it doesn't take much [Snaps fingers] to set you off. And so in the press, of course, there is nothing worse [than] for an American male to cry a little and show some emotion.

The Muskie campaign died. Well, first, it peaked too damn early. They were running this guy ragged. Hell, I had him over at a big fundraiser at my father-in-law's house. We came in by helicopter, over in Santa Clara County. That was on Labor Day of the year before, 1971. That was a full-blown campaign then. He was the hot item, so by the time it came up to the actual elections this guy was pretty burned out. I really don't like this system that we have, it just is not working. I'm beginning to think that the old days of the smoke-filled rooms are probably better than what we are doing now, because, hell, the winner is just going to be the guy that physically and mentally survives.

The Impact of Media on a Candidate's Image

VASQUEZ: And who can afford and maintain an image machine?

REES: Yeah, and I think a lot of good potential candidates look at that and they say, "No way."

VASQUEZ: How do you feel about what some people have referred to as "keyhole journalism," this push to look into every vestige of a candidate's personal life and bring that up as a measure of the value of a candidate: I'm thinking of [United States Senator Joseph R.] Joe Biden [Jr.]; I'm thinking of [United States Senator] Gary [W.] Hart; I'm thinking of a number of other people.

REES: Well, I don't like it. You know, the press has all the protections of the First Amendment and I think it's misused. They call it the [Robert] Woodward-[Carl] Bernstein syndrome; everyone wants to be famous as an investigative reporter. I think Hart was a fool to tell everybody that he is so pure and he doesn't mess around, and at the same time be doing what he did. I think Biden was a fool to have played loose with that [quote]. Now, I don't know if that should disqualify them for being president. I mean, [John] Kennedy supposedly had his escapades. Under the present

system, I don't now if Kennedy would ever be nominated.

VASQUEZ: Should Judge [Michael] Ginsberg have been frozen out of his recent nomination to the United States Supreme Court for having smoked marijuana?

REES: No, definitely no. I was opposed to Judge Ginsberg because he had a blatant conflict of interest on his cable TV stock, while representing the government position on cable TV, that seemed to coincide with the company he had stock in. No, I thought that was blatant, but no one ever seemed to think that that was bad. That alone would have caused me to vote against Ginsberg. Because someone smokes some marijuana, I mean, if they are hopheads they are on the stuff every night, that's one thing, but alcohol is just as bad as marijuana. It kills a hell of a lot more people, but that's all right. I'm not for legalization; I tend to be fairly conservative in those fields, but to disqualify someone before because they had marijuana in college.

The Trivialization of Political Morality in the Media

VASQUEZ: Is it a trivialization of political morality?

REES: I think it is. I don't know who the hell we can nominate. I am afraid of the type of person we are going to nominate if they can't have any human failings. It gets just too difficult if they put investigative reporters on every candidate and start doing research on all phases of a person's life.

There are some interesting situations that I had in the legislature. When I was in the legislature, the Los Angeles Times was a paper I generally was very friendly with and generally got their endorsement. The paper had changed a great deal from the time of the Bowron mayoral campaign. They decided they were going to ask every member of the legislature how much they earned in outside income and what they owned. Well, it didn't bother me at that time because I had practically no outside income and I owned a home with a big mortgage and had nominal savings. So that's what I told them; they said, "What's your mortgage?" And I think it was \$32,000 on a \$54,000 house. "And who has it?" I said, "Well, it's Glendale Federal [Savings and Loan]." And that was about it.

George Miller [Jr.], who I mentioned before from Contra Costa County, a rough, tough son of a bitch. The L.A. Times gets him, he says, "Friend, it's none of your fucking business what I own, get the hell out of my office!", or words to that effect. And so when the article came out it's, "Rees is alleged to have so much income. He does, though, own a house with a mortgage from a savings and loan. Rees, of course, is chairman of the Finance and Insurance Committee that legislates in this field." I mean, it made me a look like a crook. And I got so damned mad. I was one of the purest persons in the legislature. The only thing I owned was my car and my house, and a house with a mortgage. It made me kind of look sleazy, "He alleges that." And Miller: "Senator Miller declined to comment." This is what I mean.

Should the "Fourth Estate" be Regulated?

VASQUEZ: The press is known as and is called the "fourth estate." The other three branches of government have some kind of checks and balances on them. Do you feel that the press should have more checks on it?

REES: No, I don't know. It's. . . . We do have a First Amendment protecting the freedom of the press and I hate to mess with that. The Supreme Court, I think, has been a bit too protective in terms of libel and slander actions. But I'm not about to overreact; too much of the legislation we have is overreaction against a situation and the overreaction proves to be far worse than the original problem. I don't know what to do about it. I get very frustrated when I look at the type of journalism that some people practice. I don't appreciate [the ABC correspondent] Sam Donaldson yelling questions in a rude manner at the president of the United States.

VASQUEZ: But when there's no other access to the president except his walk from the White House to the [presidential] helicopter?

REES: Yeah, but still, I think it shows a certain amount of arrogance. I can sympathize with the fact that they are frustrated because Reagan does that, but Reagan is not particularly going to answer a question that's shouted out, so what do you accomplish? I just don't know. I was at times unhappy because I felt I was treated

unfairly; generally, though, I got a good break with the press.

Writing One's Own Press Materials

VASQUEZ: Didn't you always write a lot of your own press releases and all of your own press columns?

REES: Yeah, I always did my own writing. I didn't want anyone writing for me. I write easy so it wasn't too bad.

VASQUEZ: Why have you never published a book of your columns?

REES: I started to; it was very frustrating because I had a contract with Dutton [and Co.] And you know, here's a letter I just found from Dutton, from the editor who was working with me. He says, "Thank you so much for the first two chapters. Possibly I have read 'The First Day' too many times. In any case, though I do think it's improved, I don't enjoy it half as much as I did the uncompleted chapter on the Rose-Thomas bill. I found the latter to be quite funny. I do have some suggestions. The opening seemed a little too long and I felt breaking your foot was too quickly introduced and too early introduced since it's an important element in the humor of

the anecdote." And we go through this . . .

VASQUEZ: In short, what are they saying?

REES: They are saying that they like the original style that I wrote in, which is an eight-hundred-word column, because it was punchy. But then they said I had to have longer chapters and I needed to have a thread of a plot going through the chapters to pull them together. So I started putting two of my columns together with about a two-hundred-word transition and they said it didn't have the punch of my original column, but it really consisted of two of my original columns. I mean it was very difficult.

Using Humor in Politics

VASQUEZ: What thread would you want to weave through a work that put all of your columns together?

REES: Well, I didn't particularly want to weave a thread, because it meant I would have to do a lot of rewriting. When you do that you kind of kill the spirit. My columns were about eight hundred words long. The newspapers would print them because it wasn't too long, and I could get some punch in there; I could get some irony in there.

My stuff was tongue-in-cheek. I think that

humor is perhaps the greatest weapon of all and this is another reason that I wasn't liked particularly by the Lyndon Johnson administration, because I wrote a lot of columns on the Vietnam War. It got to be ridiculous. The statements we were making about destroying bridges; I mean, every bridge we destroyed, there would be five new bridges. I suggested we have some birth control method so if we destroyed a bridge it wouldn't multiply by five.

VASQUEZ: Did humor serve you well in your political career?

REES: Yeah, I never got in too much trouble. At times you do get in trouble with humor, and it's probably best, if you want to survive, not to have any sense of humor at all. But once you establish your reputation, you can deal with it. Now [United States Senator Robert] Dole probably has one of the best senses of humor of any of the presidential candidates. Bob Dole of Kansas. Which is a revelation for a conservative Republican, but he has got a very acerbic, a very very bitter sense of humor and he has really had to cut it down.

VASQUEZ: It has hurt him in public presentations, when he lets it be seen.

REES: Yeah, it really has. I had a district that appreciates humor. One time, it was right after Ford pardoned Nixon, I had just gotten off the plane and I drove over to the Westwood headquarters and there was a camera crew--I hadn't heard the story yet--and they bounced this off at me and I was supposed to come up with an instant answer. And then I went to a meeting that evening in Westwood. These are very bright, funny people. They asked me about Nixon and I said, "Well, Richard Nixon is his own worst enemy." And this voice comes from the back, "Not while I'm alive."

So with my district we did well with humor, but it can be devastating. I think too many of these columnists are too serious, and Russell Baker all the time is kind of too funny; he's kind of labored. They need something in between. I think Art Buchwald has some excellent columns. I wanted to do one when they discovered all these Soviet troops in Cuba and it turns out they had been there for twenty years. I really

wanted to do a column; I wasn't in office there. Maybe we should give the Russian troops social security because they are about ready to retire, and you know, we are always thinking about the Nicaraguans crossing the border en masse and taking Louisiana.

XV. WHY REES LEFT THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Why Rees Resigned from the Congress

VASQUEZ: When you left congress in 1976, was it out of frustration?

REES: Yeah, I was horribly frustrated. When I got there I was part of the rebels, I was rebelling over the Vietnam War; I was rebelling against the whole damn system, the seniority system. The old people had been there for years, having control of everything. If you are a new person, it's the old Rayburn [adage], "To get along, go along."

You only have so many years of life on earth and you don't want to just be standing in line for twenty years. One of the most tragic things in Washington is when you have a guy who is in his seventies as the ranking majority member of a committee where the chairman is eighty. And this guy who is seventy has been waiting for twenty

years for that guy to die or get beaten and he never does. He just keeps getting older, and the guy who is seventy just quits in frustration. I wasn't about to take my life and set it there.

You know, if I had remained on the Banking and Currency Committee--I left the end of 1976--I don't think I would have gone up; I would have gone up three spots in seniority.

VASQUEZ: As of now?

REES: Yes, as a member. And I can't stand the chairman of the Banking Committee; he's a guy that I fought every day.

VASQUEZ: Who would that be?

REES: [Congressman Ferdinand J.] St. Germain of Rhode Island, who has had enough scandals to handle anybody.

I could never get on the Mexico-U.S. Inter-parliamentary Committee. And hell, I speak Spanish, I have been in business in Mexico, but there would always be some senior guy who wanted to go on the junket. Then once you start rebelling, of course, you get nothing. It was terrible.

Trying to Reform the Congress

I came in halfway through a special election, so I came in halfway through the Eighty-ninth Congress. This was a congress that was heavily Democratic because it had been elected with the Lyndon Johnson landslide against Barry Goldwater. And we didn't have any help from leadership. Our leader was [Speaker] John [M.] McCormack, who was in his eighties, and all he could do was talk about how it used to be under [presidents] [John Calvin] Coolidge, [Herbert C.] Hoover, and [Franklin D. Roosevelt] FDR.

We tried to get some help, I mean secretarial help; we tried to get some secretarial pooling so we could get letters out. We tried to get an extra office so two or three members could pool an operation, but everything was given out by seniority. The senior members who didn't need help, who all won by huge votes, that's why they are senior members, because they have [a] set district. There aren't too many competitive congressional districts in the United States; maybe 20 percent.

Well, the situation was that it was a lost

cause. The senior guys had the staff; they had the secretarial backup; they had the space; they had the machinery, and we didn't. I remember [Congressman] Lee [H.] Hamilton was our class chairman. He was the guy that handled the hearings this summer.

VASQUEZ: The Iran-Contra hearings?

REES: Yes. We invited the speaker to a meeting at the congressional hotel, to try to plead with him to give us some help, to try to make some changes in schedules so we could get back to our districts. [Interruption]

What had happened was that the Goldwater-Johnson race had brought in a lot of very good, new, young, aggressive Democrats into Congress. But you always know that you are going to lose some in the next election; that's just the way life is. But McCormack didn't give us a chance. I mean, the scheduling was lousy; we couldn't get away to campaign. He was very much attached to his cronies and tried to please everyone. And, of course, the older ones, they just as well sit in Washington, you know. They are chairmen; they're kings. Why go back to

their district? They are not going to have a fight.

There was one guy named [Congressman] Joe [R.] Pool from Texas. He was on the [House] Un-American Activities Committee, a real hack, and he had a bill to make it a felony to demonstrate against the Vietnam War. It was a terrible bill. He convinced McCormack that he needed the bill in his district, which he didn't. So McCormack, six weeks before the election, came up with a HUAC vote on the floor, and that was devastating for our people because most were targeted. I wasn't targeted, but most of these guys were targeted because they all took over marginal districts.

And McCormack, when we had the meeting begging him to give us better schedules, to give us more facilities, again this garrulous old man said, "Well, I'll tell you, you're all the apple of my eye, you young guys are all going to win." You know, the crap you get when you get out of high school.

Then he proceeded to start with his speech, working slowly from the [President Woodrow]

Wilson administration and up through Jack Kennedy. As a result of the lack of support, we lost well over half our members. We lost six just in my committee. I went up six seniority spots and then didn't move for eight years, which is terribly frustrating.

My chairman was in his eighties, partially senile. [Congressman Wright] Patman was a horrible legislator. By the time a bill came out of the committee, they were just completely fouled up. And we had to completely rewrite them on the floor. This is the only committee that ever did their committee work on the floor of the house. One old guy said, "You know, that Patman, he couldn't sell pussy in a troop train." It was that kind of a thing, and again, Patman would just give his old speech, the old populist speech. And if you ever disagreed with him he always had a leak to Jack Anderson and you would find yourself in the column. It was completely, totally frustrating.

VASQUEZ: What reforms did you propose to change this situation?

REES: Well, I proposed a lot of reforms. Congressional

reform was not a popular subject because we were going against the establishment and I was only a second-termer when I got into that kick. We wanted to limit committee posts so that you could become chairman of the full committee and chairman of one subcommittee, no more. I wanted to have the committees chosen by the [Democratic] caucus. Committees were chosen by the Democrats on the Ways and Means Committee, so I wanted to set up a Democratic caucus and I wanted to have a steering committee and the steering committee could make recommendations to the caucus and the caucus could vote the recommendations up and down.

I wanted to really open up the process so that more people would be participating, so you wouldn't have just a few aged chairmen dominating the whole situation. There were just a lot of different things. The rules of the House are extremely difficult. You know, they start with Jefferson's manual, which was written by Thomas Jefferson after the Constitution was approved. And so it starts there. Number one is the United States Constitution; second is Jefferson's manual;

and then we would get into these very complex, arcane rules of the House of Representatives.

I tried to streamline that. I tried to provide that there had to be an up-to-date volume of precedents available to all members so you don't have to show the parliamentarian what plan to do so he can tell the speaker how to kill your amendment. I wanted to have a public roll call vote. We couldn't ever get a straight vote on the Vietnam War. I went through this before. We'd have a teller vote where you walked through a line, but you didn't have a recorded vote. The only way we could vote against the Vietnam War was to vote against the entire defense budget. Well, I always did, but it sure didn't help me in my district. I had Douglas Aircraft, Litton Industries, Lockheed, Hughes; I had all these people in my district and I kept voting against the defense budget. I mean, the lobbyists understood my motivation, but their employers didn't.

It was very frustrating, it was extremely frustrating because we had been so successful in the [state] legislature. And then we got to the

House of Representatives and it was just crawling through the mud.

Then [Congressman Allard K.] Al Lowenstein got elected. He was a very fantastic and dominating guy. I have never met anybody like him. The press wouldn't pay attention to our reform group. They said, "Ah, hell, once you have seen one reform bill, you've seen them all." They are old, cynical people in the press corps, but Al Lowenstein was big news. He was considered the guy that single-handedly started the movement to bring down Lyndon Johnson.

He was a very dynamic, very messianic type of character and he became part of our group. His ego was such that he would not try to dominate; it was just great. So our movement started growing and then I started working with a group of Republicans who wanted some changes.

VASQUEZ: Which included people like who?

REES: [Congressman] Barber [B.] Conable, who is now head of the World Bank, was the one I worked most closely with. They were worried over the fact that the minority didn't have any staff, and they wanted to have some guarantee of staff. All the

staff was for the majority so if they wanted anything done they had to go to the majority to have it done. There were various things.

VASQUEZ: So here you were back in a bipartisan situation to get things done.

REES: Well, no, we used to do the same thing in the legislature. I always believed in making cross-deals like that; that's what we did in the speakership to get what we wanted. You need Republicans on some issues, so you play that. No, I am a great believer in partisanship but you should never let partisanship cloud what the real issue is. And the issue was trying to bring that damn body into the twentieth century, that was the issue. You know, to develop our own television operation, to develop word processing, to get into computers, I mean just trying to centralize more of the functions, this is what we were trying to do.

The "Watergate Babies" in the House of Representatives

Then when the reform finally started moving is when the new class came in after Watergate. That would be, what, 1974?

VASQUEZ: Yes.

REES: Yeah, the "Watergate babies" came in and they were really ready to go and that gave us the fuel. I was able to get Patman out of the chairmanship of that committee and we elected [Congressman] Henry Reuss. And I was Reuss's manager. I got the votes to turn down Patman as chairman of the committee. It was tough; I felt horrible. Patman sat just about where you are. He made sure he sat right there looking at me all the time I was giving the speeches as to why he shouldn't remain chairman.

The Costs of Leading Reform Efforts

But the problem is, when you become the first guy into a battle like that, you are the first guy to be put against the wall. I mean, this is the way revolutions work. Some of us, like Jerry Waldie and I, we didn't have much currency left because the old guys in the leadership didn't like us because of what we did, and the new guys didn't quite trust us, because they had just got there and we were semi-establishment to them. All these things happened when the new class came in and they felt they did

it all. Well, they didn't. I mean we had done all the spade work, cleared the land mines, and the whole damn thing. They were the high-tech fuel that made it operate, but they all thought that it was their doing, which was a little ironic.

But after that, I just figured to hell with it. I got what I wanted, I got chairmanship of the subcommittee that I was an expert in, [Finance, Trade, and] International Monetary Policy, and I was able to make the most fundamental change in the operation of the IMF [International Monetary Fund] since the Bretton-Woods conference had set it up. But I just burned out. I didn't want to be in congress anymore. I was tired, I was just tired. I had been fighting that thing all the time I was there, eleven years, and the Banking [Finance, and Urban Affairs] Committee was a disaster; I wouldn't have moved up a bit. I would still be there, about eighth in seniority.

You know we had guys like [Congressman] Henry [B.] González. The guy has been senile for years, but every time they talk about getting rid

of Henry González, who's chairman of the housing subcommittee [Housing and Community Development] all the Chicanos were saying, "You are going against Henry González because he's Chicano." He's crazy. You know, he is completely ineffective, and because of that not a goddamn thing is being done about housing policy. That's what I hated about it. Because with a seniority system, you had these guys in there [who] cared more about having a big staff. They didn't give a damn about the issue. All they knew was [that] the housing subcommittee was the power subcommittee of the banking committee.

Nothing has happened in housing. We have more people that are ill-housed and living on the streets than we probably have had since the Great Depression, and this is why I was so furious at Patman, because he was incompetent, and as a result huge areas of public policy were not being addressed.

[End Tape 6, Side A]

[Begin Tape 6, Side B]

REES: Many a new member would come up with a bill, the bill would be picked up by the press, and the

chairman would take the damn bill over.

Lawyers in Politics

VASQUEZ: Since you left the congress, you have been in business and practiced law. Now, you never finished law school but you passed what bar?

REES: California.

VASQUEZ: California. And you also practice law in the East, don't you?

REES: Yeah, I'm a member of the District of Columbia bar. In the Muskie campaign the lawyers flocked into the political campaign because they are always looking for that big slot in the cabinet. So many of them don't know a damn thing about politics and they certainly have intuition in politics. They don't walk precincts. They are these brilliant people and they all want to be on the strategy committee, discuss high strategy.

I got tired of this. Muskie's campaign was dominated by lawyers and they tried to make everyone feel that if you weren't a lawyer you weren't qualified. Of course, the Muskie campaign blew up. I was talking to a friend of mine, [Joseph] Joe Eisenberg in Los Angeles, who

had just passed the California bar. He had just graduated from law school. And I said, "Joe, what would it take to pass the bar?"

Taking the Bar Examination

My situation is that I registered for the study of law before 1956, and the rules say that if you register for the study of law before 1956 upon an affidavit of study of so many hours, you are eligible to take the bar. I didn't write that rule; I think it was written when they did away with correspondence courses.

The bar always tries to restrict membership. Most professional groups do. They say they are trying to protect the public, but they are trying to protect their profession. This is when they did away with correspondence courses, and this was used as a grandfather clause because you had a lot of people that were in the middle of studying. To take a correspondence course, first you have to register for the study of law and you do that automatically when you get to law school.

So I was qualified to take the bar with my one year of law school. I assumed that the

interminable hours sitting in the senate, the assembly, and the United States congress I could call legal study. Hell, I had been writing laws for fifteen years. So Joe convinced me that I could take the bar, and he had a friend, Joe Zelden, who had also gone to Boalt Hall and who was in Washington. He suggested I call him. So we set up a system of study. I got the bar review course on cassette tape--you can do that--and then Joe would give me questions and I would do them at home. Each week we would meet and I would give him my written answers. He would correct me and give me new questions.

He was very good. Most of my law I learned from those bar review cassettes. I would get up about four in the morning and clip on the ear-phones and take notes, going through corporations one night and something else the next night.

I think on a typewriter, so I typed the bar exam. I worked my ass off. The last three weeks I was doing straight twelve hours. It's discipline; it's like training. I really didn't talk to anyone at the bar exam because they second-guess themselves and they can set you off. It's

mental, it's very mental. I know people that know far more than I do, great scholars, that can't pass the bar. They really spin out, but I was trained. I trained myself. I would come in with my big Royal Standard typewriter and put my headphones on to keep out any noise. I didn't talk to other people. I didn't study at night during the exam; I would go out and have a big meal, a good bottle of wine, and go to sleep, then get up the next day and do the exam.

VASQUEZ: What year did you pass the bar?

REES: Well, it was 1973. I felt pretty good about passing it because now when these lawyers tell me how to read the English language I could tell them I had the ticket. I think it makes me a better lawyer because I only had to have one-third of the upper lobotomy. You know I do practice tort law. I deal with victims of toxic exposures and my professor, as I mentioned earlier in the tape, was William Prosser, and he's the god of torts. He was a wonderful professor and I consider that really sufficient. You learn the law by doing. But I really kind of think of myself more as a businessman at times.

Rees's Philosophy of Government

VASQUEZ: If you were to summarize your philosophy of government, what would that be?

REES: Oh, that's kind of hard. You know the [kind of] questions people ask you at meetings and you just stand there staring at them for five minutes.

VASQUEZ: Take your time.

REES: I remember some of the books I read very early. At Occidental [College] when I was there we were required to read certain books, one of them was [J.] Lincoln Steffens's autobiography, which was the book that really impressed me about government; that was, at that time, a transition between the old bosses and the reformers.

[Interruption]

You do have your rather constant ideals of what government should be, and this goes all the way back to the Greeks. Another book we also had to read was Thucydides's History of the Peloponnesian Wars. And there's Pericles's speech to the Athenians, which is magnificent. So you have a constant that goes all the way back, as to what the purpose of government is, in relationship to people.

But then you also find that government is never static. It's very cyclical. The reforms of Hiram Johnson in the old days can lead to corruption thirty years later. You always have to reassess what government is, and what it is supposed to be doing. I'm a little suspicious of people that say, "We have to come up with new ideas," because I think the ideas are constant.
[Interruption]

I'm not knocking new ideas, but there have been some who want to completely change every idea that we have, to get them integrated with all the changes in technology.

Although I think we need these new ideas, they really are in addition to your basic foundations. I think everyone has, in a democracy, a duty to participate in the rights and duties of the system. And nothing infuriates me more than people who knock the system and don't participate; they are proud because they don't vote. Everyone has a chance; I really think so.

You listen to some lobbyists in Washington and they will tell you that you can't do anything

[because] they are the ones that have the key.

In congress if one of my constituents wanted to call me up, they could call me up and I would talk to them; if they sent me a letter I would read the letter; if they came to Washington, I would meet with them. I didn't need an intermediary. I don't like politics where the politicians become isolated. I think that's bad. You might have 220 million people in this country, but I believe we must have access between the people in politics and the constituents to make the system work. We don't need intermediaries. I think intermediaries are really a great threat to the system. I don't think the system will ever become so big that we have to have them.

You know, Adlai Stevenson said that "Everyone's generation has to make his own fight for freedom," and it was very easy for me when I was eighteen to get into the infantry. It's a big thrill, and for most men being in the service was the most memorable thing they ever did. There are, unfortunately, a lot of things that are appealing [about] war. There are a lot of things

that certainly aren't. You are all together, you are all on the same team. It's all the excitement and everything else, but it is a lot tougher when you get into a situation like now. We don't have any wars, we can't be heroes, but you have to make the fight. How do you make your fight for freedom in 1987? Because it has to be made; it has to be made in every generation.

My generation, once it got out of the war [World War II], it retreated; only a few of us got into the fight. But we had to keep that going. The thing that bothered me about my own CDC was that it was aging. Everyone was my age or older, and new people weren't coming in. I'm not like Ronald Reagan because I don't believe that government is bad. We are government.

If government is bad, we make it bad. Again, Adlai Stevenson said, "We get exactly the government we deserve," and if the government is lousy, it means that we are not doing a good job. We have a right as voters to make changes and I believe the system is open; maybe some people don't, but I think it is. I paid attention to individuals because I needed to in

order to be an effective legislator. I also needed those individuals to get elected, and I couldn't do what I wanted to do unless I had their support. I tend to think most people in public office are good people. I think most people that work for government are good people.

But, of course, you have a Ronald Reagan that says, "Government is bad," and sets up a moral situation so that the good people in government quit, and then you tend to get the faceless dregs surviving, the real bureaucrats and, of course, government becomes unresponsive. This is the problem that we face. The whole Ronald Reagan approach has been knocking government--government is evil, government is bad--and I think that's wrong.

Government is there, government represents us, and government is something we have created. If it's bad, it is up to us to change it and make it good, and not to destroy it.

The Relationship Between Politics and Economics

VASQUEZ: In your mind, what is the connection between politics and economics?

REES: Economics is certainly crucial and economics can

determine what's going to happen. When Reagan came in you had these ideological supply-side economists.

VASQUEZ: [Arthur B.] Laffer and company?

REES: Yeah, and probably two-thirds of the UCLA Department of Economics, because they were very conservative economists. Chancellor [Raymond B.] Allen tried to develop a, let's say, friendly approach between conservative businessmen, the UCLA School of Business [Administration] and the UCLA School [Department] of Economics, and I used to argue with him quite often when I was in congress. They were just hard-liners.

I remember in 1981, I was lobbying at that time when we were dealing with the problem of taxation of U.S. citizens working abroad. U.S. companies could not compete because the U.S. citizens were so heavily taxed in comparison to say British or French, or Japanese or Korean. And a lot of U.S. companies had to fire their U.S. employees and hire foreigners just because of this double taxation.

This guy's name was Norman Ture. He was the under-secretary of [the] Treasury [Department],

the number two spot, and he told us, he said, "If this tax reform bill passes, we will have the incentives in this system, under our approach, [so] that we will produce a balanced budget by 1985. You can be assured of that."

I was listening to that, oh, boy. This is what really got us into trouble. Economists, theoretical economists. The tax bill of 1981 that was the biggest business giveaway in the history of this country; it was a flesh auction. The Democrats and Republicans were offering the special interests everything in the world if they would support them. It was one of the biggest giveaways in history.

And this was the beginning of the largest deficit in the history of the country. It's amazing. My area was international monetary policy. The impact of our policy of going heavily into debt and selling our debt around the world and keeping up an artificially high dollar where our balance of payments deficits became historically high was devastating.

To me it's almost criminal. I don't know why anyone would want to be president next

year. I see the problems as being insurmountable; these are all economic problems. The economic problems impact on government because they don't want to cut the defense budget. And the actual percent of the budget that is controllable is rather small, like 20 percent. The rest of it you can't control: interest and national debt, social security payments, retirement payments.

So the more you cut the budget, the more you're cutting down real essential programs that affect people. At a time when air safety is getting to be a very scary situation, we are firing people from the air safety agencies in the federal government because they are cutting budgets. Again, this is economics and we are cutting out complete functions of government services. The functions for the poor are diminishing. Frankly, you are not going to allow these people to starve in the streets, so it means we are taking a federal program, abolishing it, and tossing these people back on local government.

The Future of Government Spending Limitations

VASQUEZ: What do you think this will mean for California

politics in the future?

REES: I just don't know, because again we had that situation of the [Howard] Jarvis initiative [Proposition 13], these various Jarvis-[Paul] Gann initiatives which are the pie-in-the-sky of freezing expenditures. The expenditures now have no practical relationship with the needs of the state. And I think it is going to be devastating. We are going to have more Mickey Mouse financing, and using Mickey Mouse financing costs more money.

I think we are in a tough situation and all of it due to this great so-called conservative ideal that you can run government and deal with expanding needs and not raise your taxes. You can't do that in business. If my expenses go up, I have got to raise the rents in my building. If I don't raise the rents in my building, I go out of business. But if the government doesn't raise the rents in its building, it just prints more debt and sells it on the market. We are the largest debtor nation in the world today. Not Mexico, not Brazil, the United States of America.

A Resurgence of Liberalism

VASQUEZ: Do you foresee a resurgence of liberals in

California politics?

REES: Yeah, I see a resurgence of liberals. I think there is going to be a hangover from the Reagan years because he was just telling us fairy stories. [Congresswoman Patricia] Pat Schroeder is an old friend of mine, she called him a "teflon candidate" because nothing sticks to him. I think we are going to have a resurgence, I just hope we do.

Here's the problem with the resurgence: Let's say Democrats take the presidency. Let's say we keep the House and the Senate. Let's say we take the governorship in three years. I don't know what we are going to have once we take it, because we want to restore a lot of programs that affect people, especially poor people. We want to restore some programs that affect education, but how can we? We have got a two trillion dollar budget deficit, although I think we peaked on defense, which practically doubled [in the last] seven years. It's extremely difficult to figure out what we are going to have to do. I'm convinced that whoever is president is going to have to raise taxes, and they should.

VASQUEZ: How do you feel about the new tax structure?

REES: Well, it's fine. I guess I would probably raise the maximum rate somewhat, maybe to 45 percent. I have always been opposed to raising the maximum [rate] too high because it just means that money flows someplace else in the tax code. Under the Reagan program, the tax code is directed where investments went, and the big benefit went to the real estate people, my old nemesis. That's why we have 40 percent vacancy in San Jose, California. People built commercial buildings because they got fifteen-year depreciation; now it's been returned to forty years.

Let me tell you a little anecdote on that. We sold a house and we had some cash, and we decided we wanted to buy an old building in Leesburg [Virginia]. It was a building that was really composed of three buildings, the first one built in 1811, the second one 1849, and the other one around the turn of the century. And it was in the historical district and we qualified as a historical building. I didn't buy it because of the tax code. We just wanted to have an investment and we figured Leesburg was a very historical

area and the prices hadn't really started to escalate. It would be a good investment; it was a commercial building.

At the time we purchased, they changed the law from a forty-year depreciation to a fifteen-year depreciation. That made no difference in our ability to purchase it; we purchased it because we figured we could make money on a forty-year depreciation. So here comes the government giving us a fifteen-year depreciation which means we are making a lot more money. This is on a building where the first part was built in 1812. Depreciation is supposed to reflect the life of an asset.

So here was a building that had been there for a 170 years or so, and we're getting a fifteen-year depreciation on it. This is ridiculous. This has no relationship to the life of the building; to date the life of the building, built in 1812, is what, about 171 years?

Then, at the same time, I was allowed to amortize my rehabilitation costs, which were considerable over a five-year period. So I have huge new tax write-offs in this building, none of

which did I ask for before the tax bill, and none of which did I need, to get to a positive cash flow out of the building.

This is what was happening. Money that should have been going into new plant equipment so that we can compete abroad was going into building high-rise buildings, so-called "see-through buildings." This is what happens when the tax code gets out of kilter, because these limited partnerships were going in there and developing these buildings.

Economics has such a profound effect that I just don't know what will happen. Especially in California, where you have all these initiative measures blocking state and local budgets where they can only be changed by putting them back on the ballot.

VASQUEZ: Are you generally optimistic or pessimistic about the future?

REES: Oh, I'm always optimistic about the future. I don't want to get into a syndrome that I see older politicians getting into--that their time was the great time. They served with the giants and today the pygmies are in charge and

everything is going to hell. I meet too many people like that. We still have people that believe.

I just look at my representatives here. I'm very happy with them. [Congressman] Leon [E.] Panetta, I think, is one of the most competent people in congress. [Assemblyman] Sam Farr--I served with his father in the state senate, you know--is really a dedicated member of the state assembly. No, I'm always optimistic because I essentially believe in the system. I have never been outside saying, "The system is bad and it has to go." I sit on the inside saying, "This is my system and how do I make it better, how do I make it so that it functions, how do I make it so that it responds to the needs of the people?" I think one of the differences between Democrats and Republicans is that each of us have a different idea of who the people are. [Laughter] That might be the major conflict.

[End Tape 6, Side B]