



Helen Sommers

An Oral History – 1973-2009



Washington State Legislature
Oral History Program

Helen Sommers

An Oral History



Interviewed and Edited by Dan Monahan

Legislature Oral History Program
Washington State Legislature
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Rep. Helen Sommers

This Oral History is based on a series of about 25 hours of interview sessions with **Representative Helen Sommers** on her 36-year career representing the 36th Legislative District in Seattle from 1973-2009.

The Oral History book is a one-on-one interview with Representative Sommers on her life, including her childhood in New Jersey; her years with Mobil Oil Co. in Caracas, Venezuela; her studies at University of Washington in Seattle, first as a correspondence student in Caracas, followed by her move to Seattle; her involvement in the National Organization of Women and the League of Women Voters in King County; and her amazing 36 year career in the Washington State House of Representatives.

Helen Sommers was first elected to the House of Representatives in November, 1972. That year, Democrats won a majority of the House for the first time after six years of Republican control. **Governor Daniel J. Evans** was beginning his third term as Washington Governor. The new Speaker of the House was **Rep. Leonard Sawyer** (D-Puyallup) as Democrats amassed a 57-41 majority. Before Rep. Sommers and eight other new Democratic members were elected in 1972, House Republicans had a 51 to 48 majority, and the Speaker of the House then was **Rep. Thomas Swayze, Jr.** (R-Gig Harbor).

Two years later (1975) – in Representative Sommers’ second term – Democrats increased their ‘*super majority*’ to 62 Democrats and 36 Republicans; the largest majority in the House in 14 years!

During Helen Sommers’ 36 years of service in the House, the 98-member House of Representatives twice deadlocked in a 49-49 tie, with Democrats and Republicans split down the middle. Rep. Helen Sommers is the only member to serve during two historic ties – 19 years apart.

The first-ever tie in state history was in the 1979-1980 sessions. **Rep. John Bagnariol** was House Speaker in the 1977 and 1978 sessions. But the November 1978 election brought the tie – 49 Democrats and 49 Republicans in the 98-member House. Since there was no process for a tie, the two parties choose two Co-Speakers and co-chairs for each committee. Democrats re-elected Bagnariol and Republicans elected **Rep. Duane Berentson** as Co-Speakers.

Throughout her 36 year career, Helen Sommers chaired of five committees including; the State Government Committee (1976-78); Chair and Co-Chair of the Revenue Committee (1977-80); and eight sessions as Chair (and three years as Co-Chair 1999-2001) of the House Appropriations Committee, including her first session as Chair in 1994, replacing long-time Chair **Rep. Gary Locke**.

However, that post lasted but one year! After the 1994 election, the Republican Party again gained control with **Rep. Clyde Ballard** (R-Wenatchee) as Speaker of the House with a 63-35 ‘super majority.’ Republicans held the majority for four years (1995-99) first with, **Rep. Jean Silver** (R-Spokane) as the new Chair of the Appropriations Committee for the 1995 session. **Rep. Tom Huff** (R-26th) became Chair in 1996. The House Republicans held the majority for five years. Former Appropriations Chair Sommers served as Ranking Democrat on Appropriations with both Jean Silver and Tom Huff.

The 1998 election results created the second ‘49-49 tie’ in state history. **Speaker Ballard** and **Rep. Frank Chopp** (D-43rd District) were elected by their two caucuses to serve as Co-Speakers of the House. Reps. Sommers and Huff served as the Co-Chairs of the House Appropriations Committee in the 1999 and 2000 sessions. In 2001, Helen’s Co-Chair of the committee was **Rep. Barry Sehlin**.

The three-year tie was broken with the 2001 ‘special election’ in the 21st District as an appointed incumbent Republican was defeated by a Democrat. That gave the Democrats a 50-48 majority, and Frank Chopp held the top post of Speaker. It also returned Helen Sommers to the Appropriations Committee Chair, the

position she always sought. She continued in that critical post as Appropriations Chair through the end of her 36-year career in the House.

Helen did it “Her Way!” She left on her own terms, when she decided the 2008 session would be her last. There was speculation in the House and in the Press that she was planning to retire, but wisely, Helen wouldn’t confirm her intention until the very end of the 2008 session.

While Helen had hoped to walk away quietly and without fanfare of her career, The House of Representatives, the Senate and **Governor Chris Gregoire** would not let Helen leave without an astounding ‘heart-felt’ acknowledgment of her amazing 36-year career.

This Oral History contains many of the comments of House and Senate members honoring the Honorable Representative Helen Sommers, March 13, 2008, on the Final day of Helen’s last session.

Acknowledgements

This Oral History on Representative Helen Sommers’ 36 years of service to the State of Washington, the House of Representatives, and the citizens of the 36th District was an amazing undertaking. So many people who shared parts of Helen’s career stepped forward to talk about her: **Former Governor Gary Locke**, now U.S. Secretary of Commerce; **Former Governor and U.S. Senator Daniel J. Evans**, **Governor Chris Gregoire**; **Lieutenant Governor Brad Owen**; **former House Speakers Wayne Ehlers, Joe King, Clyde Ballard and Frank Chopp**; Current and former Members of the House and Senate including: **Representatives Lynn Kessler, Eileen Cody, Mary Lou Dickerson, Barry Sehlin, Jim Boldt, Denny Heck** and **Senator Jeanne Kohl-Welles**;

Other acknowledgements go to Chief Clerks of the House: **Dean Foster, Vito Chiechi, Denny Heck, Cindy Zehnder, Barbara Baker**, and **Bernard Dean**, Deputy Chief Clerk and longtime Appropriations Committee staff person.

Victor Moore, former Appropriations OPR staff, director of the Office of Financial Management, and currently Director of the State Investment Board; **Yona Makowski**, House Democratic Caucus staffer and close friend to Helen Sommers;

Longtime Associated Press Capitol Reporter **Dave Ammons**, who served with AP throughout Helen’s 36-year House career, share his perspective.

Melinda McCrady, Director of Communications for the House Democratic Caucus, who participated in a number of the interviews with Helen and others.

We also acknowledge the **Washington State Archives**; **Andrew Smith**, who served as Helen Sommers’ Legislative Assistant in the final years of her career; **House Production Services** (for Graphics and Printing); **Darhl Avery, Nicholas Hopkins**, and **John Mason**, Graphic Designers; **LeMoyne Coates**, House Photographer and **Dick Baldwin**, Senate Photographer; to the **Washington State Legislature Oral History Program**. Special appreciation goes to **Chief Clerk Barbara Baker**, who envisioned and arranged this Oral History on her friend Helen Sommers.

Interviewer's Reflections on Rep. Helen Sommers**Dan Monahan & Helen Sommers 2010**

As a longtime staff person for the House, the Senate and, way back when, the Governor's office, my first-ever attempt to conduct an Oral History interview gave me a unique insight into the 36 year career of Representative Helen Sommers. Helen and I both retired from the Washington state House of Representatives about the same time. Helen concluded her amazing career at the end of her 18th term on Jan. 9, 2009. As a House staffer, I had retired nine days earlier.

Helen Sommers began her career in the House of Representatives when she was elected for the first time in 1972, and served in her first session in January 1973. I first came to the House as a staffer for the House Democratic Caucus in 1975, so I knew and worked with Helen Sommers in her second term, and I followed her amazing 36-year career in the House from near and far away. In 1975, I worked for the House of Representatives Democratic Caucus in the communications area, writing press releases, newsletters and doing interviews with members for radio broadcasts across Washington state. I had nine years in broadcasting and had my B.A. from Eastern Washington University in Political Science and Journalism. I came to Olympia after the end of EXPO '74 in Spokane, where I had worked for a few years in communications and public relations.

I served on House staff for only two years, but it gave me an opportunity to see first hand the legislative process. I got to know many of the individual members in the leadership in the House, including Leonard Sawyer, John Bagnariol, John L. O'Brien, Wayne Ehlers, Bud Shinpoch and Helen Sommers.

In 1976, I was hired by newly elected Congressman Norm Dicks where I served as his first Press Secretary. I moved to Washington, D.C. when Jimmy Carter had just been elected president. Our congressional delegation was: Sens. Warren Magnuson and Henry Jackson; Rep. Tom Foley (who later would become Speaker of the House);

and Reps. Joel Pritchard, Al Swift, Don Bonker, Mike McCormack, Mike Lowry and Norm Dicks!

After Norm's first term and his reelection to a second term (he's now on his 34th year), I returned to Olympia as deputy Press Secretary to Gov. Dixy Lee Ray, who was midway through her one term as Governor. But, most importantly, I moved home to wed (1979) my wonderful wife, DeNise, and to raise our three daughters. (We now have six grandkids (ages: newborn to 9!))

After Dixy, I returned to the Legislature, as Communications Director for the Senate for six years; and in 1988 returned to the House in communications and in administration for 21 more years until I retired in 2009. So, for much of my career, I knew Helen Sommers, worked with her, and admired her and her career in the House of Representatives.

When I retired from the House, Chief Clerk Barbara Baker graciously asked me if I'd like to do an Oral History with Rep. Helen Sommers who was retiring from the House after 36 years of service to Washington. I was excited to take on this project because of my respect for Helen Sommers, and my eagerness to share Helen's amazing accomplishments for the state of Washington.

Helen, as you will read in this Oral History, worked to bring women to the forefront of state government; she was the guardian of higher education; she made tough decisions on how to protect the state's resources through good times and bad. And, she served her state with great distinction.

But, you will also see that Helen, unlike many people in politics, didn't take a lot of credit for her accomplishments – 'she was just 'doing her job!' She avoided the fanfare. As you read Helen's often 'under-stated comments' about her amazing career and then read the comments of Governors; Speakers of the House; Representatives and Senators; House staff, you'll see that Helen Sommers truly was surprised by the praise and accolades she received throughout her 36 years of service to Washington. And you'll read about the appreciation and respect of Helen from leaders on both sides of the political aisle. The Legislature will never be the same without Helen Sommers.

Dan Monahan

'About Helen Sommers'

Helen Sommers has been an institution in the Washington State House of Representatives for nearly four decades! She was first elected to the House in the 1972 election and she served in the House from 1973 to 2009. As you will read in this Oral History, Helen was one of the early women at a time when the Legislature was considered the “good-old-boy’s club!” When Helen came to the House in 1973, there were just 12 women in the House; and no women in the Senate! So the 1973 Legislature was composed of 135 men and 12 women!

With her Masters Degree in Economics, Helen’s focus throughout her career was on the state Budget. Through most of her 36-year career she was a member of the House Appropriations Committee, and for the final 15 years in the House, she served as either ‘ranking Democrat’ when her caucus was in the minority; co-chair during the three-year 49-49 tie in the House and then Appropriations Committee Chair through the remainder of her career!

Throughout her career, Helen Sommers was known to be tough, she was bright, she was focused and she was a dedicated legislator. That is the side of Helen Sommers that most people saw, and which brought a lot of new legislators and lobbyists to tremble!

We picked just a few excerpts of the interviews from others who worked with and admired Helen Sommers; and those who know her best. The full text of interviews with 24 individuals who know her best are included in this book, but it is important to highlight here the other aspect of Helen Sommers!

David Ammons, a political reporter during all of Helen’s 36 years legislative career, knew her very well on the job. But, as a professional reporter, Dave didn’t socialize with her, so his perspective of Helen was her ‘business side.’

Dave had this observation about Helen: “She was all business, I would say. I think she scared people with her sort of gruff demeanor and sort of looking down at the floor and not engaging them as they walked by her. I think part of it was a sense of pride. I don’t know if shy is the right word, but she definitely was not a ‘glad hander.’ It was on the rare occasion when she did crack a smile or she did ‘B.S.’ about the weather or sports teams or something, we always thought that was a good moment.”

But, Helen also had a warm, friendly, fun and funny side that people who dealt with her in the ‘legislative arena’ perhaps did not see!

“Helen has an absolutely fabulous sense of humor. I think most legislators, most staff and even most lobbyists don’t know that. When she was working in the Legislature, she was all business! But, when you’d be with her off-campus at a dinner or a party, she was always a lot of fun,” said her longtime friend and 36th District seatmate, **Sen. Jeanne Kohl-Welles**. “She has a great sense of humor and at social events would let down her hair, crack jokes and laugh constantly.”

“On the job Helen was so focused on the business end and wouldn’t seem to get distracted easily. She had that ‘Laser-point Focus’ that was constant, and that’s what most people probably saw in her. It was all business, getting the job done and sticking to the agenda.” Don’t talk fun; don’t talk anything; let’s just do Legislative business! But when she was out to dinner with us, she’d say, Let’s not talk anything about the Legislature! I want to talk about anything but the Legislature!” said **House Majority Leader Lynn Kessler**.

Rep. Mary Lou Dickerson also commented on Helen’s other side: “Before I came to Olympia as a legislator, I felt intimidated by Helen when I first met her. I soon found her to be very warm and delightful and that she had a very good sense of humor. A lot of people didn’t know that about Helen. And I can also say that when she’s away from the office, has dinner and a glass of good wine, she does let her guard down. She’s a wonderful person and a great friend.”

U.S. Secretary of Commerce and (former Governor) Gary Locke: “Helen Sommers is an institution. Since 1972 she has been a stabilizing influence in the Washington State Legislature. She had incredible knowledge, and people (Democrats as well as Republicans) would go to her for advise – and she’d give it willingly! She really had an amazing career, and I feel so fortunate to have worked with her through much of it. Washington state is so much better because of Helen’s dedicated service.”

Governor and U.S. Senator Daniel J. Evans: “In the early days (the 1970s) it was obvious from the start that Helen Sommers was a very smart, able and dedicated legislator. Some come and the thrill of winning kind of overcomes the challenges of legislating. But that was not the case with Helen. She, from the very start, was a real student of

government and a hard worker, and those are the kinds of things that lead you up the ladder in a legislature pretty quickly.”

Governor Chris Gregoire: “Helen’s service spanned seven governors, and her distinguished tenure in the State House of Representatives was consistently marked by integrity and insightful leadership. She was truly an icon in Olympia, and her many accomplishments and years of dedicated service are part of the very fabric of our state’s progressive history.”



Helen Sommers begins her House Career in 1973

SECTION I

INTERVIEWS WITH REPRESENTATIVE HELEN SOMMERS

Chapter 1 Helen Sommers' Early Years in New Jersey

This interview with **Rep. Helen Sommers** (D-36th District) is for the purpose of the Legislature Oral History Program in Washington State. Helen Sommers is the second longest-serving Legislator in Washington state history, with a remarkable 36 years of service – having been elected to the House for 18 terms, from 1973-2009. Throughout her career, Helen Sommers served as Chair of five different committees.

The only longer-serving legislator in Washington state history, was **Rep. John O'Brien** (D-Seattle), who served in the House from 1939 to 1997, including four terms as Speaker of the House (1955-1961) and nine terms as Speaker Pro Tempore (1973-1991).

Speaker O'Brien, 95, died on April 22, 2007 which, coincidentally, was "Sine Die Day" for the 2007 legislative session! He set a record for longevity with a 52-year career in the Washington State House of Representatives. Shortly after he left office in 1993, the House Office Building was named the John L. O'Brien Building in his honor.

Dan Monahan: Representative Sommers, as we begin this series of interview of your exemplary career in the Washington State House of Representatives, let's begin with the 'early years' of your life. Tell us about your youth, your family, the early years of education and your early career.

Representative Sommers: Well, I grew up in Woodbury Heights, New Jersey. I had an older brother, Martin, and a younger sister, Joan. My father, **Roy Sommers**, was a car salesman. He owned his own auto business until the Great Depression hit, and, like so many people, he lost his business during this very horrible time in America's History. He worked the rest of his life as a car salesman.

Early on, my mother, **Christine Sommers**, was an office manager for the Girl Scouts' in Woodbury Heights. She gave up her job to raise her family of three children in the early days. But, after my parents lost the car dealership, my mom went back to work. My mom was very supportive of her three children. Of course, with my mother working, my brother, sister, and I had responsibilities doing the chores in the house, so we all did our part.



Christine Sommers and her three children, Helen, Martin and Joan Sommers (Left to Right)

For as long as I can remember, my passion in my youth was reading. I loved to read and I read everything I could get my hands on. When I was in the sixth or seventh grade, probably 12 years old, I decided I wanted to read the Bible. I read it from cover to cover. I don't know that I assimilated very much from it at my age, but I did follow my ambition to read the Bible in its entirety.

My mom was Presbyterian and she would take her three children to Sunday School regularly. Of

course, my sister Joan and I were active in Girl Scouts, and our brother, Marty, was a Boy Scout.



I was a good student in grade school and high school. But, in my youth, young girls were taught in that era they probably would work as a clerk or a secretary; get married; raise a family and 'live happily ever after!' So, girls were encouraged to take such classes as typing, bookkeeping and so on. So, that was my focus.

I remember my brother Martin was not a particularly good student, but he was a born 'handyman.' He could fix anything; and he did go to trade school. He later became a professional carpenter and did very well in that field. My sister, Joan, the youngest child, earned a degree from a community college and went to work as a management assistant.

While my parents and my brother all have passed on, my sister, Joan, lives in Florida today. We still get together as often as we can. I went to Florida to see her for Christmas (2009).

Monahan: You mentioned that one of your early interests was reading. What were your other interests and those of your family?

Representative Sommers: My family lived just a few blocks from a small lake in Woodbury Heights, where the kids would play and would swim in the summer. The kids in the neighborhood played kick ball for fun.

My greatest family memories revolved around the holidays: Christmas, Thanksgiving, the 4th of July and other holidays. Those holidays were family occasions – and we would always drive to my father's family home in Philadelphia, where we had an aunt, uncle and cousins. Woodbury Heights was a small town, just across the Delaware River from Philadelphia. My grandmother on my mom's side had ill health when we were growing up, so we were more involved with my father's family.



Chapter 2

Helen turns two-year Caracas deal to 14 years!

Monahan: So you'd spent all your life up till this time in New Jersey. You'd graduated from high school and it was time to move on to a career. And that move was very significant. Tell us about what came next.

Representative Sommers: When I graduated from high school, I was 17, and I went to work as a clerk for Mobil Oil Company at a large refinery not many miles from where I lived in Woodbury Heights. This was a job where my typing and bookkeeping classes had provided me employment. I worked there for four years.

There were a few employees at Mobil Oil with whom I had worked with for several years who had an opportunity to live and work in Saudi Arabia, so, they left New Jersey for a new experience. I thought that sounded interesting, so I made an inquiry with my employer. They sent me to New York City to meet with a recruiter of employees who were interested in living abroad.

I was thinking they were recruiting employees to go to Saudi Arabia. But when I talked to the recruiter, he wasn't looking for someone to go to Saudi Arabia – he was recruiting for the Mobil Oil Operation in Caracas, Venezuela. That was a surprise to me, and I was delighted that it was Caracas. It is a wonderful place! They decided to transfer me to Venezuela.

I went home and told my mom that I had an opportunity to go to Venezuela. I knew she didn't want me to move away, let alone go to a foreign country, but she understood and she supported my wish and encouraged me to go. This was in 1954, and my father, Roy, had died a few years earlier.

So I got the job and, without hesitation, I moved to Caracas, Venezuela in 1954 when I was 21. For the

first time in my life, I boarded an airplane and I flew all the way from New Jersey to Venezuela. Thank heavens I was sent to Venezuela, because Caracas and Saudi Arabia were worlds apart! Caracas was a wonderful city. I loved my time there.

I had a two-year agreement to work in Venezuela, but I stayed for 14 years! It was a wonderful place to live. I lived with a roommate in a penthouse apartment that overlooked the Andes Mountains. It was beautiful, as Caracas is 3,000 feet high in the mountain range on the west coast of Central America. Caracas is at the tail end of the Andes. The Andes go up the west coast of mostly Chile, up to Colombia and then Venezuela to the Caribbean. Caracas goes straight up from the sea. The country was completely transformed from a dictatorship to a constitutionally elected government.

My first effort was to learn to speak Spanish, which I learned fluently during my time there. I was very interested in the country in the life and culture in Caracas.

In 1958 I married **Mario Selles**, a Cuban/Panamanian, whom I'd met in Venezuela. Mario had his own business dealing with barge and tug boats. I got married and seven years later got divorced, so I had a pretty full lifetime there.



Caracas, Venezuela

While working at Mobil Oil in Caracas, I had an Indonesian co-worker who was enrolled in a correspondence course from the University of Washington in Seattle, a city I'd never seen. He encouraged me to enroll in the program at UW. It was a great challenge for me, so for two years, I took correspondence courses.

I visited Seattle for the first time in 1965 for summer classes on campus. I really enjoyed Seattle. It was such a beautiful city, and I loved the University of Washington. I attended summer classes for two years, and then I decided it was time to leave Caracas after 14 years. I moved to Seattle in 1968 to finish with a major in Economics, and to begin a new life.

I didn't know a lot of people in Seattle at the time, but I had some friends that I met when I attended summer school here. So, I'd earned my Bachelors and my Masters degrees in Economics from the University of Washington. I love Seattle.

I've now lived in Seattle for more than four decades. I could never imagine living anywhere else! Seattle and Washington have been my home for 43 years. It's wonderful.



University of Washington campus areal view



University of Washington – Allen Library



University of Washington – Sieg Hall



University of Washington – Thompson Hall



University of Washington – Meany Hall

Chapter 3

Seattle draws Helen to the Northwest

Monahan: After you earned your masters degree in economics from the University of Washington, did you start to work in Seattle?

Representative Sommers: Actually, no, I didn't begin working right away. I had become very active in the National Organization of Women (NOW) in 1970. NOW was a fledgling women's organization that was just taking roots in Seattle and I became involved in it. I think I was born a feminist!

I also became active in the League of Women Voters. But the League wasn't focused on the feminist movement at the time. Their effort was more focused on major government policy, which was also of great interest to me.

Some of our League members, like me, were also feminists in NOW. We decided it would be appropriate to raise women's issues in League meetings. We were interested in changing state laws that were restrictive to women. NOW encouraged us to become part of the establishment; infiltrate, if you will! While the general response was very positive from other members of the League in our meetings, I believe League leadership thought it was too big a jump for the League to take at that time.

In 1971, I was elected the second president of the Seattle-King county chapter of NOW in Washington state. We sought to change some of the local and state laws to support the women's movement.

Early on, we met with **Seattle Mayor Wes Uhlman** and he agreed to form an advisory committee, which led to the formation of the first Seattle Women's Commission. As president of NOW, I was named to the commission. Mayor Uhlman was interested in our issues and he formed the commission to promote full and equal participation of women in the affairs of Seattle and to establish programs for

equal opportunities for women in Seattle. I believe the mayor appointed seven members and the City Council appointed seven members.

I remember Mildred Henry, an official of the Seattle-King County Economic Opportunity Board who was director of the Women's Division at the Seattle Office of Human Resources. Mildred was responsible for putting the panel's recommendations into practice. Mildred had previously had served in the House from southwest Washington (1957-1965). Mildred and her husband, Senator Al Henry, served together in the 17th district for many years.

Monahan: As president of NOW, and a member of the Seattle Women's Commission, you and your members also went to Olympia to meet with **Governor Daniel J. Evans** to talk to him about women's issues important to your organization. Is that right?

Representative Sommers: Yes, we did, and we were pleased that he was very receptive to our issues and concerns. The first thing we talked to him about was proclaiming "Women's Day" to occur on the 50th Anniversary of Suffrage for Women, which gave women the right to vote. He did establish "Women's Day," as we requested. And he also established a Washington State Women's Commission to look at issues, statutes and opportunities



Gov. Daniel J. Evans was governor from 1965-77. In 1983 he was appointed and then elected to the U.S. Senate. He retired in 1989 and moved back to Seattle

for women. This was kind of a beginning of getting our issues considered in the Legislature. We lobbied for a state Equal Rights Amendment and for legislation to give married women equal access to credit and community property.

Evans, a Republican, has often been described as "passionately moderate." He was a very good governor for Washington. He served three terms from 1965 to 1977. At the end of his third term he decided not to run for reelection to a fourth term. He was named President of The Evergreen State College when it opened in 1981, a fledgling institution. TESC honored him with the Daniel J. Evans Library.

In 1983, Washington's legendary **U.S. Senator Henry M. Jackson** died. "Scoop" Jackson had

served five terms in the U.S. House of Representatives (1941 to 1953), and was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1952 to 1983.



Senator Henry (Scoop) Jackson Of course, Senator Jackson was a life-long Democrat, but Spellman, a Republican, appointed Evans to the seat. Traditionally, a governor would appoint someone from his own party. Evans was a good choice.

Some very important women's issues were passed in our state before I was elected to the House. The federal Equal Rights Amendment and the Washington State Equal Rights Amendment were placed on the ballot by the Legislature and Washington state voters ratified that. These were really critical steps.

Other things that occurred in Washington State at the time included a change in the community property laws. Wives did not have the right to manage their own earnings until the change was made law in the early 1970s. NOW worked with the governor on it.

Another issue we had been involved in was outlawing sex discrimination in credit and in insurance. So these things occurred before I was elected to the House, but as president of NOW, our leadership team did play a big role in making it happen. We credit the Legislature and the leadership of Governor Evans for pushing these issues to become law. I'm proud to say that we members of NOW got the ball rolling in Washington state.

Monahan: So, with your degree and your involvement in women's issues, then you went to work in Seattle?

Representative Sommers: Yes. My first job in Seattle was in 1971, when I became an instructor in Economics at Edmonds Community College. I taught for just one year. In 1972 I had an opportunity to work for the King County Council as an analyst. I was with the Council for 12 years.



Chapter 4

Helen Sommers seeks a career in elective office

Monahan: About this time were you thinking about elective office in Washington? You'd only lived in the state for about four years.

Representative Sommers: Yes, I'd only lived here about four years, plus two summers at the University of Washington. But, I believe my role with women's issues, support from NOW and the League of Women Voters, and my feminism, gained me encouragement to bring these issues to Olympia, as we had done the previous year. In those two positions, I traveled to Olympia to meet with Governor Evans and with legislators who supported our cause.

In 1972 I became active in the Democratic party, I knew the feminist issues were gaining support, not only in Seattle, but in the Legislature also. So, I had good support and I was assured by my feminist supporters that I could make the biggest difference if I were in the Legislature. Another feminist supporter of me running was **King County Councilwoman Bernice Sterns**, who was an early women's activist in King County and a great inspiration to me.

I was living in an apartment in the Queen Anne area of the 36th District. The district had been strongly Republican for decades. In fact, a Democrat hadn't been elected in the district from 1937 to 1973!

The two incumbent Republican legislators in the 36th District where I lived were **Rep. Gladys Kirk**, who had served in the House for eight years, and **Rep. Ken Eikenberry**, who had served for six years. I decided to challenge Rep. Kirk. She was appointed to the seat in 1957 after her husband, **Rep. Douglas Kirk**, resigned. He'd served three terms (1944-57). I might add; it's interesting to note as a feminist, that in her first few elections, she was listed on the ballot as: "Gladys (Mrs. Douglas G.) Kirk!" I know the growing number of feminists in the

district were offended by that. The King County Democratic Party Chairman wanted me to run. He told me that the 36th District Democrats had a candidate search committee and they are looking for a qualified woman to run against Gladys Kirk.

So, with the supporters of NOW, the League of Women Voters, encouragement from Bernice Sterns, the 36th District Democrats, and also some legislators, I decided to go for it!



Rep. Gladys Kirk

Because Seattle has been so heavily Democrat for the last 30 years, people have since forgotten that Seattle had its Republican period back then. Certainly the Magnolia area of the 36th was Republican oriented in the 1950s and 60s.

I don't think the Republican Party or Reps. Kirk and Eikenberry gave me a second thought. In fact, I don't think the Democrats figured I had a chance either. So I didn't get much financial support for my first campaign. I was a newcomer to Seattle, and my opponent had served for a long time, so she and her party didn't consider me as much of a threat. They didn't think a Democrat and a feminist could actually win in the 1972 election. But, it was apparent to me and my supporters that the political makeup of the district was changing, and there was a growing number of Democrats in the 36th District, so I might have a shot at it.

In my first campaign, I doorbelled a precinct-a-day, seven days a week. That was 109 precincts that I doorbelled the first time I ran! That takes a lot of persistence. Queen Anne and Magnolia are very, very hilly. I spent every day walking up those hills to reach as many voters as I could. I campaigned hard and met a lot of people and I won their support. I didn't have much money to finance my race, so I made up for it with hard work. And, it clearly was the determining factor in my win. I didn't get hardly any money from the Democratic Party.

To the surprise of many, I'd say, I was elected in November 1972. I had 52-percent of the vote to my opponent's 48-percent, so it was a pretty handy win against an incumbent. So, I was elected to the House of Representatives!

When I won election and went to Olympia for my first term, I found it very demanding and very stimulating. You are involved in so many things at one time. I learned to concentrate on a few issues, particularly revenue issues. I had my Masters' Degree in Economics and had also worked on tax issues, which had been the focus of the League of Women Voters. Throughout my career I would work with new members and encourage them to focus on issues that they had some background and some knowledge in.

Fortunately, I had a supervisor in King County Council where I worked, who was very supportive, so he allowed me to go to Olympia during sessions, and then go back and work when we were out of session. In the King County position I was involved in fiscal and revenue issues.

After a dozen years working for the King County Council, in 1984 I got another position at the King County Office of Finance. I worked there until 1995 when I retired. I continued to serve in the House of Representatives for another 14 years.

Monahan: So you came to Olympia as a new legislator from a Seattle district that had been Republican-leaning for decades. And, Republican **Governor Dan Evans** was in his third term, the only Governor in Washington State so far to serve three consecutive

terms. What was your relationship with Governor Evans in your first term?

Representative Sommers: Dan Evans was a strong Governor and he was well-respected, the press liked him and the people liked him. He had shown his interest in the issues proposed by NOW and by the League of Women Voters. But, I'm certain that he was endorsing the re-election of Republican Rep. Kirk.

But, to respond to your question, as a newcomer I wouldn't have had a lot of direct dealings with the governor that first session. I had served on a tax reform group Gov. Evans established and I'd met with him when I was a leader in NOW and served on the League of Women Voters on women's issues, but as a new member of the 98-member House, I didn't have very many dealings with him directly. There he was in his third term and he continued to be a strong and respected Governor who was a moderate Republican.

The legislative process can be overwhelming when you're a newcomer. When I was first elected, I concentrated on a few issues, particularly revenue issues. I had a background in economics, so that was much of my focus, and serving as vice-chair of the House Revenue Committee in my first term was important to me.



In the 1973 session, there were 12 women legislators in the 98-member House, up from eight in the previous session.

Front row (seated): Rep. Lorraine Wojahn (D-27th District) and Rep. Helen Sommers (D-36th District).

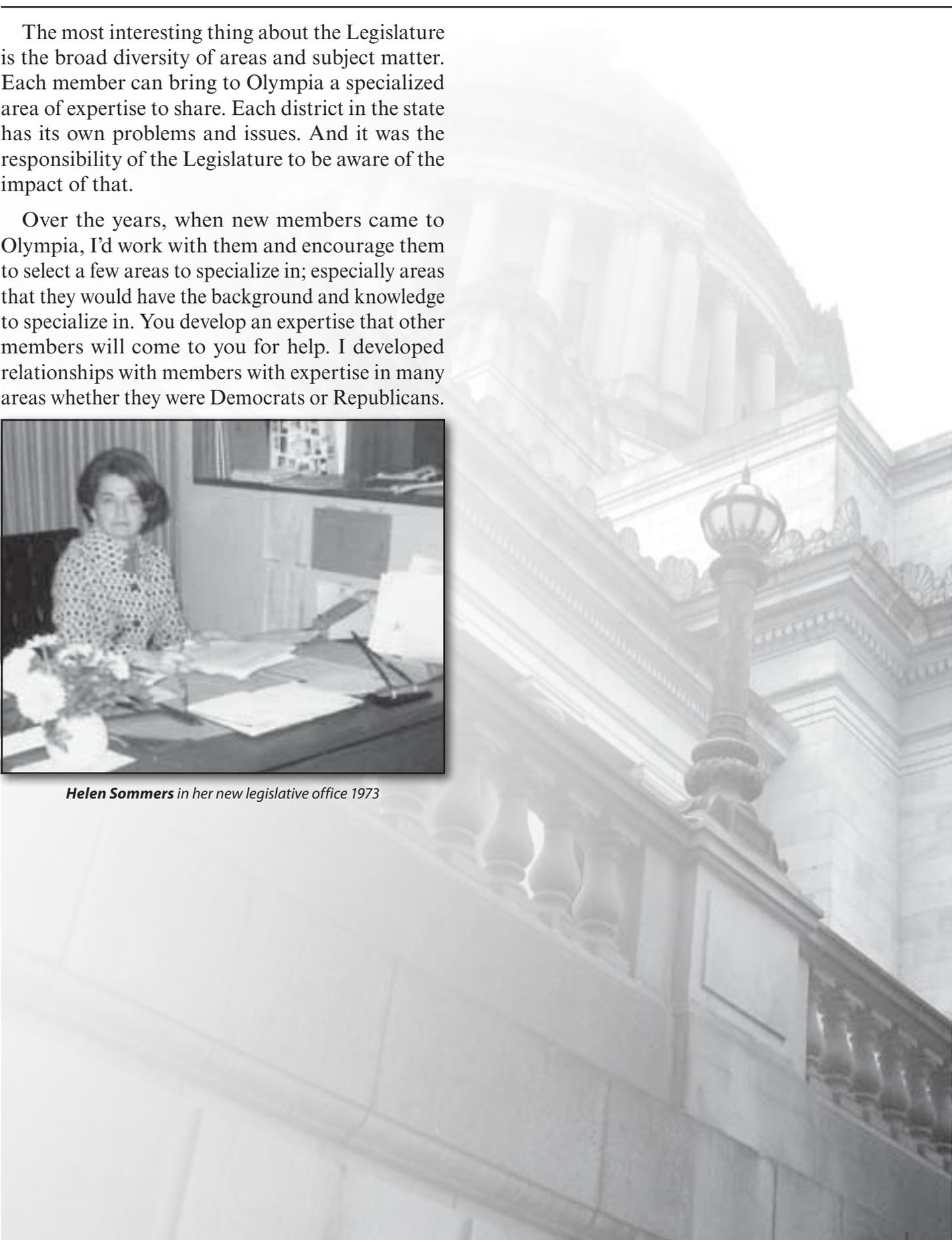
Back Row: (L-R): Reps. Doris Johnson (D-8th District), Phyllis Erickson (D-2nd District), Eleanor Fortson (D-10th District), Francis North (D-47th District), Geraldine McCormick (D-5th District), Georgette Valle (D-33rd District), Peggy Joan Maxie, (D-37th District), Jeannette Hayner (R-16th), Lois North (R-44th) and Margaret Hurley (D-3rd District).

The most interesting thing about the Legislature is the broad diversity of areas and subject matter. Each member can bring to Olympia a specialized area of expertise to share. Each district in the state has its own problems and issues. And it was the responsibility of the Legislature to be aware of the impact of that.

Over the years, when new members came to Olympia, I'd work with them and encourage them to select a few areas to specialize in; especially areas that they would have the background and knowledge to specialize in. You develop an expertise that other members will come to you for help. I developed relationships with members with expertise in many areas whether they were Democrats or Republicans.



Helen Sommers in her new legislative office 1973



Chapter 5

“This District isn’t big enough for both of us!”

Monahan: I remember when **Rep. Ken Eikenberry**, the Republican who was your 36th District seat-mate for two terms (1973-1976), decided in the 1976 election to challenge you, instead of run again for his safe seat!

He waited until you had filed for re-election to your Position-1 seat and then, in a very public way, announced: “This district is not big enough for both of us” meaning Eikenberry, the Republican, and you, the Democrat. So he didn’t file for the Position 2 seat he’d held for three terms. Instead

he filed for your seat to challenge you! He thought he’d have no problem beating you. But, you beat him! Is that true?

Representative Sommers: Yes it is true! “The district isn’t big enough for both of us” is what he said and, I guess, that proved to be true after the election results gave me the win! Going into the election, I had no idea of his intentions to run against me until he announced.

I was the first Democrat elected in the 36th District in 35 years, but, as I said, the district was changing. If he (Eikenberry) had run against me in my first election, he probably would have defeated me.

Pension reform was a major issue in my first two terms. It was a controversial issue, but it had to be addressed. Our system was in debt. In particular, the policemen and firemen systems were badly abused. There were cases of people taking questionable disability leave or disability retirement, and then move on to other high paying jobs elsewhere, really abusing the system. When the pension reform bill vote came up, we thought we had 50 votes, but

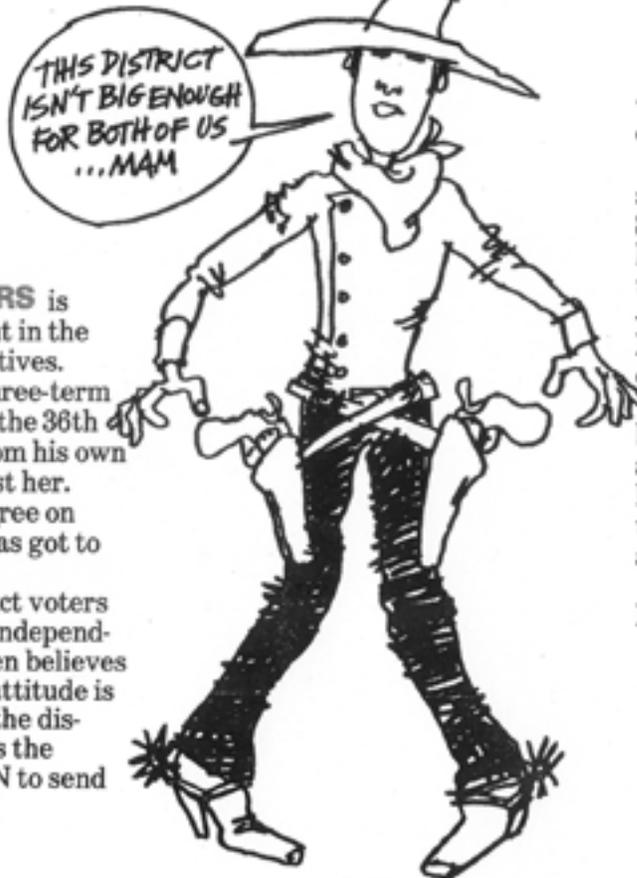


HELEN SOMMERS is a two-term incumbent in the House of Representatives. Ken Eikenberry, a three-term incumbent also from the 36th District, switched from his own position to run against her.

He says they disagree on issues so “one of us has got to go.”*

Thirty-sixth District voters are among the most independent in the state. Helen believes this “shoot ‘em out” attitude is unrepresentative of the district. After all, it was the **VOTERS’ DECISION** to send both to Olympia.

* Post-Intelligencer, July 28, 1976



The Post-Intelligencer comments on Helen’s opponent.

For five years political science students at North Seattle Community College have prepared mock campaigns to unseat incumbent legislators — two Republicans and three Democrats. No incumbent ever complained.

Then the class chose Eikenberry. He had faculty and administrators summoned to a hearing in Olympia and called to task. They were told to stay away from incumbents.

The *P-J* editorialized on March 5, 1976:

“A MATTER OF FREEDOM”

“Eikenberry (has) thrust himself in to an attack on academic freedom. . . Restricting a campaign politics class to past elections would be a reprehensible exercise of political muscle by thin-skinned, insecure politicians.”

Eikenberry, who we believed supported the legislation, voted 'No!' So, it didn't pass, and that became a big issue in the 1976 election. I won the election with nearly 53 percent of the vote. It was the 1977 session that we finally passed a pension reform bill that helped resolve the problems.



The seat Eikenberry gave up to challenge me was won by Republican **Rep. Joe Taller**. I got along pretty well with Taller. Joe served two terms in the 36th District and won his third, so the district still had a Republican base, but the number of Democrats was growing.



Rep. Ken Eikenberry

Shortly after the 1981 election, Joe was appointed as Director of the Office of Financial Management in newly-elected **Gov. John Spellman's** administration.

In a November special election, the appointee to Joe Taller's vacant Republican seat was **Rep. Jay Lane**. She was defeated by **Rep. Seth Armstrong**, in a special election; Armstrong was the second Democrat elected to represent the 36th District. Seth served from 1981-1989, and ever since, every state representative in the 36th District has been a Democrat. Seth and I worked well together.

Of course, Eikenberry made a comeback. He was later elected State Attorney General (1980-92) and he served 12 years. He ran for Governor in 1992, but was defeated by **Congress Mike Lowry**. Ken also served for a time as the state Republican Party Chairman.

Monahan: During this same time period, the 36th District Senate seat had been strongly Republican as well – four Republican senators served for nine terms. But, in 1979 that, too, changed.

Your longtime Senate seatmate **Senator Ray Moore** ran for the Senate in the 1978 election and he won! What's interesting is he had lost four different elections to the Legislature and the City Council in the 1940s through the 1970s. Moore had been a Republican but turned a Democrat during the 1960s.

With the 1978 election approaching, Moore decided to try for the Senate one more time. In his Oral History book (printed in 1999), he related how he went to a 36th District Democratic Club's meeting for the first time. He said he was snubbed by the Democratic leadership at the meeting. "They were not happy with me because of my having been a Republican! How could I possibly try to be a Democrat?" they thought. "But, unknown to me, it turned out I had one ally at the meeting that was worth all of them, and that was Helen Sommers."

He said he didn't think he had a prayer of winning, but you mentored him through, and he finally won.



The 36th District Team – In 1992, **Rep. Helen Sommers** and **Sen. Ray Moore** welcome **Rep. Jeanne Kohl**, who was appointed to the House to fill the seat of **Rep. Larry Phillips**. Phillips won a seat on the King County Council. Two years later, Kohl succeeded Ray Moore in the Senate. Sen. Jeanne Kohl-Welles continues to serve in the Washington State Senate.

Representative Sommers: Ray Moore always gave me a good deal of credit. Now, he worked really hard. He started as a Republican – and was involved in that party – but I think the party became too conservative for him. He was a good friend over the years. We served together for 12 years, and I believe we did many important things for our district. He resigned from the Senate in August 1994, and moved to Hawaii.

Monahan: Again, quoting Senator Ray Moore's

Oral History, he was asked why you didn't go on for higher office; why you stayed in the House for your 36 year career.

His response: "Helen didn't want to. She was very comfortable in the House." He also said you could "certainly have moved to the Senate or could have gone on to U.S. Congress; maybe King County Executive!" But, he said, you were happy in the House.

Representative Sommers: I was always very happy in the House. I had attained positions of leadership in a number of committees dealing with issues that were very important to me.

I chaired the State Government Committee, the Revenue Committee, Higher Education and the Capitol Budget committees. I also was chair of the Democratic Caucus. And then in 1994, I moved to serve as chair of House Appropriations Committee for a total of eight years, as well as co-chair for three years. The Appropriations Committee is the one I really wanted to chair. I got that opportunity when my friend, **Rep. Gary Locke** won the race to be King County Executive in 1993, and I succeeded him as Chair of Appropriations.



Chapter 6

Leonard Sawyer elected Speaker of the House

Monahan: I thought we'd just kind of go through the Democrats taking over the House in 1973 after a Republican majority of eight years.



Speaker Leonard Sawyer

Representative Sommers: Yes, that was my first session in the House of Representatives. Democrats won control of the House with 57 seats while the Republicans had 41. The previous session, Republicans

and House Speaker Thomas Swayze (R-Gig Harbor) had a 51-48 advantage.

Of course, from 1933 to 1971, the House had 99 members. Our Democratic Caucus elected **Rep. Leonard Sawyer** as Speaker of the House. When I took office in 1973, the structure of the House had changed considerably through redistricting and a court order that established the 98-member House, rather than 99 members.

(Editor's Note: In 1972, the U.S. District Court established new redistricting boundaries, which, among other changes, cut one seat from the House in a statewide redistricting requirement. At the time, there were 49 senatorial districts, with one member elected from each district as it is today.

But, from 1933 to 1965, the House of Representatives had 99 members. There was always contention every decade as the Legislature made an effort to redistrict – usually based on what gave the majority party an advantage in the next decade of elections.

In 1965, the House was composed of 56 legislative districts: one large district – the 42nd – could elect three representatives; 41 districts were allowed two representatives; and 14 districts were allowed to have just one representative, based on population. That

totaled 99 representatives in the House.

In 1971, the process was ruled invalid by the Court. They ruled the state legislative districts must be redistricted in a more constitutional way, based on the “one man; one vote” rule.

The 1971 session (where Republicans had a 51-48 majority) bogged down as legislators were unable to devise a redistricting plan acceptable to the courts. To fix the problem, a three-judge panel named a special master to draw new legislative and congressional boundaries. The Court ordered the state be divided into 49 legislative districts of roughly equal population. The voters would elect one Senator and two Representatives from each of the 49 districts.)

Monahan: With the 1972 election and the new rulings on legislative districts, Democrats recaptured the majority in the House for the first time in eight years. The Senate had been in Democratic control since 1957.

Representative Sommers: When the 1973 session began, I was one of nine new Democrats elected, giving our party the majority. Sawyer (D-Puyallup) had represented the 25th District for 16 years (1955-1972), before he was elected Speaker of the House.



House Speaker Leonard Sawyer welcomes Helen Sommers to the House of Representatives in 1973.

Sawyer had been in office for a long time, but mostly in the minority. I believe he was very focused on expanding the power of the legislative branch of government. So, he became a very strong Speaker. However, since that was my first session, I really couldn't make much of a comparison. With the new redistricting, Democrats amassed a 57-41 majority by picking up six seats, including my election in the 36th District.

The fact that the Legislature would only meet every two years made a very weak legislature. They would just be a rubber stamp, largely to give the Governor the ability to do what he wanted and not have to answer to the legislative branch of government.

It was **Gov. Dan Evans'** good judgment that brought him to believe that a session every two years just didn't work, so, through much of his 12 years as governor, he routinely would call a Special Session in the off-year for members to come to Olympia to, among other things, make biennial budget adjustments. So Evans instituted the annual session concept long before it was enacted in the state constitution.

One of Speaker Sawyer's greatest contributions to the legislative process is, he understood the need for a professional, full-time staff in his goal for the Legislature to be an equal partner in government. The year I was elected was the first session that we actually had staff year-round.

Up to this time, legislative staffers were just people hired temporarily for the session. They didn't usually have any background to help work the issues legislators would face in upcoming sessions, which meant that you had staff with very little or no experience, but willing to take a temporary job. The only professional information we got was what the executive branch provided us.

But Speaker Sawyer established a full-time professional staff to help legislators be involved in the process even after session had ended. And, non-partisan staff would work with legislators to prepare for the upcoming session the next year. It gave our state government a new approach and a new perspective before and after each session.

Monahan: So, Sawyer's effort was to give the Legislature a more equal footing with the executive branch of government?

Representative Sommers: Yes. Before Sawyer's term as Speaker, legislators were part-time people who left their hometown for a few months each year to pass bills that primarily were prepared by the Governor and his professional staff. When session ended, the elected legislators would simply go home and go back to their "other job". That left the Governor

to work out the details and proceed accordingly, largely with little involvement of the House or Senate. That's why it was so important to establish an annual session of the Legislature and a full-time staff of professionals in Olympia to plan and prepare for the next session and to keep legislators – who were at home and not in Olympia – involved in the process and ready for the next session.

Sawyer understood that and made it his goal. He established the professional staff, which made a huge difference in the ability in the power and influence of the Legislature for the first time in Washington State. What I grew to understand over time, was that Leonard had a good grasp and understanding of the Legislature – how it worked; how it should work; what kind of a partnership should be developed so that the Legislature was an equal branch of government!

Before this change, legislators were a part-time group of representatives and senators who had no offices, but just their desks on the chamber floor and a phone down the hall! They were not in a position of oversight of the bills they passed. When they left town, really there was no one to make sure the governor followed the requirements of the legislation that passed, in many respects. He could make changes by executive orders.

As I said, a lot of credit goes to Gov. Dan Evans, who had also served in the House for four terms (1957-1965), as he saw the importance of legislators being involved by calling us back to Olympia for special sessions in the off-year because, I think, he believed the state had grown to the point that annual sessions were necessary, even though the Constitution didn't yet call for it. But, I'm sure the Governor didn't want the legislature to become too strong, as Sawyer envisioned.

A few years after Evans left office, his successor, **Gov. Dixy Lee Ray**, was less appreciative of the Legislature, so her differences with the legislative branch actually helped bring about a constitutional amendment that finally established annual sessions of the Legislature in 1981. I'm sure we'll talk more about that in this interview.

Monahan: Yes, we will get into that as we proceed. When you were a freshman, Sawyer appointed you

to be vice-chair of the House Revenue Committee. Wasn't that unusual in those days for a freshman?



Helen Sommers was named vice-chair of the Revenue Committee in her first term

Representative Sommers: That was an exception. It was a decision by Speaker Sawyer to name me vice-chair as a freshman. **Rep. Bob Randall**, who was an optometrist, was the new chair of the Revenue Committee. Randall didn't have much background in that area, so that was one of the reasons, probably along with my masters degree in Economics, I was named the vice-chair.

I think it was also because Sawyer and Randall



Rep. Robert Randall
(Editor's note: Rep. Robert Randall, an Optometrist, (D-23rd Dist.) served in the House from 1969-1977. Randall died on Oct. 15, 2007).

knew I had a background with the League of Women Voters, and one of the things at that time the League worked on was our tax system. I had given talks in the League of Women Voters on enacting a state income tax. They took some positions on these things and, as the League president, I gave speeches to community meetings, so I had a background in revenue issues. That's what got me interested to run for the Legislature in the first

place. The League was supporting an income tax rather than the state's regressive sales tax. But, that's all ancient history now.

Monahan: I read in the book, "Speaker of the House: the Political Career and Times of John L. O'Brien" (by Daniel Jack Chasan), where O'Brien makes the comment, that "Sawyer was a 'master

politician' but was not a very good presiding officer" and that's when the task of presiding fell on O'Brien. I've noticed, too, over the years including now where the Speaker very rarely presides during session. Usually, the Speaker Pro Tempore is the presiding officer of the House. And, he – in this case, O'Brien – gets into a mode where they can move things pretty quickly. But then the Speaker might take over when it's a more urgent kind of issue before the House.

Representative Sommers: I don't think Leonard Sawyer liked to preside. It's a huge use of the Speaker's time and efforts. Sawyer recognized that O'Brien really liked to preside and was proud of being the presiding officer. Sawyer knew he was not a particularly good presiding officer, he turned that duty over to O'Brien. I guess this change in pattern recognizes that the Speaker has a lot of other things to do, and presiding is a time-consuming task. He might preside from time

to time but the presiding was a huge demand on time. That continued throughout the time. When **Frank Chopp** was House Speaker (2002 to present), **Speakers Pro Tempores John Lovick** and **Jeff Morris** were the presiding officers.

Monahan: Would the Speaker, for example, use that time when you're debating issues and so on, to engage in his caucus maybe, I would say, a little arm twisting or at least encourage votes?

Representative Sommers: Oh, yes! One of the Speaker's primary jobs is to try to keep his caucus together on major issues. In Sawyer's case, he was a Speaker who would twist arms on many of the big issues. Sawyer had a good grasp of government and knew how government should be run and that you needed the legislative branch.

Monahan: But, while he presided very infrequently, Sawyer's focus was on increasing and advancing the role of the Legislature. Is that a fair statement?

Representative Sommers: Yes. There were things



Speaker of the House: The Political Career and Times of John L. O'Brien by Daniel Jack Chasan (Sep 1990)

that couldn't be done without the concurrence of the legislative branch. The same is true of the executive branch. To put it simply, the Legislature sets an agenda for the session and the Governor has the power to approve or veto what the Legislature did. Of course, the Governor always has his/her agenda for the Legislature to consider, so in very many ways the governor has strong influence on the agenda.

Since I have been in the Legislature we were in session every year, but one. The only year the governor didn't call us in for an 'off-year' special session was in 1978 when **Dixy Lee Ray** was Governor. Much to the surprise of legislators, Dixy announced that she wouldn't call a session, as Evans had done routinely. It wasn't until three years later (1981) that the Legislature was able to pass – and the state's voters concurred – an amendment to the Constitution to establish the annual legislative sessions, so then it became automatic.

Sessions were set at 105 days in the budget year and 60 days in the second session of the legislative term. But, of course, the governor had the power to extend the session when necessary. The concept of only one session every two-years is so foreign now because after you pass a two year budget, the need is always there to make modifications in the off-year.

Monahan: Tell us about longtime **Speaker** and **Speaker Pro Tempore John L. O'Brien**. He served for more than 50-years in the House of Representatives (1939-1947 and 1949-1993). O'Brien served eight years as Speaker of the House (1955-1963) and was Speaker Pro-Tempore for a total of 18 years (1973-81 and from 1983-93). You served in the House with O'Brien for 20 years (1973 to 1993) when O'Brien retired.

Representative Sommers: I was really honored for the opportunity to serve with John O'Brien. It was a wonderful experience. I knew him as Speaker Pro Tempore, a leader and a well-recognized parliamentarian who knew the rules of the House. I believe he still holds the record of legislative service not only in Washington State, but also a national record. I was so proud when we named the House Office Building the John L. O'Brien Building (J.L.O.B.) in his honor. The building had been the 'Public

Health Building' before the Legislature began to expand and needed more space in the early 1970s.

One big event for John was St. Patrick's Day. Each year he threw a very lively party during session.

John left the Legislature in 1993. He died in 2007,



Rep. John L. O'Brien spent 52 years in the House of Representatives! He served as House Speaker from 1955-1963 and was Speaker Pro Tempore from 1973-93. He died at age 95 in 2007.

at age 95. It is noteworthy that he died on April 22, the final day of the 2007 legislative session. Even when he died, his heart was with us, I guess you could say.

Monahan: In 1976, the House Democratic majority grew to 62 Democrats and 36 Republicans. That gave Speaker Sawyer a very large majority, but we learned more and more that all his caucus was not happy with him. There was a growing group of back-benchers, largely from Seattle, but other areas as well, right?

Representative Sommers: Yes. As the session started – my second term – this group of new and young Democrats, many of them believed Sawyer had too much control, and didn't listen to the concerns of others in the caucus. At one point, the group of "back-benchers," as they called themselves, began to voice concerns about Sawyer's methods of leadership. Sawyer had a close-knit group that wielded all the power. Before the 1976 session began, there was a growing effort to try to remove Sawyer as House Speaker. I joined the delegation of back-benchers or dissidents, and we began to grow very critical of Sawyer. He was accused of all sorts of things, like the Pierce County Mafia.

I think Sawyer really did understand the legislative process and he strengthened the Legislature, but, many felt he wasn't responsive to the goals of the back-benchers in our growing caucus.

As the first few days of session began, I remember we would meet, you know, sort of secretly in the evenings off campus on occasion. I'm not sure of all the back-benchers now, but I remember **Rick Bender** and **John McKibbin** were among the leaders, **Donn Charnley**, **Charles Moon** and **Jeff Douthwaite** all of

the Seattle area; **Jim Boldt** and **Charles Kilbury** from the Tri-Cities; I remember **Joe Haussler** of Omak.

I believe **John L. O'Brien** kept himself separate somewhat, probably because of his position as Speaker Pro Tempore. I believe he was aware of the secret meetings but never mentioned it to Speaker Sawyer. We were surprised that the word never got back to Leonard that this was going on!

Monahan: I read a quote from one of them. **Rep. Jim Boldt**, of the Tri-Cities, said: "We came to Olympia to change the world!" But they were told by the Speaker when to vote yes, and otherwise, they were back-benchers.

Representative Sommers: I think it was an example



Helen Sommers – 1976

where, if the Speaker gets a majority that's too great, he can lose control of his caucus. I think that's what was happening here. The larger the majority, the more factions leadership has to contend with. There were little factions, and so the criticism that I saw with some of the people was

that all Sawyer would say to freshmen would be to instruct them "Ok we got to vote yes on this!"

Of course the Legislature had been like that for decades. It was the leadership making the decisions and the new members just kind of tagging along, perhaps wanting to build up seniority to have more influence. Probably not challenging and not expecting to have much influence, but that's traditional in legislative bodies, that's not something unusual.

Part of Sawyer's problem, besides many in his caucus disapproving his approach, I guess, is the press got very tough on him. He was accused of all sorts of things in the media. How accurate that was, you know, I think he sort of had the image of, I don't know how to say it, a dishonest politician – but dishonest might be too strong a word – but he had that persona that he was kind of a wheeler-dealer!



Chapter 7

Speaker Sawyer Steps Down

Monahan: So, shortly into the 1976 session, the back-benchers or so-called dissidents, presented Sawyer with a petition in caucus signed by 32 members asking Sawyer to step down as Speaker. Right?

Representative Sommers: Oh, yes the criticism and, as you mentioned the back-bencher thing, became historic. Sawyer was apparently unaware that the dissidents in the caucus were meeting off campus in an effort to remove him as Speaker, and their number grew. Later on, I was one of the 32 back-bencher who wanted to change the Speaker's excessive power.

As I recall, at first, the back-benchers presented Sawyer with a petition that was signed by 32 members, out of our 62-member caucus, asking him to step down voluntarily. This was a very emotional and tense time. It seemed to some of us that Leonard should have seen almost immediately that it wasn't going to work for him. Of course, this brought the session to a standstill! On January 14, 1976, about a week into session, House pages delivered a resolution to all 98 members that stated "The office of the Speaker of the House of Representatives is now declared vacant." When they brought the issue to the House floor, there were enough votes in our caucus to force him out.

I can still vividly remember it. This was one of the most intense things I'd ever been through! I wrote in my journal: "Just before the already difficult day began; one of the overhead high-powered television lights exploded and showered glass down on the House Chamber! We were already tense, but this small incident seemed to portend a day of exploding emotions. I remember thinking 'Ye gods!' Leonard's world is crumbling around him, and he seems so unaware and so insensitive to the meaning of it all."

Among Sawyer's allies were **Rep. John Bagnariol**, who was chairman of the Ways & Means Committee

and **Rep. Bob Perry**, who chaired the Transportation & Utilities Committee. Perry was, I think, somewhat sympathetic to the problems but he didn't, you know, throw off the Speaker.

The next day, January 15, Sawyer came up to the rostrum and resigned as Speaker.



Speaker Leonard Sawyer

(Editor's note: Here are the actual floor resignation speeches of Speaker Leonard Sawyer and Majority Leader Robert Charette on Jan. 15, 1976, seeking to end the division that has plagued the Democratic Caucus since the second extraordinary session of the 44th Legislature began two weeks earlier.)

House Speaker Leonard Sawyer: "I think the time has come for me to put a halt to our divisions within this House. In my respect for this House and my pride in what we have accomplished over these last three years – and in consideration of my family – I am submitting my resignation as Speaker, effective tomorrow.

"I have become the center of a controversy I don't believe is justified, but none-the-less, the fact is that it is there. Some have turned to criticism, rather than constructively working on the issues before us. In the last 10 days in my caucus there has been no discussion of education, pensions, taxes, or budgets. The work we were sent here to do has taken second place to political infighting that is becoming more and more emotional. I cannot see that continue, and I will not be the excuse for it.

"Clearly, I do resign with great regret, because my dream has been that of an independent Legislature free of outside forces: a Legislature with the ability to analyze on our own: a Legislature with a staff able to help us evaluate the information and the opinions of those who come before this body for help and assistance. My dream is that we listen to all, but really give only to those we believe deserve.

"I must say, I really have enjoyed being your Speaker for three years, and as I return to my seat on the floor of this House, I do make a request of the House. I appeal to all of you to put a stop to the divisions of the past. And to my friends who sup-

port me – and those who think otherwise – please all of you, let’s unite together and get on with the business of the House. I will work for that and I hope you will too. I wish to thank you very much for your past courtesies.” (*Applause*)

Sawyer was followed to the rostrum by House Majority Leader, **Rep. Robert Charette** (D-Aberdeen), who submitted his resignation as majority leader because he said he was appointed by the Speaker. Charette also addressed the floor and added to the call for unity and calmness:

Majority Leader Charette: “I urge that we start from now by keeping our voices a little more quiet and be a little more concerned about the business we were sent here to transact. OK? The fight’s over! Now let’s get on with the business of the state, that’s the reason we’re here.



Rep. Robert Charette

“We were not sent here to do these things to each other. If we are and anyone thinks we are, hell, it’s over now! Let’s get down to the business of the state of Washington. And let’s do it calmly—and not as individuals, but as a group. That doesn’t mean we can’t have our differences—we will always have our differences.

“Maybe we won’t solve the problems, but let’s at least address ourselves to the problems in a calm manner and in what will be within this House, I’m sure, an intelligent manner.”

Representative Sommers: After Sawyer and Charette stepped down, there weren’t enough votes to elect either of the two contenders to be Speaker of the House. Neither **Rep. Joe Haussler** nor **Rep. Al Bauer** could muster the 50 votes needed to be elected Speaker. The Republicans just walked away from it all, they weren’t going to be involved. So John O’Brien continued to preside as Speaker Pro Tempore for the remainder of session.

Monahan: **Rep. John McKibbin** (Vancouver) said O’Brien clearly knew how to run the House. “He was a dependable quantity, and we knew we could count on him to be fair.”

Were you comfortable with the outcome of forc-

ing Leonard Sawyer out as Speaker of the House?

Representative Sommers: I don’t know if the word is comfortable, I think we were feeling that we had accomplished a lot. You know the Press was very sour on Sawyer with the wheeling and dealing image that was hurting all Democrats in the House. So, there was a lot of anger in the Democratic Caucus, especially among the newer members who felt they weren’t allowed by leadership to have a voice in the process.

Later, Sawyer announced to the media that he would not run again for his 25th District House seat, and he then departed on a business trip to Papua, New Guinea, and Sawyer was gone. O’Brien, the Speaker Pro Tem, continued to preside.

O’Brien was the parliamentarian, the man who knew the rules and who kept us to those rules, so despite the fact that Speaker Sawyer stepped down, we were still able to continue through the session.

In my 1976 Newsletter to my 36th District constituents, I wrote:

“This session began with a revolt among the House Democrats which ended in forcing the resignation of the Speaker, who had previously been considered a strongman with the power to ignore the criticism of a few dissidents. This step may well have greater long-range effect on the Legislature, and hence the state, than any new law.

“Decision-making and responsibility (and thus power) have been spread from a single power-broker to several leaders and there is greater participation by more caucus members – a healthier and more democratic structure.”

Chapter 8

How Speaker Sawyer changed the House

Monahan: In 1973, when you were first elected to the House of Representatives, Republican **Dan Evans** was Governor. The Senate had been under Democratic control for the previous 16 years. And in the House, Democrats had just won a majority after three terms of Republican control. In fact, with the 1972 election, the party switch gave House Democrats a strong 57-41 seat advantage. Looking back at your first term, and over your 36-year career in the House, how significantly has the Legislature changed?

Representative Sommers: In a number of ways. We'd already talked about how Leonard Sawyer made a big impact on the new power of the legislative branch of government. And, in 1981, we did establish annual sessions of the Legislature in the Constitution.

But also, technology has had a huge impact; the ability to easily access information. The fact we went from no computers, to many, many computers, including computers for individual member

and staff offices was amazing! Things were pretty slow moving in the past but now the change comes more quickly.



Rep. Helen Sommers on the steps of the State Capitol.

Monahan: In the early 1970s, the Legislature was a session only operation with part-time legislators and part-time staff. Before the 1973 session, the legislature wasn't an equal partner along with the executive and judicial branches of government. Was this the beginning of giving the legislative branch kind of an equal footing?

Representative Sommers: Yes, I think so. And your description is accurate. The 1973-74 sessions really put the Legislature in a new position of power. I think it defined how a Legislature is supposed to work. In earlier times, the Legislature didn't have the same kind of staff, skills, and the whole idea of year-round-staff was not yet in place. We had lesser levels of expertise and professionalism, and less access to information.

But, with the change in a full-time professional staff and more year-round involvement by legislators – and not to mention technological advances – I believe the Legislature has become a strong partner in the process of government. I credit Speaker Leonard Sawyer for bringing much of this change about.



House members celebrate a special day for Rep. Helen Sommers in 1979.

Left to right: Reps. Walt Knowles, Georgette Valle, Scott Blair, Helen Sommers, Jeff Douthwaite, John Eng, Barbara Granlund and Delores Teutsch. In the back: Reps. Claude Oliver, Walter Sprague, Sid Flannigan (behind Helen) and Irving Greengo and Dan Grimm (behind Douthwaite) among others (unidentified).

Chapter 9 From Governor Evans to Governor Ray

Monahan: The session adjourned shortly after Sawyer's resignation, with the November election just months away. In the November 1976 election, the House Democrats maintained a 62-36 majority as they had the previous election. **Gov. Dan Evans**, who had served an unprecedented three terms as Washington Governor, did not run again. Voters elected **Governor Dixy Lee Ray**, the state's first woman governor.



*Governor Dixy Lee Ray served one term (1977-1981).
Courtesy Washington State Archives*

Lee Ray, the state's first woman governor.

Representative Sommers: Yes, Governor Ray. She came from a very different background. She was

a Marine Biology professor at the University of Washington. She was an advocate of nuclear power and in 1973, she was appointed by **President Richard Nixon** to be chair of the Atomic Energy Commission.

Even though she ran for Governor as a Democrat, she was not a political person at all, and she was quite conservative. She was certainly a maverick. Her lack of political experience and understanding of the political aspect of the job made it difficult for her and for us!

Because she had never been elected to political office before being elected Governor, working with the Legislature became very controversial. Democrats had a 62-36 majority in the House and a 30-19 majority in the Senate. But, she had great difficulty, especially in working with the House that first year.

Monahan: Rep. John L. O'Brien, in his book, talked about how the post-Watergate period in 1976 turned up two political wild cards **President Jimmy Carter** and **Governor Dixy Lee Ray**. What was it like after Evans left and Gov. Dixy Lee Ray was elected?

Representative Sommers: She was very independent; she didn't want to put up with the Legislature. Very unusual! She was strong as a Governor but she had her own ways. At first, she was very popular with the people and even with the media in her campaign and when she first was elected. I believe the press even helped her get elected, partly because she was



Gov. Dixy Lee Ray signs a pension bill in 1977.

Left to right: Reps. Helen Sommers, Irving Newhouse, John McKibbin, Scott Blair, Sen. John Jones, Reps. Mary Kay Becker, Bud Shinpoch, John Hawkins and Speaker John Bagnariol. (Several attending the bill signing in the back row were not identified.)

a unique candidate and a woman.

But, as Governor, she was a difficult personality and didn't have much political sense. During her first year, her relationship with the Legislature – and with the press – really deteriorated. She was so independent and didn't seem to appreciate the role and responsibility of the Legislature as an equal branch of government. Her first-ever election was as

Governor of Washington! I think she didn't have a political perspective to understand the give-and-take of politics. Her four-year term was challenging. As I mentioned before, she didn't call the Legislature in for a special session in 1978, which put into motion the amendment for annual sessions in Washington in 1981. The Legislature passed it in 1980, and voters approved the measure in the 1981 election enacting annual sessions in the Constitution.



Governor Dixy Lee Ray delivers her State-of-the-State Address to a joint session of the Legislature, Jan 15, 1980. **Co-Speakers of the House John Bagnariol (D) and Duane Berentson (R)** and others look on.

Chapter 10

House experiences first 49-49 tie in state history

Monahan: When the 1977 session opened, Leonard Sawyer did not run for re-election to the House, and **Rep. John Bagnariol** (D-Renton) was elected Speaker of the House. Bagnariol, who was first elected to the House 10 years earlier, had previously served as chair of the House Ways & Means Committee.

Representative Sommers: Yes, John Bagnariol was a Sawyer ally. When Sawyer named him Chair of the Ways & Means Committee, it seemed like a very unusual thing to do. But, when I look back on it, Sawyer understood who would be a strong leader; and Bagnariol, it turned out, was that.

The new Speaker, Bagnariol, was more personable and more accommodating in listening to members old and new. The House sessions were more cordial, I'd say, and certainly were more democratic under Bagnariol than they had been with Sawyer.

However, Speaker Bagnariol and Gov. Ray had some real differences on issues, and by the time session adjourned, they did not work well together at all!

In late 1977, Governor Ray announced that she would not call a 'special session' in 1978, as had been tradition through most of Evans' 12 years as Governor. I think after that, her relationship with Speaker Bagnariol was at a broil and there was a lot of speculation about her leadership as well as her working relationship with the Legislature. I believe the fact that she decided not to call a session in 1978, apparently without consulting the legislative leadership, caused even greater animosity between the Legislature, particularly the House, and the Governor.

Monahan: In the very next election, November 1978, the voters statewide elected 49 Democrats and 49 Republicans in the 98-member House of

Representatives for the first tie in state history, it was a deadlock. There was no process in statute or in history to deal with a tie. The elected leader of the 49 Democrats was **Speaker John Bagnariol** and the Republican's elected leader of his 49-member caucus was **Rep. Duane Berentson**.



House Co-Speakers John Bagnariol (D) and Duane Berentson (R)

Representative Sommers: Yes, there was no precedent at all for a tie. Just six years earlier, there were 99 members of the House, so a tie was not possible. A judicial decision said 99-member House was not constitutional.

As it turns out, Bagnariol and Berentson got along pretty well. Often after session ended, they were known to go have a few drinks. So, they got along pretty well, and I think they worked together to layout just how the session would function. I believe they set the tone.

The end result was one Co-Speaker would wield the gavel and preside on one day, and the other Co-Speaker would preside the next day. They worked together quite well. They also established co-chairs for all the legislative committees. This seemed to be a viable plan.

As I recall, there was one new member who, before the plan was worked out, considered switching parties to resolve the tie, and give the majority to Berentson and the Republicans. **Rep. Carol Monohon** had just been elected from the Grays Harbor area as a Democrat, but she was a somewhat conservative legislator. I recall she offered to switch in an effort to resolve the deadlock, but she never had to make the switch, which I think was a relief to her.

Bagnariol and Berentson worked out a plan to deal with the tie. Along with the Co-Speakers and the co-chairs we laid out just how the tie would

function. I'd say we worked it out probably better than anyone expected. I believe the success was due to the leadership of the two of them; they set the tone! I believe all the committee co-chairs also worked the process equally well in their committees. I don't want to imply there were no problems or challenges; there certainly were! Many of the rank and file members were not happy with the process and perhaps they didn't agree with the need to compromise, but most of us in leadership understood we had to make it work.

Monahan: People might think that the chance of a tie in the House was an anomaly since it never happened before 1979. But the fact is the House used to have 99 members until 1972, the year you were elected. Right?

Representative Sommers: Yes. For the 50 years before I was elected (1933-1973), the House had 99 members, so it was not possible for a tie in the House. But, when the courts established standards for redistricting every decade and said redistricting must be based on the 'one-man; one vote' rule established by the U.S. Supreme Court, future ties are not only possible, but it's already happened twice during my 36 years in the House. So, there will likely be future ties for future Legislatures to contend with.

Monahan: During the 1979-80 tie, you served as co-chair of the House Revenue Committee. And, it's very interesting to note that the Republican co-chair of the Revenue Committee was **Rep. Ellen Craswell**. Craswell was known to be one of the most conservative members of the House Republican Caucus. How did you two work together, given the political differences between you and Ellen?

Representative Sommers: It was different than ever before. The equal number of Democrats and Republicans in the committee meant we had to negotiate everything. I think both Ellen and I understood that we needed to make it work.



Rep. Ellen Craswell

Ellen and I respected each other, even though we had very different political philosophies!

But, we were determined to make a success of the session. I recall Ellen said to me: "Look, we're going to make this work, and we'll show them!"

Much like the Co-Speakers worked together and got through the session, Ellen and I were able to work together, and I believe all the committee co-chairs felt the same way.

That didn't mean there were no differences. But the differences tended to be more among the individual members in both caucuses, than the caucus leaders and the committee co-chairs. The leadership had a better grasp of the fact that they had to keep things moving and make the process work.



Rep. Helen Sommers on the House floor (1979)

(Editor's note: Rep. Ellen Craswell served two terms in the House from Kitsap County's 23rd District (1977-80) and three terms in the Senate (1981-93) including one term as President Pro Tempore. A few years later, Craswell was nominated by the Republican Party to run for Governor. She was soundly defeated by Gov. Gary Locke in the 1996 general election. Former Senator Ellen Craswell died of cancer on April 5, 2008.)

Chapter 11

“Gamscam” sting takes down House, Senate leaders

Monahan: With the division between Governor Ray and Co-Speakers Bagnariol and Berentson – who were both considering running against her for Governor in 1980 – there was more camaraderie between the Co-Speakers and the two House caucuses than there was between the House and the Governor! I guess you could say while the session went well, despite the tie, there was another storm-a-brewing!

On April 2, 1980, two legislative leaders, **House Speaker John Bagnariol** and **Senate Majority Leader Gordon Walgren**, along with a lobbyist, Pat Gallagher, were named in a federal racketeering indictment that charged they conspired with undercover FBI agents posing as organized crime figures to allow gambling in Washington in return for a share of the profits.

The issue came to be known as “**Gamscam**,” and really made a splash in media across the country!

Representative Sommers: Oh, yes! Bagnariol, I understand, was planning that week to announce that he would challenge Governor Ray in the November election; and Walgren was considering running for the office of state Attorney General. And then, all of a sudden, this thing broke and of course just destroyed their careers!

Speculation continued for years after, that Gov. Dixy Lee Ray may have influenced the sting investigation against two of her strong rivals, but, of course, that was never proved.

(Editor’s note on Gamscam on April 2, 1980, U.S. Attorney John Merkle announced the indictment against Bagnariol, Walgren and Gallagher resulted from an undercover FBI operation that began when local authorities asked for FBI assistance in investigating gambling and political corruption in Vancouver. Agent Harold Heald, who headed the operation, posed as the representative of “So-Cal” a fictitious California company seeking to acquire and expand legalized gambling outlets in Washington.

The charges against the three said between July 1978 and January 1980, the three men had more than 150 conversations with undercover agents posing as organized crime figures in which they agreed that the legislators would arrange for passage of legalized gambling legislation, that the gambling would be controlled by So-Cal, and that the three defendants would receive six percent of the gambling profits.

Bagnariol, Walgren and Gallagher adamantly denied they had done anything wrong and denounced the investigation.

The Gamscam trial began in late summer. U.S.



*House Speaker
John Bagnariol*

District Court Judge Walter McGovern dismissed some charges, but the three defendants faced three major charges of racketeering, conspiracy, and extortion. Each was found guilty of some of the charges. They were sentenced to five years each in federal prison. They each served about two years at the federal prison in Lompoc, CA, before being

released on parole. Soon after his release, Walgren filed a new appeal, and his convictions were overturned.)

(Editor’s note: Former Speaker John Bagnariol, 77, of Renton, died of pneumonia on December 6, 2009. He had been ill for several years. Bagnariol served seven terms in the House, including 1977-79 as Speaker of the House; and 1979-80 as Co-Speaker of the House during the first-ever 49-49 tie.)

From Gamscam to Mount St. Helens!

Monahan: While the Gamscam story was developing and capturing news headlines, not only in Washington, but across the nation, the media focus soon changed as Washington's Mount St. Helens volcano erupted on May 18, 1980.

Representative Sommers: Oh, goodness. It's been 30 years since it happened, but it was an unforgettable event! We weren't in session at the time, but it was horrible and historic.

The Mount St. Helens eruption presented many problems that the Legislature would have to address in the 1981 session and many sessions to follow. Fifty-seven people died from the eruption.

Bridges, highways and roads were destroyed or severely damaged, so the volcano caused major damage and had quite a difficult economic impact on our state.



Mount St. Helens pre-1980 eruption

The eruption had been anticipated for several months in advance, but it hit at 8:32 a.m. on May 18, 1980.

The 5.1 – magnitude eruption killed 57 people, and it set off one of the largest landslides in recorded history. The volcano had been dormant for 123 years before the 1980 eruption. Ash from the volcano was deposited across eastern Washington and 10 other states.

The volcano and surrounding area are now part of Mt. St. Helens National Volcanic Monument and have provided biologist with a unique opportunity

to observe ecological succession and the reestablishment of natural habitats.



Mount St. Helens erupts May 18, 1980



Mount St. Helens in 1982, two years after the 1980 eruption

Chapter 12

The 1980 election brings “shock” for Democrats

Monahan: The November 1980 election proved to be a pretty dramatic event, too. Governor Ray had been defeated in the September primary election by **Sen. Jim McDermott**. However, in the November 1980 election Republican **John Spellman** defeated McDermott, the Democratic nominee, and Spellman, the King County Executive, was elected Governor.



**Governor
John Spellman**
1981-1985

In the House, the historic first two-year tie was over. Republicans won seven seats for a strong 56-42 majority and **Rep. Bill Polk** (R-41st District), who had served 10 years in the House, was elected Speaker of the House. Senate Democrats held on with a one-vote majority, 25-24 seats. **Sen. R. Ted Bottiger**, of Puyallup, was elected Senate Majority Leader.

Representative Sommers: The initial mood was shock! For House Democrats to go from a strong majority, to a tie, and then to a minority was devastating! We never imagined Bill Polk to be the Speaker of the House. House Democrats lost seven seats, Senate Democrats lost five seats, and Democrats also lost the Governor’s office to Spellman. Polk was very conservative as was most of his caucus. The conservative leadership created major problems for Governor Spellman.

Of course, on the national scene, **Ronald Reagan** was elected President in a landslide, and it was one of the very few times in modern history that a Republican presidential candidate carried Washington state!

In addition, **Attorney General Slade Gorton** defeated the state’s powerful **U.S. Senator Warren G. Magnuson**, who had served in the U.S. Senate for 37 years (1944-1981)! It was devastating for Democrats in our state.

The 1981 session was very contentious; little was



Senator Warren G. Magnuson **Senator Thomas Gorton**
“Slade”

Senator Magnuson was President Pro Tempore of the U.S. Senate when defeated in 1980. Gorton was Senator from 1981-87 and 1989-2001

accomplished, despite the issues related to Mount St. Helens, a major state budget shortfall, and the default of the Washington Public Power Supply System (WPPSS).

Monahan: But, as bad as the election was for Democrats, another very surprising event happened just one month into session!

On Friday, February 13, 1981, Democrat **Sen. Peter von Reichbauer** changed party affiliation in a very public way to give state Senate Republicans a 25-24 majority! With **John Spellman**, the newly elected Republican Governor, and a Republican-controlled Legislature, how did von Reichbauer’s switch affect the 1981 and 1982 sessions?

Representative Sommers: I didn’t know von Reichbauer very well. As you know, he was in the Senate and I was in the House. I think the Democrats in the Senate and **Majority Leader Ted Bottiger** were in shock because it was a significant change, and I don’t think anyone saw it coming! As I understand it, out of the blue, von Reichbauer called a press conference to announce he was switching parties from Democrat to Republican to give the Republicans the one-vote majority!

I know von Reichbauer was seen as a bit of a renegade anyway, but switching parties just a month into session, and doing it in such a public way, it created chaos and a huge controversy in the Senate – far more in Senate than in the House, but it brought the session almost to a standstill.

With that move, the Republican Party, with Governor John Spellman, took control of both houses of the Legislature. But, in the Senate, they didn’t have strong control with a 25-24 majority.

Monahan: So with a Republican governor and Republican majorities in the House and Senate as

well, what was the economic situation at the time?

Representative Sommers: Well, during the 1982 session, our nation and our state were suffering through a recession more severe than any since the 1930s. Interest rates for home loans, and the like, were in the double digits, which put our housing and timber industries in a tailspin and ominous unemployment grew. So, of course, state revenue was going down, down, down!

Adding to the problem, was the fact that in the two previous sessions (1980-81), the Republican majority, led by Speaker Polk, had limited property taxes and removed the sales tax on food. Later the sales tax on food was reinstated, much to the Republicans chagrin!

Governor Spellman, who was fairly moderate, had to deal with a group of legislators in his party who were very conservative and anti-tax no matter what the cost! In frustration, Spellman called Republican legislators "Troglodytes!" He was unable to get them to support any tax increase to try to resolve the problems. So there was great friction between the Republican Governor and the Republican House and Senate.



**House Speaker
Bill Polk
1981-1983**

Monahan: I recall interest rates at the time to be about 15-percent as my wife and I built a house in 1981. We figured we'd never see single digit home loans again, so we proceeded.

Sommers: The 1982 session was the most difficult since the depression in the 1930s. Unemployment rate were at 10 percent and the recession was overwhelming. Governor Spellman had a very difficult time with the 'anti-tax' Republicans in the House majority. Our state's bond rating fell and we had the WPPSS debacle on nuclear power in our state, which impacted our state's financial status. On the final day of the session, a tax increase, including re-imposing the sales tax on food resulted in passage of a very difficult budget.

Monahan: As a result of the budget problems faced

nationally and in our state, the next election brought some changes, at least in Washington. In 1983, Democrats came to Olympia, having swept control of both houses for the 1983 session. House Democrats picked up 11 seats in the 1982 general election, for a 54-44 seat majority, and Senate Democrats won two seats for a 26-23 majority, with Spellman halfway through his term as Governor.

Democrat **Rep. Wayne Ehlers** was elected the new Speaker of the House. What was the session like with a new Democratic majority and a new House Speaker?

Representative Sommers: In the House, with Democrats back in the majority, it was a significant win! It was quite a big change, and with all the problems of the previous session still unresolved, we had a lot to deal with.



**House Speaker
Wayne Ehlers
1983-1987**

Wayne Ehlers was a school teacher from Parkland in Pierce County when he was elected to the House in 1972, the same year I was first elected, so we'd been friends for a decade.

Wayne was a very likeable guy and he really got along well with everyone in our caucus. When he was elected Speaker in 1983, I believe Wayne moved well into the position. Wayne certainly recognized the discontent of his younger colleagues back when Leonard Sawyer was Speaker. Ehlers was a member of the back-benchers, so he was certainly more open and willing to involve all his caucus in the process. He worked closely with the committee chairs, but he gave us flexibility to run our committees, and he also involved the rank-and-file members into the process.

When I was chair of the State Government Committee in 1975-76, Wayne was the Committee vice-chair, and we worked very well together. In 1986, when he was Speaker, I was named chair of the Higher Education Committee.

Ehlers was Speaker. We worked to raise the standards of our colleges and universities. We began a process to make higher education more available

to the urban areas. We made it possible for branch campus universities serving in more rural areas.

University of Washington established branch campuses in areas of the Puget Sound, and Washington State University began to advance to other locales in eastern and southwest Washington as well. It made higher education available to more citizens of our state, including evening classes for the employed, displaced workers and homemakers who needed educational advancement.

Wayne was elected from the 2nd Legislative District in Pierce County. So was **Senator Ted Bottiger**, who was the Majority Leader in the Senate, so they were very close friends throughout their careers. They worked well together, and brought some unity to the House and the Senate.

The economy was still in trouble, so the Legislature worked to improve economic development and boost education. I believe the Democrats worked better with Gov. Spellman in the final two years of his term than the Republicans did in the first two years.

From Helen Sommers' July 1983 newsletter to her 36th District constituents:

HIGH TECH, OF COURSE

"Inevitably the Legislature has caught the "high tech fever." We need to encourage high technology industry to locate here. This session, the policy decision was to invest in education rather than tax exemptions and tax preferences.

"Projects include a High Technology Center at the University of Washington, to be established for specialized study and joint research with industry, especially in electronics, aviation, bioengineering, forestry and marine sciences."

"Money was provided to establish telecommunications services at the University of Washington and at Washington State University. These links will allow professors in Seattle or Pullman to teach groups of employees in firms across the state. This live "McNeil/Lehrer" format allows interaction with the professor and transports academic expertise from campus to workplace."



The Legislature took a major step toward building a tourism network when they approved legislation for the construction of a Trade and Convention Center in Seattle. Construction of the center over the I-5 freeway began in 1983 and was completed in 1985. Helen was a strong supporter of the center as a "major step toward building a tourism network, creating thousands of new jobs in employment," Helen wrote in her 1982 Newsletter.

STATE REPRESENTATIVE
36th DISTRICT
SETH ARMSTRONG
EDUCATION
ENERGY & UTILITIES
JUDICIARY
TELECOMMUNICATIONS

State of
Washington
House of
Representatives



STATE REPRESENTATIVE
36th DISTRICT
HELEN SOMMERS
COMMITTEES
WAYS AND MEANS
ENERGY & UTILITIES
NATURAL RESOURCES
CONSTITUTION, ELECTIONS &
ETHICS
LEGISLATIVE BUDGET

June 1984

Dear 36th District Seniors:

The President of the Senior Citizens Lobby credited the 1983 legislative session with producing “more beneficial legislation for senior citizens than any other time since our lobby was organized.” The 1984 session continues to give matters affecting seniors a high priority. The following bills were approved this year:

RESPITE CARE

It is estimated that between 60 and 80 percent of the care given to disabled adults is provided by family members or friends who aren’t paid. Senior citizen groups advocated allowing occasional time-off for those who provide such care and this year, the Legislature authorized creation of two “respite care” demonstration projects.

The goal of the projects is to provide family and friends who care for disabled adults – and who, as a result, rarely if ever have much time to themselves – with a short vacation or a weekend off by having a respite care worker fill in for them. It is hoped that such programs will make it easier for those who need frequent attention to remain at home instead of being institutionalized at great monetary and human cost.

NURSING HOMES

Two other important bills were approved this year. One creates a new reporting system to handle cases involving neglect or exploitation of the elderly. The state will respond to such reports and offer appropriate protection. The other bill simply provides that nursing home operators must give each patient who wishes it a reasonable opportunity to have regular contact with pets. People of every age enjoy such contact, so there is no good reason that moving into a nursing home should put an end to it. The bill does not force nursing homes to accept live-in pets.

PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTIONS

We have enclosed a card to remind you to update property tax exemption law for senior citizens. Applications for an exemption on 1975 must be made before July 1, 1984. This is the last year you have to re-apply. Other details concerning the update tax exemption law are contained on the card.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Helen Sommers in cursive script.

Helen Sommers

Handwritten signature of Seth Armstrong in cursive script.

Seth Armstrong

Chapter 13

House Democrats regain majority

Monahan: We'd previously talked about Speakers Leonard Sawyer (1973-77), John Bagnariol (1977-79), Co-Speakers Bagnariol and Duane Berentson (1979-81), Bill Polk (1981-83) and Wayne Ehlers (1983-87). In 1987, Ehlers did not run for reelection; he went to work for DSHS. The new Speaker of the House was **Rep. Joe King** of Vancouver.

Representative Sommers: Joe was a very strong leader and he came by it naturally. Like Wayne Ehlers, Joe was very personable; he was very outgoing and he stepped into the Speakership with relative ease. Joe was very sophisticated with great overview. He was a very good Speaker of the House, and he was a good friend.



**House Speaker
Joe King
1987-1993**

In 1987, Joe determined to split the Ways and Means Committee. He named me to Chair the Capital Budget Committee, Gary Locke became Chair of Appropriations, and Art Wang was Revenue Chair.

In the 1987 session, House Democrats had a strong 61-37 majority, but the Senate Democrats again were dealing with a bare 25-24 majority. **Gov. Booth Gardner**, who had defeated Gov. Spellman in 1985, worked well with the House and the Senate. He was a very popular governor who was preceded by Governors Spellman and Ray; neither of whom was very popular after their single



**Governor
Booth Gardner
1985-1993**

terms though each ran for reelections and lost. Gardner was very likeable and was certainly very popular with the citizens of Washington.

Joe King served as Speaker of the House for six years, but when Gov. Booth Gardner completed two terms and didn't seek a third term. Joe decided to run for Governor. He lost in the primary to **Congressman Mike Lowry**, who was elected governor in 1992. I believe Joe King would have made an excellent governor.



Rep. Helen Sommers and House Speaker Joe King (1992)

As I wrote in my 1987 36th District Newsletter, "the 1987 session approved more major policy initiatives than I had witnessed in many years. Among the bills passed were a landmark budget for higher education, and critical changes in the funding and functioning of K-12, including a vocational school for Seattle. Other measures provided health care coverage for the working poor and welfare reform with an emphasis on putting recipients to work." It was a very successful session.

Monahan: At the time Speaker King was elected, Booth Gardner was into his second year as Governor and went on to serve until 1993. What are your recollections of Gardner's two terms?

Representative Sommers: Booth was a very friendly, easy-going person. He had served in the Senate for a short time and had served as Pierce County Executive, so he came out of a political leadership position. He came in at a very good time, as the economy was working its way to recovery. Gardner served two terms as Governor (1985-1993).

Booth treated people well and respectfully and worked well with the majorities and minorities in the Legislature. His service was notable for advancing standards-based education and environmental protection, among other issues. He worked very well with the Legislature on most issues. He really was a people person. I believe he could have been

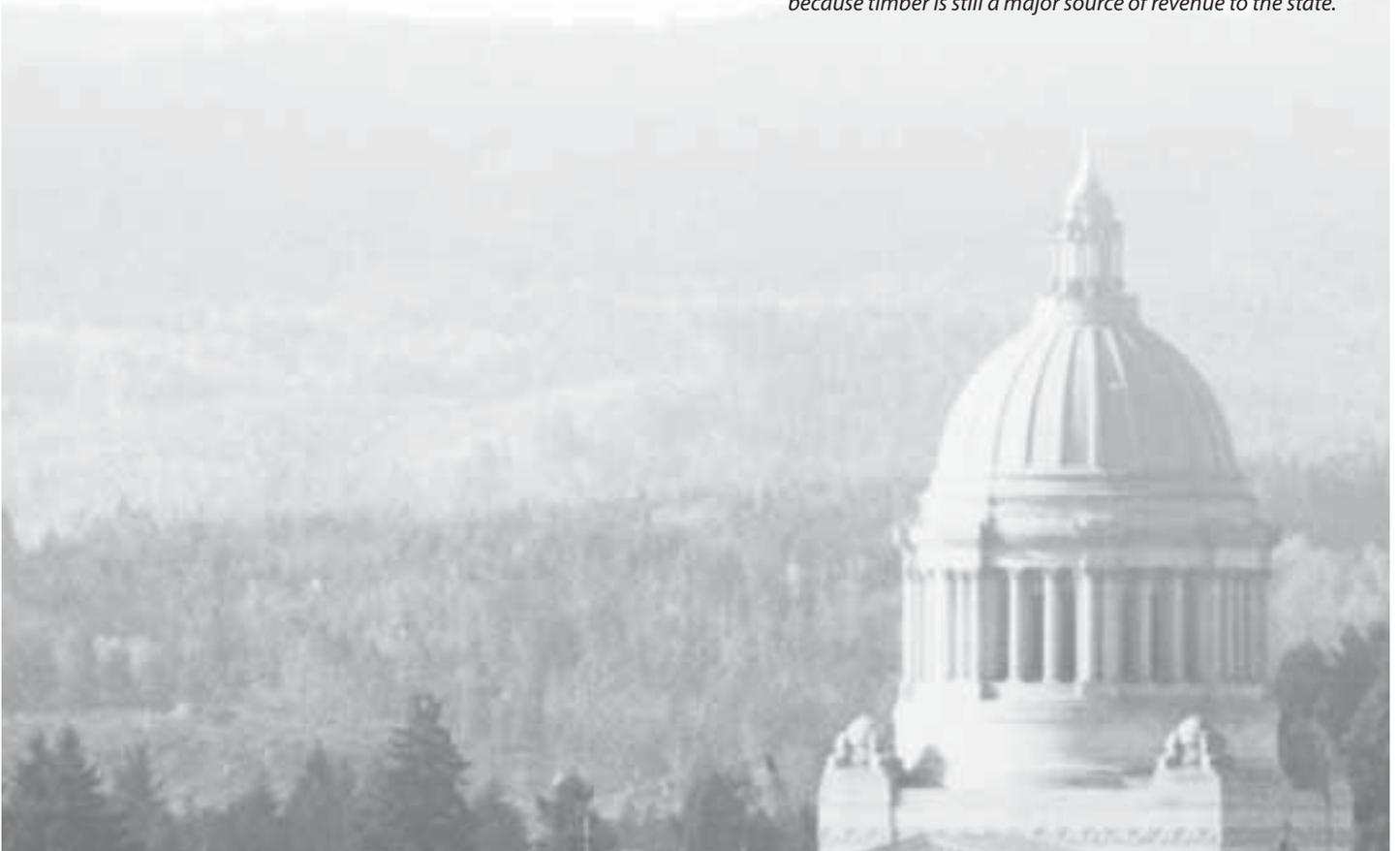
elected to a third term, but he decided not to run again, and chose to retire on a high note!



Rep. Helen Sommers joins **Gov. Booth Gardner** and **First Lady Jean Gardner** in the Governor's Mansion in 1991.



Helen was Chair of the Capital Budget Committee (1989-92) "We traveled all over the state because the state owns property in all directions," she said. "In this photo, the committee visited a timber site because timber is still a major source of revenue to the state."



Chapter 14

Gov. Lowry and Speaker Ebersole

Monahan: In 1993, the House Democrats had a 65-33 majority, the largest majority either party had held in the House since 1959. The Senate Democrats held a 28-21 majority. **Rep. Brian Ebersole** (D-Tacoma) was elected Speaker of the House, after Joe King stepped down.

The newly elected **Governor Mike Lowry** had been a Democratic Congressman from Washington's 7th District. So his Congressional district included your 36th Legislative District. How was it with Speaker Ebersole and Governor Lowry and such a strong House Democratic majority? What were some of the accomplishments during his term?



Gov. Mike Lowry signs a bill sponsored by **Rep. Helen Sommers** in 1993

Representative Sommers: When Brian Ebersole was elected Speaker, I was elected Chair of the House Democratic Caucus. The caucus chair works with the Speaker, the Senate majority leader and the Governor to set priorities, develop strategies, and schedule legislation. So I worked closely with Brian and with Gov. Lowry to coordinate and reconcile differences in legislation through the session. Caucus chair was a new opportunity for me and a very challenging one.

Mike Lowry was a more liberal Democrat and a very activist governor. With the new governor and strong Democrat majorities in both bodies, the 1993 session was pretty intense and fast-paced, I remember. I would say it was a very productive session. Reform and efficiency were the themes of the session. We passed health care reform legislation and education reform.



Speaker of the House
Brian Ebersole
1993-95

But, the big concern in the '93 session was again the falling revenues in the state, so we had to deal with that and a combination of budget cuts and raising taxes to get us through another difficult economic forecast.

Of course, Ebersole, served just one term as Speaker (1993-95), when he chose to run for mayor of Tacoma instead of re-election to the House, and he was elected mayor of Tacoma.

(Editor's note: Mike Lowry started his career in government when he worked briefly for the Washington state Senate. In 1975, he was elected to the King County Council, and in 1978, Mike was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from Washington's 7th Congressional District. He served in Congress for five terms (1978-89). In 1992, Lowry was elected Washington's 20th Governor. He served one term.

Brian Ebersole was first elected to the Washington state House of Representatives in 1983 from Pierce County's 29th District. He served for 10 years when he was elected Speaker of the House in 1993. He served one term as Speaker and then won election as Tacoma Mayor (1996-2000). He left the mayor post in 2000, when he was named President of Bates Technical College in 2000. He served four years at Bates.)

Chapter 15

Helen Sommers takes helm of Appropriations... briefly

Monahan: In the 1994 session, you moved from House Democratic Caucus Chair to Appropriations Chair, a position you would hold for many years.



House Appropriations Committee Chair Helen Sommers holding a 2002 hearing on the Supplemental Operating Budget

Representative Sommers: The chair of Appropriations is responsible for writing the state budget as proposed by the House, and then working with the Senate and the Governor to make it law. So, for the remainder of my career, 15 years, I served as Chair, Co-

Chair and Ranking Democrat on the Appropriations Committee during some very interesting times. With my masters degree in economics, Appropriations Chair was a perfect fit for me.

Monahan: In the election in November, 1994, however, there was another big change in the Legislature, right?

Representative Sommers: Oh yes, the 1995 session brought a big change! Control of the House shifted from the Democrats to the Republicans for the first time in 11 years! But the sweep was not just in our state, it happened in many other states and also in Congress, where even the **Speaker of the U.S. House Tom Foley**, of Spokane, lost his seat in the 1994 election! For a long-time House Speaker to lose to a newcomer was shocking!

Clearly, the 5th Congressional District changed considerably from moderate Democrat to strong Republican. **George Nethercutt**, a conservative Republican, defeated the Speaker of the House! I believe losing the power of Speaker of the U.S. House was very sad for our state.

Rep. Newt Gingrich was the new Speaker of the U.S. House, and the leader of the so-called Republican Revolution. But, the Republican philosophy had also changed significantly. There was a strong streak of “cut government no matter what the program!” And to some, there was a strong distrust and hostility toward government itself.



Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Thomas Foley (D-Spokane) served from 1989-1995 as Speaker. He represented Washington's 5th Congressional District from 1965-95

(Editor's note: Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Tom Foley (D-Spokane) lost to George Nethercutt in the 1994 election by fewer than 400 votes! Foley had served in the U.S. House from Washington's 5th District for 30 years (1965-1995). He was elected Speaker of the House from 1989-95. Rep. Newt Gingrich (R-Georgia) was elected the new Speaker of the House by the Republican majority

In that same election, the Washington State House Republicans gained a 62-36 majority in the 1994 election. During the 1994 session, Speaker Brian Ebersole (D-Tacoma) had held a 65-33 majority over Republicans, so the Republicans gained 29 seats in the 1994 election. Rep. Clyde Ballard was elected Speaker. The Democrats in the state Senate held on with a 25-24 majority, but two years later, 1997, Republicans took the Senate too, with a 26-23 majority).

Representative Sommers: I knew **Clyde Ballard** when

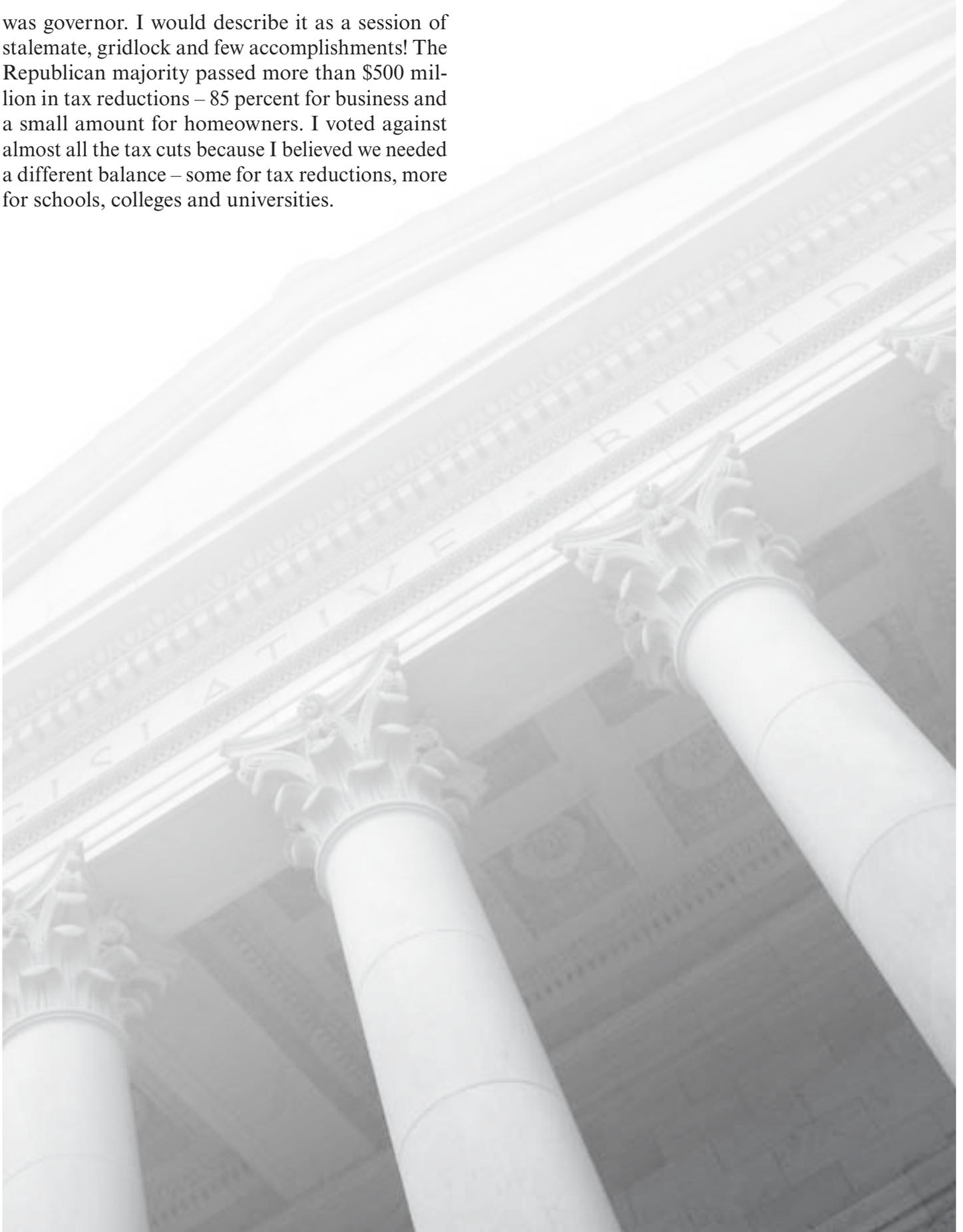


Washington House Speaker Clyde Ballard (R-Wenatchee) served as Speaker from 1995-99 and Co-Speaker with **Rep. Frank Chopp** (D-Seattle) from 1999-2001. Photo by Steve Bloom/The Olympian

he first came to the House in 1983. While we didn't agree on a lot of issues, I respected him and his work on behalf of his district. He was elected Speaker of the House in 1995 when Republicans had won a significant majority in the 1994 election. My caucus went from a 65 to 33 majority in 1994 to a 42-36 minority in 1995!

It was a very difficult session, the worst in what was then my 22-year career. Senate Democrats did maintain a bare 25-24 majority, and Mike Lowry

was governor. I would describe it as a session of stalemate, gridlock and few accomplishments! The Republican majority passed more than \$500 million in tax reductions – 85 percent for business and a small amount for homeowners. I voted against almost all the tax cuts because I believed we needed a different balance – some for tax reductions, more for schools, colleges and universities.



Chapter 16

Gary Locke elected Governor

Monahan: The 1996 election saw your friend, Democrat **Gary Locke** win election as Washington's 21st Governor.



*Washington
State Governor
Gary Locke*

*was sworn in Jan. 15, 1997.
He served two terms
1997-2005*

Locke was one of your House colleagues and a good friend for many years, and had served as King County Executive for two and a half years (1994-1997). But, when Locke became Governor he had to work with a Republican-controlled House and Senate. The House Republicans maintained a 56-42 majority and the Senate Republicans

gained a majority of 26-23.

Representative Sommers: Yes, Gary Locke was elected Governor in 1996. I knew Gary very well; we had served together for 12 years in the House, and we were good friends. He is very bright and very capable. He provided leadership during his time in the House and he was a role model for many.

A Democratic governor coming in with a Republican majority in both the House and Senate, though, really made Locke's task much more difficult. But, Gary had served six terms in the House and he understood the process. He knew what he wanted to accomplish as Governor, and I would say he worked pretty well with the Republican leadership. He had to pass the budget, so he had to work with the Republican Legislature.

Of course, not having majorities in either of the chambers was a big disadvantage to Gary. But, I can't imagine anyone who was better qualified to work with such a difficult situation. It was Gary's strong legislative experience that gave him, a Democrat, the ability to deal with the Republican Legislature.

He used his veto and his partial veto very widely.

It's always difficult to negotiate with a majority of the other party, but you have to do it! You have to make trade-offs on budget situations and legislation, and you must be flexible and make it work. Governor Locke understood what he had to do. The veto pen was an important weapon to him. He was a very strong Governor.

Monahan: As a member of the minority, and Ranking Democrat on Appropriations, how did you perceive the 1997 session?

Representative Sommers: The session was difficult. It was dominated by differences on welfare, health care and transportation. There were differences on tax cuts and spending levels. Of course, there was controversy over abortion and gay rights, as well. However, Governor Locke did use his veto power extensively to try to moderate actions by the Legislature; and he was successful.

Another issue for the session dealt with transportation issues. The state gasoline tax had not been raised since the one-cent increase in 1991. But, six



Helen Sommers reviews budget issues

years later, the gas tax had lost considerable buying power as highway construction and maintenance had grown considerably in costs. The Republican majority in the House and Senate, however, was dominated by members who oppose any new taxes, no matter what the need, it seemed to me.

In addition, state obligations to fund education continued to be ignored with the Legislature approving less state support for education.



Chapter 17

Déjà Vu! – House 49-49 tie again

Monahan: There were some significant changes in the 1999 session. Democrats in the Senate regained a good 27-22 majority. In the House, Democrats did pick up seven seats, but that only created the second-ever 49-49 tie (1999-2001).

With the second tie, **Rep. Clyde Ballard** was reelected by his Caucus to be the Republican Co-Speaker and the Democrats elected **Rep. Frank Chopp** of Seattle as their Co-Speaker. Chopp had been elected to the House in 1995, and quickly rose to a leadership role.

You are the only House member to have served during both ties (19-years apart)! How would you say this tie in the House compares/contrasts to the first tie?



Appropriations Co-Chairs Tom Huff & Helen Sommers with Co-Speakers Clyde Ballard & Frank Chopp (1999)

Representative Sommers: Well, on both occasions of the ties, it was a shock to the party in power! First the Democrats had a strong majority in the 1978 session (62-36) but the 1979 election brought a 49-49 tie. It was paralyzing at first, but the leadership had to work together to make the session a success, and I mentioned before, Co-Speakers Bagnariol and Berentson were friends, so they made it work. Neither was too happy, but they did work together.

Then, in the second tie, the Republicans had held a majority for four years, including a 57-41 majority when the 1998 election came. The voters again created the 49-49 tie when the Democrats gained eight seats in the November election. That had to be a shock to Speaker Clyde Ballard and the Republican Caucus; and I'm sure Rep. Frank Chopp, who would be elected Co-Speaker with Ballard, had hoped he could have won just one more seat!

So, each party had a time of power before the tie. I expect there will be future occasions in the House when the two parties will deal with a 49-49 tie yet again.

In the first tie, the Co-Speakers and leadership in both the Democrat and the Republican caucuses had no previous experience to look back on, since it was the first-ever tie. So we all worked to set the parameters for a successful session as it went along, and it worked!

I believe one option the Democrats and Republicans considered in the 1979-80 tie, was to hire an outsider to serve as Speaker who would be non-partisan and would not have a vote. But Bagnariol and Berentson figured they could serve as Co-Speakers, so they didn't go with that option.

When the second 49-49 tie occurred, Co-Speakers Ballard and Chopp had a precedent to follow, and that's what they chose to do. They could have established a different way to approach the operation of the session, but I suspect they saw that the first tie worked pretty well, and decided to go with that process in the second tie.

Monahan: So, what are your thoughts about the second tie in history, since, as we said, you are the only member to go through both ties?

Representative Sommers: Well, I don't think it was as easy for Co-Speakers Ballard and Chopp because, where Bagnariol and Berentson were friends before the tie, Ballard and Chopp were not close at all. They had different personalities and they also had very different philosophies. Whereas Bagnariol and Berentson met daily, Chopp and Ballard rarely met together, I recall.

Also, I'd pointed out that times were very different back in the late 1970s than they are now. I think the atmosphere among legislators of both parties was more cordial and friendly then. But,

in the 1990s, I believe the two parties did not get along very well. The atmosphere in Olympia – and in politics nationwide for that matter – has changed.

The 1998 session seemed to be one of the most contentious sessions, I would say. There were deep divisions in philosophy and policy in many areas. Transportation funding was an area of serious difficulty. The Puget Sound area is one of the worst in the country for traffic gridlock. Governor Locke had proposed a plan to deal with serious traffic gridlock with a gradual Gas-Tax increase. But, Republican leadership in both chambers refused to support any increase!

Then matters got even worse in 2000, when the state lost \$1.1 billion in car tab revenues with the approval of Initiative 695, the \$30 license plate tab. That initiative produced a loss of more than one-third of all taxes dedicated to transportation, plus big cuts in revenue for local government. It was almost an impossible situation.

Monahan: During the three years of the 49-49 tie, you served as co-chair of the House Appropriations Committee. Republican **Rep. Tom Huff** was your co-chair for the first two years of the tie. He had been an executive for Sears and represented the 26th District from Kitsap and Pierce counties. How did this go?

Representative Sommers: As with the previous tie in 1979-80 and the second tie from 1999-2001, it was imperative that the Co-Speakers and the co-chairs get along. My experience working as co-chair of the Revenue Committee with Republican **Rep. Ellen Craswell** in the first tie went pretty well because we both understood the need to work together.

It was true again in this tie. But, it was more difficult this time around in part because the philosophical differences and the lack of camaraderie between Democrats and Republicans were so much more difficult this time than in the late – 1970s tie.

Representative Huff and I did work together on the operating budget. Tom was viewed by many in our caucus as not very friendly and more difficult to work with. But as co-chairs, we both realized that we had to work as a team. And both Huff and I had to work with our committee members to

stress the need to work together and to get along. I think it went better than might have been expected, given the 49-49 tie.

Monahan: With a tie, it looks like neither side really wins. You just have to negotiate and work together to reach the best balance.

Representative Sommers: Yes, as I said, sessions during a ‘tie’ have to function very differently because each issue had to be decided by both leaders working together and agreeing on the issue. If you don’t have the votes, you don’t get what you want. If there isn’t agreement between the two caucuses, that’s a veto! In some cases, I would say it probably led to some good decisions. So, when that happens, it is a win for everyone. The progress was slow at the start, but that wasn’t surprising in a tie. But, many in Huff’s caucus and his members on the Appropriations Committee were reluctant to support any legislation that required any tax increase – period!

At the end of the 2000 session, the 2001-2003 operating budget was approved when four Republicans joined all 49 Democrats and voted ‘Yes.’ It had the approval of the Senate, and was signed into law by Governor Locke. No one was happy with the outcome, but our Democratic Caucus got the better of the deal when the four Republicans joined us to pass the budget. I believe the Republican Caucus was not pleased.

Chapter 18

Third year of tie; and the Nisqually Earthquake!



In the Legislative Building, over 173 million pounds of stones, bricks and building finishes moved in response to the Nisqually earthquake. Structural damage was limited to the upper rotunda.

Monahan: You've got to say that 2001 was an interesting year. Not only did the voters extend the 49-49 tie in the 2000 election but, barely six weeks into session the devastating **Nisqually Earthquake** occurred on Feb. 28! The 6.8 magnitude earthquake had a large impact on the legislative campus and certainly the 2001 session.

Representative Sommers: Oh, yes. The Nisqually earthquake forced the Legislature out of the Legislative Building, which was damaged extensively and had to be closed for several years. The House and the Senate were quickly moved into makeshift meeting rooms. The House sessions were moved to 'Hearing Room-A' in the John L. O'Brien Building. The room was never intended to hold 98 members plus staff. So it was very tight and very crowded. The Senate was moved to the John Cherberg Building, but with only 49 members, I think it was easier for them than the jam-packed House chamber.

The Nisqually Earthquake event had a big impact on the flow of the session, but I do think, in some

ways, it may have brought legislators closer together.

Despite the size of the quake (6.8 magnitude) and with the epicenter just 11 miles from the Capital, the sandstone Legislative Building survived remarkably well! As I wrote in my 2001 Legislative Newsletter: "For days we watched industrial climbers rappelling up and down, inspecting every section of the dome. During that week, I attended a briefing by a seismic engineer who advised us the Legislative Building is one of the safest places to be in when there's an earthquake – and the rotunda, under the structural circle of the dome is the safest of all."

But, year three of a House tie really slowed progress again.

Monahan: Do you remember where you were about six weeks into session when that earthquake occurred? And, any recollections you might have of that historic event?

Representative Sommers: I sure do! There was a



Legislative Building Dome under reconstruction, March 2003

group of us in a meeting in Speaker Chopp's office, off the House floor, including **Speaker Chopp, Lynn Kessler, Bill Grant, Eileen Cody, Mary Lou Dickerson, Jeff Gombosky** and me along with a few staff people. We knew it was an earthquake, but we had no idea how severe it was. The building really shook mightily! It

was quite frightening for many. I remember stories of people in the elevators when it happened, which trapped them in for awhile.

As it turned out, the buildings held up very well. But, of course, the earthquake required us to quickly pack up and move out right in the midst of session.

Monahan: Given that the session was just six weeks in, and the disruption was so sudden, and they had to vacate the Legislative Building quickly, was there added turmoil to a session that was dealing first

with the difficulty of a '49-49 tie' in the House and then a significant earthquake?

Representative Sommers: It was a job! (*laughter*) Because it required a lot of adjustment, it was a long session, with the third year of a 49-49 tie and, of course, the earthquake! And then, being crammed into the hearing room, 98 members plus staff in Hearing Room-A was very tight!

Monahan: With all that to deal with and the session clock ticking, did the two parties become a little more closely knit and cooperative, perhaps?

Representative Sommers: Well, it was forced upon us, yes! It was a huge shock and challenge but it could have been even more severe. We could have lost lives, so I think we were fortunate in the fact that we got through it and the buildings were impacted but not destroyed. There were no injuries on campus, but there were many, many terrified people as all the buildings shook. But, the Nisqually earthquake also produced significant damage to the Alaska Way Viaduct in Seattle. Now, almost 10 years after the earthquake, there is still no final agreement on how to resolve the problem of damage to the viaduct. That continues to put people at risk, given the prospect of another earthquake.

Monahan: It was certainly a significant event, and it did slow down the session, which lasted about six months. With all that going on, and voters maintaining the 49-49 tie in the 2001 session, you continued as co-chair of the House Appropriations Committee. But, Tom Huff did not seek reelection, so your new co-chair of Appropriations was **Rep. Barry Sehlin** from Whidbey Island for the third year of the tie. How was your working relationship with Rep. Sehlin?



Rep. Barry Sehlin
Co-Chair House
Appropriations 2001

Representative Sommers: Like with Rep. Tom Huff – and Rep. Ellen Craswell, back in the first tie – again, Rep. Barry Sehlin and I had to work together as co-chairs. But, Barry and I had a particularly good working relationship. Barry is a very sophisticated kind of person. Huff was seen

as more brusque and tougher to deal with, whereas Sehlin was more suave and polished. Barry was a very fine gentleman and a great person to work with. He was fair and balanced and pretty much a moderate in philosophy, so I would say it was as good a working relationship as there could be.

Before Barry was elected to the House, he was the Naval Commander of the Whidbey Island Naval Center. When he retired from the Navy, he was elected to the House (10th District). So he had a very good sense of how to resolve issues of contention in the committee. I believe our work together in Appropriations went extremely well. We both respected each other and willingly worked together. And, I think we also were able to bring harmony to most of our committee members on both sides of the aisle.

Of course, there were always some tough spots in a situation like this. I can't say I remember who might have been the least cooperative, but, generally, the committee Democrats responded well to me; and the committee Republicans responded well to first, Huff, and then to Sehlin. No one ever got all they wanted on either side, so we compromised to get as close as we could to try to make both sides happy. And I remember our committee did quite well.

Monahan: In your summer-2001 House Newsletter, you noted that in addition to the earthquake, legislators faced an enormous increase in health care costs. Talk, if you would, about this problem as a co-chair of the Appropriations Committee and your thoughts about the needs for improved health care in our state, and of course, across the nation.

Representative Sommers: Well, health care costs had just taken over control of the committee agenda, from my perspective. There were many other important issues, but health care's growing costs has gotten enormous attention! I believe the aging population, where older people are living longer than earlier generations, has had a major impact on the cost of health care. The older we get, the more health care we require. Every effort is made to keep people alive but the costs are going up, of course. As we all know now, health care continues to be high on the agenda of the new President of the United States in an effort to find a better way to provide health

care. The federal government covers a lot of people with health care.

But, we didn't get anything significant accomplished on health care reform that year, given the tie. The session went on 162 days, which was the second longest session in state history, 52 days longer than a normal session.

Monahan: The November 2000 election, as we said, extended the 49-49 tie into the third year. But, just before the 2001 session began, to the surprise of many, **Rep. Renee Radcliff** (R-21st District) who had been reelected, resigned her seat on Jan. 10, 2001, after serving three terms in the House and being reelected to her fourth. As happens when a member steps down, in this case, the Snohomish County Commissioners appointed her successor, **Rep. Joe Marine**, a Republican, to her seat, thus maintaining the tie.

Representative Sommers: Yes, Renee did resign and, of course, her replacement, Joe Marine, was quickly appointed to the seat, so we continued with a tie for the third year.



Rep. Pat Scott

Just before the 2001 session began, the House suffered another great loss with the death of **Rep. Pat Scott**. Pat Scott was a very dear friend, and is a great loss to

the House, **Jean Berkey** was appointed to the 38th District seat Pat held for 17 years. So that left two seats to fill. Joe Marine and Jean Berkey were both on the Snohomish County ballot for a November special election. Berkey, a Democrat, was elected to Pat Scott's seat, while Marine, a Republican, was defeated by Democrat **Brian Sullivan**, giving the House Democrats the majority in the House for the first time since the 1994 session. It was only a 50-48 majority, but it certainly changed the House after three difficult years.

With that, Rep. Frank Chopp was elected Speaker of the House and our caucus was in the majority. That also allowed me to again become the Chair – rather than the co-chair – of the House Appropriations Committee. I held that post for seven years,

through the 2008 session, when I decided to retire.



House Speaker Frank Chopp (D-43rd District)

Monahan: That must have been a pretty interesting time and very much a relief for the Democratic Caucus to regain the majority for the first time in seven years; three of which were the tie.

Representative Sommers: Everybody likes to be in control! Now, we had a 50-48 majority, which is very difficult to deal with, because 50 votes are often very tough to get even in your own caucus. But, each election after, our caucus got a little bit larger, and in the 2008 session, my last, the House Democratic Caucus had grown to 63 seats, with 35 in the Republican Caucus. That's a powerful majority.

Monahan: For the 2002 session, legislators were able to temporarily return to the Legislative Building, which had been shorn-up in anticipation of a pending major reconstruction and remodel. The 75-year-old domed building was declared safe, but still needed several years for a complete restoration. In the meantime, two large modular buildings were erected on the Pritchard Library parking lot in preparation for the 2003 session. The two modular structures were the center of House sessions for the 2003-04 sessions.

Representative Sommers: Yes, the Legislative Building held up very well during the earthquake, but the architects determined there was a need for a major restoration to give the building new, extended

life. So many of us were please to know that the 75-year-old building would receive the needed restoration, but it seemed a little sad to imagine that we wouldn't be able to conduct sessions under the Capitol Dome for two years!

Two large modular buildings were brought in and set up in one of the parking lots. It took up a lot of parking space, but, it was the only option we had, so we had to adjust to it.



Two Modular Buildings being erected south of the Legislative Building – 2003

The modular buildings provided adequate space for the House Chamber, the caucus offices, and also legislative and administrative offices. The best part was it certainly gave us more space than when we had in Hearing Room-A. But they were 'big boxes' that weren't very attractive, and I recall many homeowners in the area, who loved being in the neighborhood of the Capital Campus, were very displeased, and eager to get the 'modulars' out of the neighborhood when the job was done.

All other offices in the Legislative Building had to move, too. Both Gov. Gary Locke's and Lt. Gov. Brad Owen's offices, as I recall, were moved across the street to the Insurance Building, and other state elected officials were moved off campus. We served two sessions in the 'modulars' (2003 and 2004 sessions). The Senate chamber and offices moved into the Pritchard Building.

And, I certainly remember when the 2005 session opened and we were finally able to return to the Legislative Building! It had been closed for 30 months, but the improvements certainly added to the longevity of the Legislative Building. It was wonderful to be back, and to this day, the Legisla-

tive Building looks more beautiful than ever!

After the 2001 session of the Legislature, Helen wrote this in her annual newsletter to her 36th District constituents:

Helen Sommers 2001 Newsletter

Report to the 36th District

Summer 2001

NISQUALLY EARTHQUAKE

The epicenter of the February 28 earthquake is just 11 miles from the Capital. Those famous sandstone buildings shook mightily, but survived remarkable well. Much attention and concern was focused on the Legislative Building and it's giant dome.

One of the dome's supports was already affected by the 1949 and the 1965 quakes, and the building was seismatically upgraded after 1965. The engineer who supervised the structural reinforcing came out of retirement to inspect his earlier work – a job credited with saving the building from extensive damage in the 6.8 magnitude quake this year.

For days we watched industrial climbers rappelling up and down, inspecting every section of the dome. One set of stone block supports was knocked out of alignment and will have to be replaced.

I attended a briefing by a seismic engineer who advised us the Legislative Building is one of the safest to be in an earthquake – and the rotunda, under the structural circle of the dome is the safest of all!



May is moving month for the Legislative Building occupants

(from "In the House" newsletter – April 2002 – by Dan Monahan)

The move is on as contractors prepare to vacate the Legislative Building this month for about two-and-a-half years for a major reconstruction of the magnificent 74-year old domed structure, one of America's grandest state capitols.

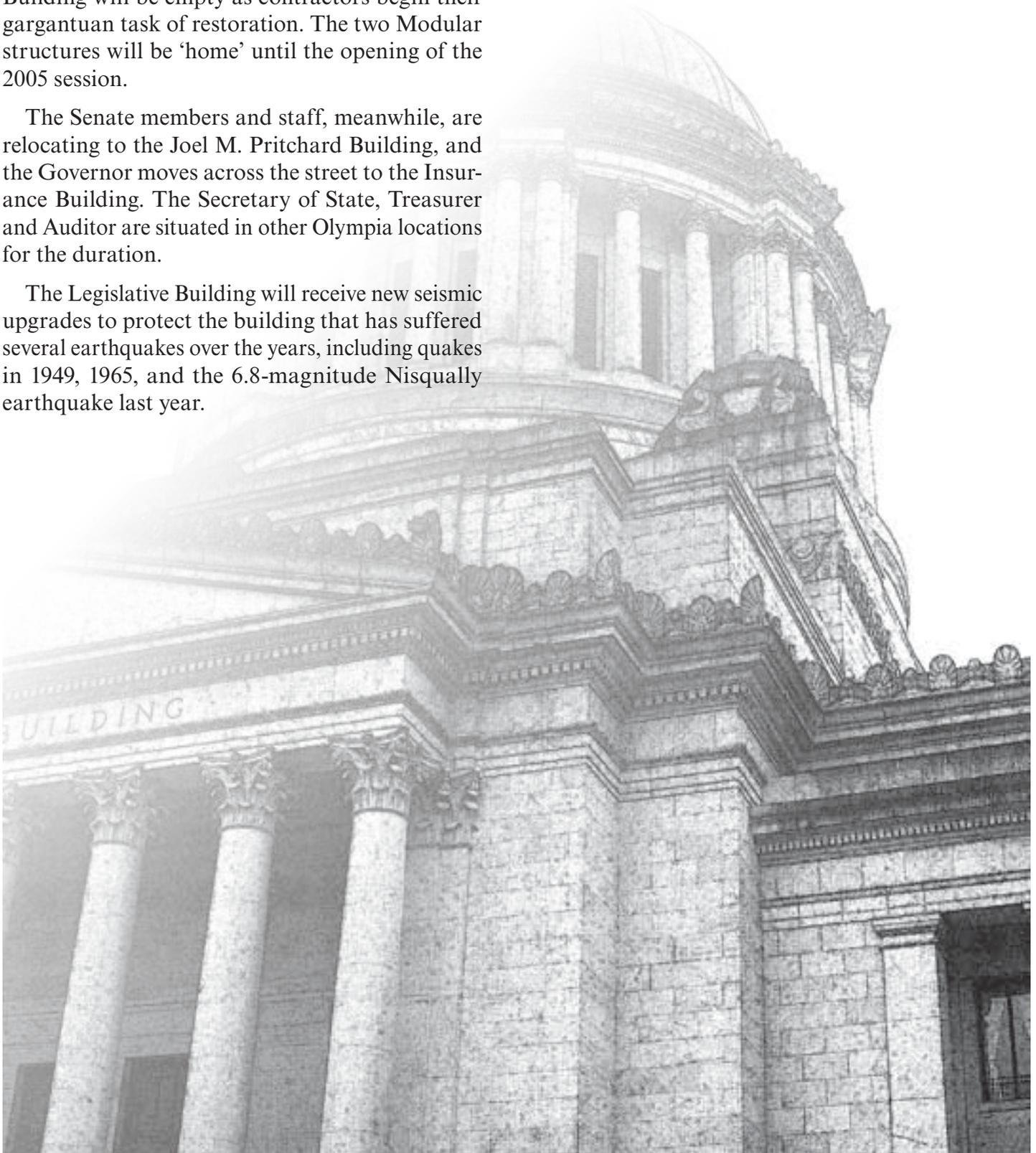
Fourth-floor members and staff of the Legisla-

tive Building begin the move to the newly erected Modular Building #1 this week. That will be followed in the next few weeks by House leadership and administration moving to Modular Building #2.

By June 1, it is expected that the Legislative Building will be empty as contractors begin their gargantuan task of restoration. The two Modular structures will be 'home' until the opening of the 2005 session.

The Senate members and staff, meanwhile, are relocating to the Joel M. Pritchard Building, and the Governor moves across the street to the Insurance Building. The Secretary of State, Treasurer and Auditor are situated in other Olympia locations for the duration.

The Legislative Building will receive new seismic upgrades to protect the building that has suffered several earthquakes over the years, including quakes in 1949, 1965, and the 6.8-magnitude Nisqually earthquake last year.





Helen Sommers enjoys her favorite 'art bench' in Seattle's Urban Park at Fourth Avenue and Lenora Street.



Chapter 19

The 2005 session – Gregoire/Rossi governor race still undecided

Monahan: The 2005 session of the Legislature got off to a very interesting start. The House Democrats picked up three more seats in the election for a 55-43 majority. And Democrats in the Senate regained the majority in the Senate with 26 seats to the Republican's 23 seats. Republican's had control of the Senate the previous two years with a precarious 25-24 majority.

But the race for Governor was much different! When Gov. Gary Locke concluded two terms as Governor, he did not seek re-election.

Democrats selected **Attorney General Christine Gregoire** as their candidate for Governor and **Sen. Dino Rossi**, the Chair of the Senate Ways and Means Committee in 2003-04, was the Republican nominee. The outcome of the race for governor was startling! With about 2.9 million votes cast, after the final count, followed by a mandatory 'hand recount,' Gregoire was declared victorious by just 133 votes!

Representative Sommers: Oh yes. That was such a stressful time! I remember that Chris Gregoire was sworn in as Governor, but the Republican Party took the issue of the count to Court. It took almost seven months, but the Judge ruled in Gregoire's favor and her election stood!

Monahan: Yes, Chelan County Superior **Judge John Bridges** upheld the election of Gov. Christine Gregoire on June 6 after a nine-day trial in Wenatchee. Sen. Dino Rossi, who brought the suit seeking a 'revote' in one of the closest

elections ever, announced later that day that he would not appeal the judge's ruling to the State Supreme Court.

Representative Sommers: Well, I do recall a mood during session of great uncertainty as we awaited the outcome of the court battles. Despite it all, I think Governor Gregoire put all the anxiety aside, and served responsibly, still not knowing what the outcome might be! It took nearly seven months before it was finally resolved. It was such a heavy weight lifted when the issue was resolved and Gregoire was proclaimed



Sen. Dino Rossi
2004, 2008 candidate
for Governor

the winner. It was a win for her and for all of us in the Legislature. You said it was just 133 votes?

Monahan: Yes, the final count was 133 votes that elected Governor Chris Gregoire.

At the time, everyone thought it had to be the closest governor's race in U.S. history. But, I did a little research back then, and learned that there was an even closer election for governor than this election. In Minnesota back in 1962, **Gov. Karl Rolvaag** defeated incumbent **Gov. Elmer Anderson** by just 91 votes!

Representative Sommers: Well, I know that the count probably laid heavy on Chris' mind, but I think she took her responsibility seriously and served as a strong governor during her first term. But she had to be very relieved four years later when she beat Dino Rossi a second time by a wide margin. She must have felt that she did well in the first four years and winning a second term verified that.

Monahan: What are your thoughts about Chris Gregoire being elected twice as Governor of Washington?

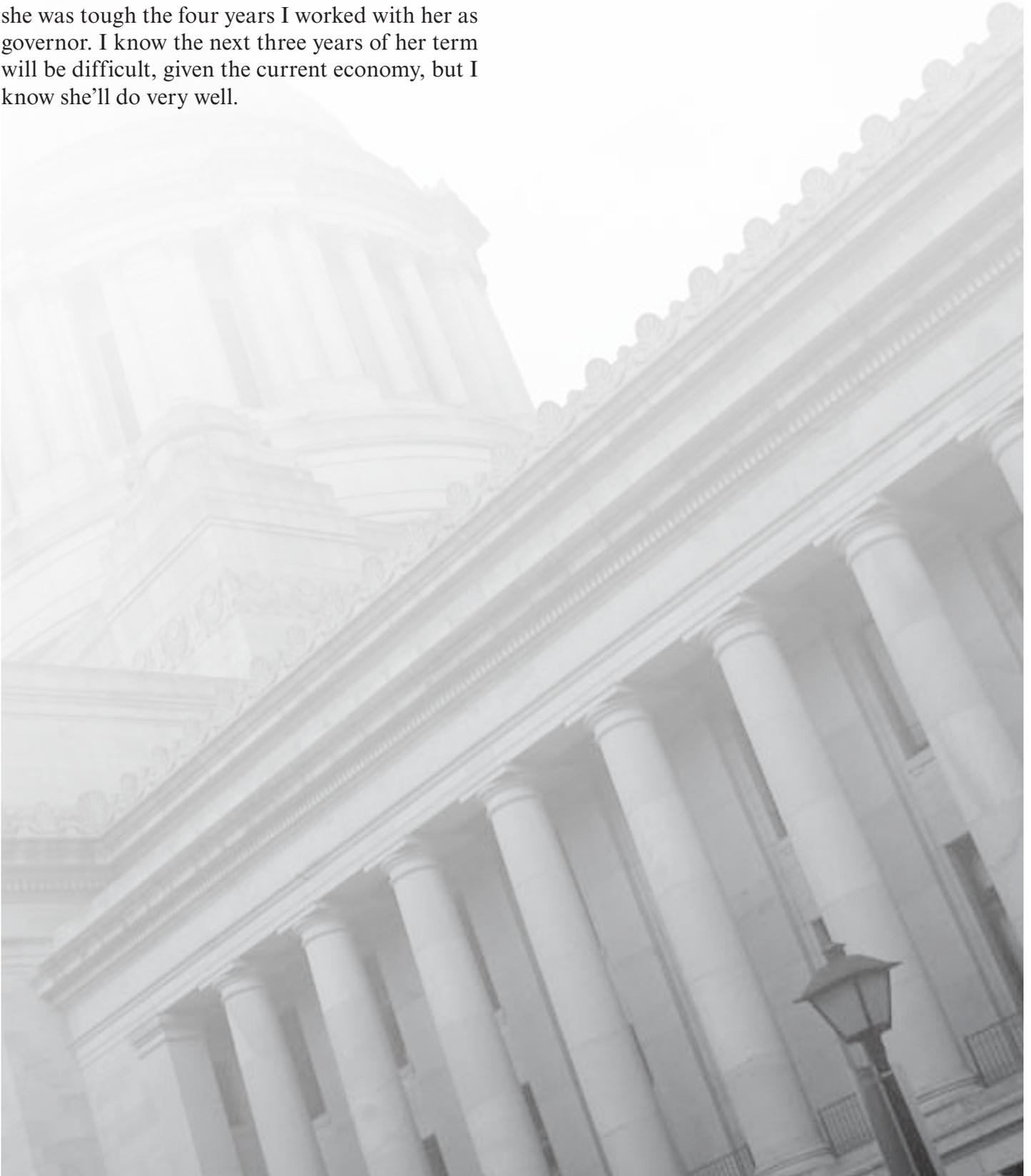
Representative Sommers: Of course I was very pleased that we had another woman governor – remember we had Dixy Lee Ray – and Gregoire was of course a very different style governor than Ray! Chris was very brilliant; and we worked with her very well. She was an attorney who had served 12 years as the state's Attorney General. While her first election was such a narrow win, I am delighted that she had a strong decisive reelection victory in 2008.

With her background as Attorney General and



With a hand placed over her heart, **Christine Gregoire** acknowledges her family sitting in the gallery after she was sworn in as governor in the Legislature in Olympia (Jan 13, 2005).
Mike Urban/P-I

Governor, she's an outstanding leader for Washington. I worked well with her in so many areas, including, of course, the budget issues every two years. She is a very good political person, and she worked so well with legislators. She was strong and she was tough the four years I worked with her as governor. I know the next three years of her term will be difficult, given the current economy, but I know she'll do very well.



Chapter 20 Washington's beautiful Capital Campus



Aerial view the Legislative Building (center), the John L. O'Brien Bldg. (front left); the John Cherberg Bldg. (front right), and the Temple of Justice (Supreme Court) Bldg. (top)

Monahan: While we're on the subject, I remember you had great interest in the Capital Campus, the Legislative Building, and the other buildings, the monuments, the campus itself and also the trees of the campus. Throughout your 36 years as a representative, you were profoundly involved in the campus, and I remember working with you in 1992 because you wanted to put together a book on the 'historic trees' on campus.

That book has had several reprints over the years and is still used today for visitors to the campus.

Representative Sommers: Oh, yes, I had and have great interest in the spectacular campus. I think one of the things that impresses me is that our campus is so beautifully developed compared to many other state's capitals. In Olympia, our campus with the many buildings, monuments and beautiful landscaping and trees was so beautifully designed.

As we said, the domed Legislative Building is the centerpiece, and of course, the magnificent



Governors Mansion turned 100 years old in 2010

Governor's Mansion, which celebrated its 100th Anniversary in 2008! There's also the Temple of Justice where the Supreme Court meets; and the many monuments on campus. As a state, we certainly have benefitted from the forethought in the great architectural work, design and buildings. For most of my career, my office was in the John L. O'Brien Building, which is now involved in a major remodel program.



A Bigleaf Maple, just one of many monuments and trees on the wonderful Capital Campus

The Capital Campus

The Washington State Capital Campus, completed in 1928, included some of the last buildings to be built in the "America Beautiful" movement. The ornate Washington State Legislative Building, the dominant structure on the campus, has the fourth-highest free-standing dome in the world, at 287-feet. St. Peter's Basilica in Rome; Sancta Sophia in Istanbul; and the U.S. Capitol in Washington D.C. are the only taller domes.

Among the most recent memorial additions are the World War II Memorial (corner of Capital Way & 13th); The Vietnam Veteran's Memorial (east of the Insurance Building) and the memorial to Korean

War Veterans on the plaza east of the main campus.

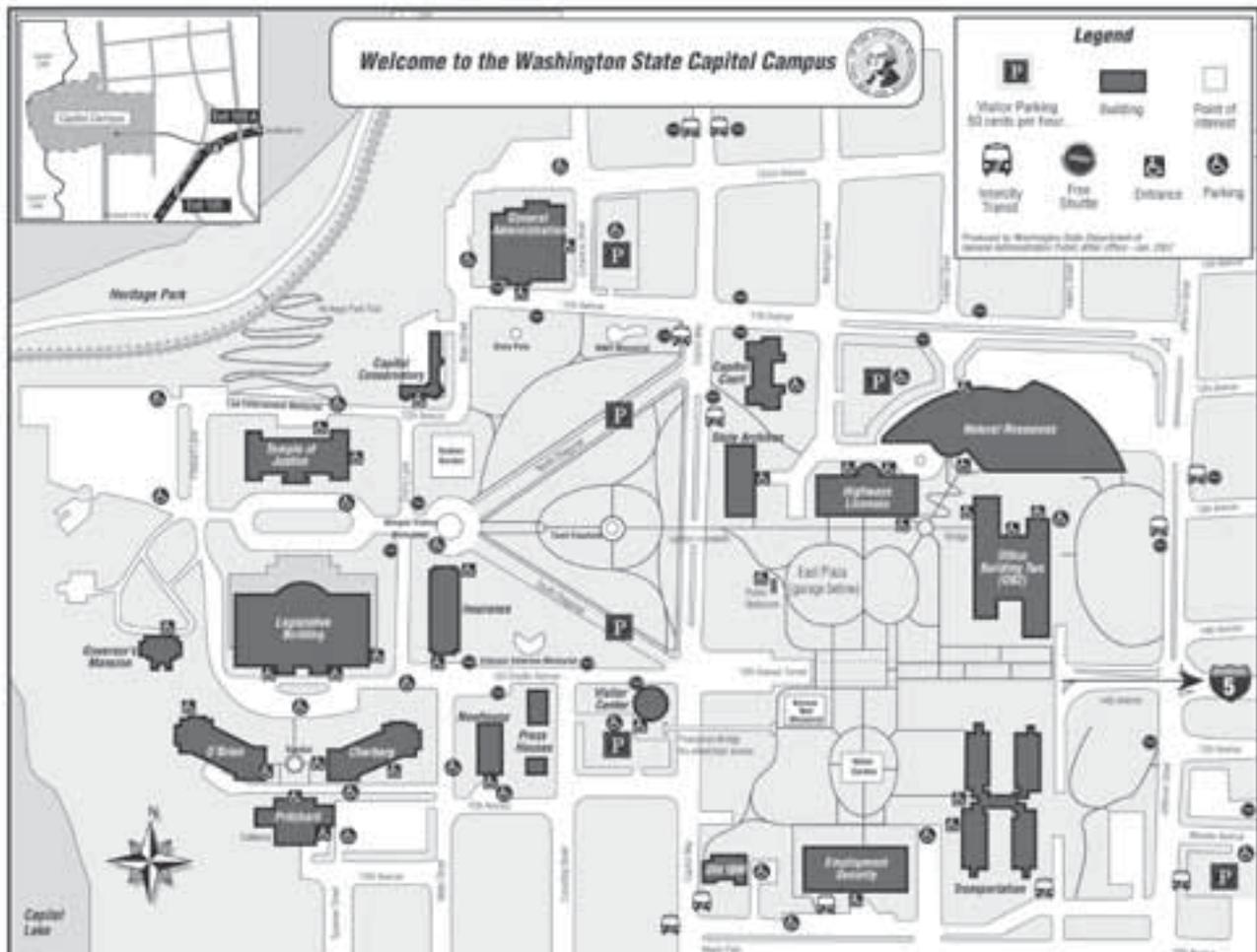
“Trees of the Washington State Capital Campus”

It was 1993 when **Rep. Helen Sommers** brought a University of Washington arborist to Olympia to identify and photograph the many beautiful and unique trees on the 54-acre Capital Campus.

Helen requested a booklet be printed to provide a ‘self-guided’ tour of 20 of the most interesting trees on campus. The booklet includes the largest English Oak in the United States; the “Moon Tree,” a Douglas Fir which, as a seedling, accompanied astronaut **Alan Shepard** on the Apollo-14 flight to the moon in January, 1971; an American White Elm, which is a cutting from a tree under which George Washington took command of the Continental Army; and a California Sequoia dedicated to Washington’s first woman governor, Dixy Lee Ray (1976-81).



A tree you won't see on the campus is the 110-year old Atlas Cedar that graced the campus for 70 years. The tree crashed to the ground on December 13, 2001 in an Olympia wind/rain storm. (Revised story from the January 2002 "In the House" newsletter)



Chapter 21

The History of Women in the Legislature

Monahan: We've talked throughout this 'Helen Sommers Oral History' about women's growing involvement in Washington State government. This year (2010), Washington acknowledged the 100 year anniversary of the State Constitution granting women the right to vote! When you were first elected to the House, it had only been 62 years since the state granted women's right to vote!

Representative Sommers: Yes, it was a long time coming. The role of women in government in Washington was slow to come, but the progress has been very significant, certainly more so than most other states. In 1972, the year I was elected, there had only been eight women in the House and no women in the Senate! It was largely the 'good old boy's club!'

When I took office in 1973, the number of women House members grew by four, so there then were 12 women in the 98-member House, but still none in the Senate! In 1975, four women were elected to the 49-member Senate and the House female count in the Legislature grew to 14 women and 113 men!

But, each election, the numbers of women increased in Olympia. In 1983, we had 20 women in the House and eight in the Senate, so women were now 29 percent of the 147-member Legislature. In 1993 it was up to 41 women in the House and 17 in the Senate, which was nearly 40 percent! In my final term, 2007-08, there were 32 women in the House and 20 in the Senate!

And women have advanced to very significant leadership roles in both chambers! **Rep. Lynn Kessler** is Majority Leader of the House and **Sen. Lisa Brown** is Majority Leader of the Senate. **Sen. Rosa Franklin** is Senate President Pro Tempore. I chaired the Appropriations Committee in the House and

Sen. Margarita Prentice is Chair of the Senate Ways & Means Committee in the Senate. **Rep. Judy Clibborn** and **Sen. Mary Margaret Haugen** are the Chairs of the House and the Senate Transportation Committees, respectively.

Washington's Governor is **Chris Gregoire** and our two U.S. Senators are **Senator Patty Murray** and **Senator Maria Cantwell**. Washington State has certainly been a leader in the role of women in government. And, I should also mention the first female U.S. Speaker of the House is **Rep. Nancy Pelosi**. That's a dramatic change for women!



Patty Murray (left) served one term in the State Senate (1989-93). She won U.S. Senate seat vacated by Sen. Slade Gorton in 1992. **Maria Cantwell** (center) served in the state House from 1987-1993. She was elected to one term in the U.S. House of Representatives (1993-94) In 2000, she was elected to the U.S. Senate. **Governor Gregoire** (right) is in her second term as Washington's Governor. She was the State's a first woman Attorney General, and the State's second woman Governor. Gov. **Dixy Lee Ray** (1976-80) was the first.



House
Majority Leader
**Representative
Lynn Kessler**

Senate
Majority Leader
**Senator
Lisa Brown**

Senate
President Pro Tem
**Senator
Rosa Franklin**

Editor Note: Representative Kessler and Senator Franklin both announced in 2010 they will retire at the end of their terms. Franklin served two years in the House (1991-1993); and 18 years in the Senate (1993-2011). Kessler served 18 years in the House.



Rep. Catherine May, Washington State's first woman in the U.S. Congress, co-sponsored legislation to provide women with equal pay for equal work. At this White House ceremony President Kennedy signed into law the "Equal Pay Act of 1963." Catherine May is shown directly behind the President. At May's left is Vice President Johnson. May served in the State House of Representatives from 1952-1958 from the 14th District – Yakima. She served in Congress from 1959-1971.



Julia Butler Hansen (D-Cathlamet) served in the state House from 1939-1960; and was elected to the U.S. House in 1960 – 1974 from Washington's 3rd District.

Hansen was the first woman to serve as Speaker Pro Tempore in Olympia (1955-61).



Former Rep. Jennifer Belcher (D-22nd District) is the only woman to be elected Washington state Commissioner of Public Lands. Belcher served in the House from 1983-1993. In 1992 she was elected to the Lands Commissioner position and served two terms (1993-2001)



Former Senate Majority Leader Jeannette Hayner was first elected to the House in 1972 (same year Helen was elected), from the 16th Legislative District. In 1977 Hayner was elected to the Senate, where she went on to serve four terms (16 years). In Senate, Hayner served as Republican Leader (1979-80 and 1982-87) and she served as Senate Majority leader from 1981-82 and again 1987-1992). She retired from the Senate in 1993.



In 1854 as Washington Territory was being formed, the Territorial Convention nearly granted women the right to vote, but the women’s suffrage proposal was defeated by a single vote. In 1881, the Territorial House passed legislation granting women the right to vote, but it failed in the Council on a 5 to 7 vote. The issue was debated every session thereafter. The constant protesting and pushing by the Washington Equal Suffrage Association, organized by Susan B. Anthony and Abigail Scott Duniway in 1871, led the Territorial Legislature to grant full voting rights to women in 1883. But in 1887, the Territorial Supreme Court overturned that law. Another law was enacted in 1888, but that was also quickly overturned. The efforts of women voters opposing the sale of liquor led others to fight to remove their voting rights. The State Constitutional Convention of 1889 did not include women’s suffrage in its constitutional proposal to Congress. The questions of voting rights for women, prohibition and siting the state capitol were submitted as separate ballot actions and the male voters disapproved of women’s suffrage and prohibition.

In 1910, voters in Washington approved Amendment 6 to the State Constitution granting women the right to vote. This broke a 14-year gridlock in the national woman’s suffrage crusade; the state became the fifth in the nation to enfranchise women - the first on the Pacific coast. In 1920, the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution won the necessary two-thirds ratification from state legislatures and women’s suffrage became the law of the land on August 26.

Nationally, the number of female lawmakers in state legislatures steadily climbed after women first entered state office in the 1920s and gained more with the women’s movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, according to research by the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University. In 1998 and 2004, Washington State had the distinction of electing the highest percentage of women to its Statehouse, 40 percent in 1998 and 37 percent in 2004. The state consistently ranks among the top three of all states.

The Numbers of Women in the Washington State Legislature Over the Years

Year	Senate	House	Total	Members	Pct.
1889-1911					
1913	0	2	2	139	1.40%
1915	0	0	0	139	0.00%
1917	0	1	1	139	0.70%
1919	0	1	1	139	0.70%
1921	0	1	1	138	0.70%
1923	1	4	5	138	3.60%
1925	1	3	4	139	2.90%
1927	1	1	2	139	1.40%
1929	1	4	5	139	3.60%
1931	0	3	3	139	2.20%
1933	1	5	6	145	4.10%
1935	2	9	11	145	7.60%
1937	3	6	9	145	6.20%
1939	4	4	8	145	5.50%
1941	4	4	8	145	5.50%
1943	3	10	13	145	9.00%
1945	1	7	8	145	5.50%
1947	0	3	3	145	2.10%
1949	0	7	7	145	4.80%
1951	0	7	7	145	4.80%
1953	0	9	9	145	6.20%
1955	0	9	9	145	6.20%
1957	0	12	12	145	8.30%
1959	0	10	10	148	6.80%
1961	1	9	10	148	6.80%
1963	1	9	10	148	6.80%
1965	1	10	11	148	7.40%
1967	1	7	8	148	5.40%

Year	Senate	House	Total	Members	Pct.
1969	0	7	7	148	4.70%
1971	0	8	8	148	5.40%
1973	0	12	12	147	8.20%
1975	4	14	18	147	12.20%
1977	6	16	22	147	15.00%
1979	7	20	27	147	18.40%
1981	8	26	34	147	23.10%
1983	8	20	28	147	19.00%
1985	7	28	35	147	23.80%
1987	7	30	37	147	25.20%
1989	10	32	42	147	28.60%
1991	12	35	47	147	32.00%
1993	17	41	58	147	39.50%
1995	20	38	58	147	39.50%
1996	21	39	60	147	40.80%
1997	23	35	58	147	39.50%
1998	22	35	57	147	38.80%
1999	23	37	60	147	40.80%
2000	23	37	60	147	40.80%
2001	23	34	57	147	38.80%
2002	23	34	57	147	38.80%
2003	21	33	54	147	36.70%
2004	23	31	54	147	36.70%
2005	20	29	49	147	33.30%
2006	20	29	49	147	33.30%
2007	20	28	48	147	32.70%
2008	20	32	52	147	35.40%
2009	19	28	47	147	32.00%

Chapter 22

Governor Locke left after two terms – but he has more to give!

Monahan: When Governor Gary Locke's term ended in 2005, you had served for 33 years in the House. Given that Locke had to work with a Republican majority in both chambers during much of his tenure as governor, how would you rate his overall success?



Governor Locke

a third term, I'm sure he'd have won. He started with a Legislature that was controlled by the Republicans for much of his two terms plus three years with a tie in the House! So, he probably didn't accomplish all he had hoped. But, given the circumstances, he had a wonderful career as Governor of Washington.

Representative Sommers: I think Gary Locke did an excellent job in his two terms as Governor. If he had wanted

Gary had a lot of background experience in government in general and he was able to handle dissent and differences. That is a major part of being a leader in government. He had the respect of legislators on both sides of the aisle, and he worked with them all quite well. I'm sure there were many things Gary would have liked to have been able to accomplish, but it's very difficult with a Legislature that is of the other party or in a tie! But, Gary certainly came out on top; and when



Representative Helen Sommers – 1997

Ranking Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee

he left the Governor's office after eight years, it was with high respect of legislators on both sides of the aisles and in both chambers; and certainly with high appreciation from many citizens of our state.

Monahan: After Gary left office in 2004, he practiced law in Seattle. But, in 2009, with the election of **President Barack Obama**, Washington's former Gov. Gary Locke was appointed by the new president to be U.S. Secretary of Commerce. As we talk about your career and the careers of many of your colleagues for this Oral History, what are your thoughts about Gary Locke who is now the Secretary of Commerce?



President Barack Obama names former **Gov. Locke** as the new U.S. Secretary of Commerce (2009)

Representative Sommers: Through his legislative career, I knew Gary Locke was destined for higher office and to continue on in positions of extraordinary power. He served six terms in the House (1982-1994); He was elected King County Executive (1994-97), and then was elected Governor of Washington twice by landslide elections (1997-2005). Then, he followed-up as the U.S. Secretary of Commerce!

Gary is very personable; very bright; very articulate – and he is also a minority. All those qualities made him an outstanding candidate for political office and also an excellent leader. These qualities gave him many opportunities during his entire career. He just kept moving ahead in everything he did.

As a state, we've got to be very proud of his position, and I think he will be an enormous benefit to President Obama's Administration in his role as Secretary of Commerce.



Washington's **Gary Locke** and **Ron Sims** make the cover of *Law & Politics* magazine! (Courtesy of Key Professional Media, Inc.)

Monahan: In addition to Gary Locke as Secretary of Commerce, **King County Executive Ron Sims** was confirmed as Deputy Secretary to the Department of Housing and Urban Development by President Obama in 2010. You knew Ron Sims early in his career. What are your thoughts of his new position in the Obama Administration?

Representative Sommers: I remember when **Ron Sims** worked for **Senator George Fleming** in the 1980s. I didn't know him well but I did know him and work with him on occasion when he was on the King County Council and then when he became King County Executive. I worked for the Council, but that was before Ron was a Council member. He was a wonderful choice for such a significant post in the Obama administration.

He has a great background; he's very intelligent and articulate. I think he brings outstanding experience to be the Deputy Secretary of HUD.

Monahan: Same question for **Seattle Police Chief Gil Kerlikowske**, who Obama appointed to head the Office of National Drug Control Policy — otherwise known as the country's "Drug Czar" Do you know

him and if so, what are your thoughts expectations for him in that role?

Representative Sommers: I'd never had any dealing with Kerlikowske. But I know he's had an amazing career in law enforcement. He served Seattle very well.



In Feb. 2009, **Seattle Police Chief Kerlikowske** was named Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy by President Barack Obama.

The appointments of Gary Locke, Ron Sims and Gil Kerlikowske and of course, Senators Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell give Washington State a lot of stature in the Washington, D.C. Now Congressman Norm Dicks is the Dean of our Delegation after 34 years representing Washington's needs in Washington D.C.



Rep. Helen Sommers and **King County Executive Ron Sims** visit in the House Chamber in 1999

Chapter 23

How the Legislature changed in 36-year career

Monahan: How do you see the change in the power of the Legislature over your 36-year career, comparing 1973 and now?

Representative Sommers: With a Legislature that met only a few months every year or two and temporary staff, the Legislature didn't have near the power of the executive branch. When session was over, we'd leave Olympia and the executive branch was totally in charge. But the big change for the Legislature came with a full-time professional staff that was able to research issues from a legislative perspective, which was often a different perspective than the executive branch.

Legislators spent more time year-round with ongoing sessions and interim gatherings. And, certainly technology also was one of the equalizers! Technology gave us ready access to all kinds of information. The various state departments put out information and shared it with both the executive and the legislative branches of Government.

The members and the staff were so much better prepared and had access to knowledge. We had the ability to mandate the way the information was presented and to improve the access to information. Technology made very significant changes to the process that made the Legislature more effective and an equal partner in governing. Before the 1970s, the Legislature was a very weak branch of government because all the information funneled down from the executive branch. That changed.

Monahan: Compare the way the two parties – the majority and the minority – worked together then, and how they work together now. What are the major changes over the years you served?

Representative Sommers: Camaraderie in 1970s-80s was very different then than now. There were friend-

ships and congeniality on both sides of the aisle. Social gatherings at the end of the day brought legislators together regardless of their party! There was nothing wrong with legislators from both parties being friends. The dynamics are very different now.

The power of those in charge – leadership and chairs – also has changed. Year-round access and information certainly gives more power. Those with decision making authority are in control of the process. The relationships, including friendships between the majority and the minority, have diminished. Sadly, politics has changed in so many ways.

Monahan: With the changing role of the Legislature as a more equal branch of government than in the years before you were elected, what are your thoughts on a full-time Legislature with fewer members?

I read an article by **Shelby Scates**, in the Seattle



Don Brazier

Weekly (1999) "Missing the bad old days." Scates interviewed **Don Brazier**, a former legislator (R-Yakima-1967-69), Chair of the Utilities & Transportation Commission, and a member of the Public Disclosure Commission. Brazier also was a noted historian and author with his books "*History of the Washington Legislature 1854-1963*" and his second

volume covering 1965-1982.

At that time, Brazier said Washington had the second-largest Legislature in the western states. He suggested reducing the size of the Legislature and making it full-time with a commensurate salary increase for fewer elected members. He suggested, at the time, a 64-member House and 32-member Senate. What are your thoughts on a smaller, full-time Legislature and how do you think that would work?

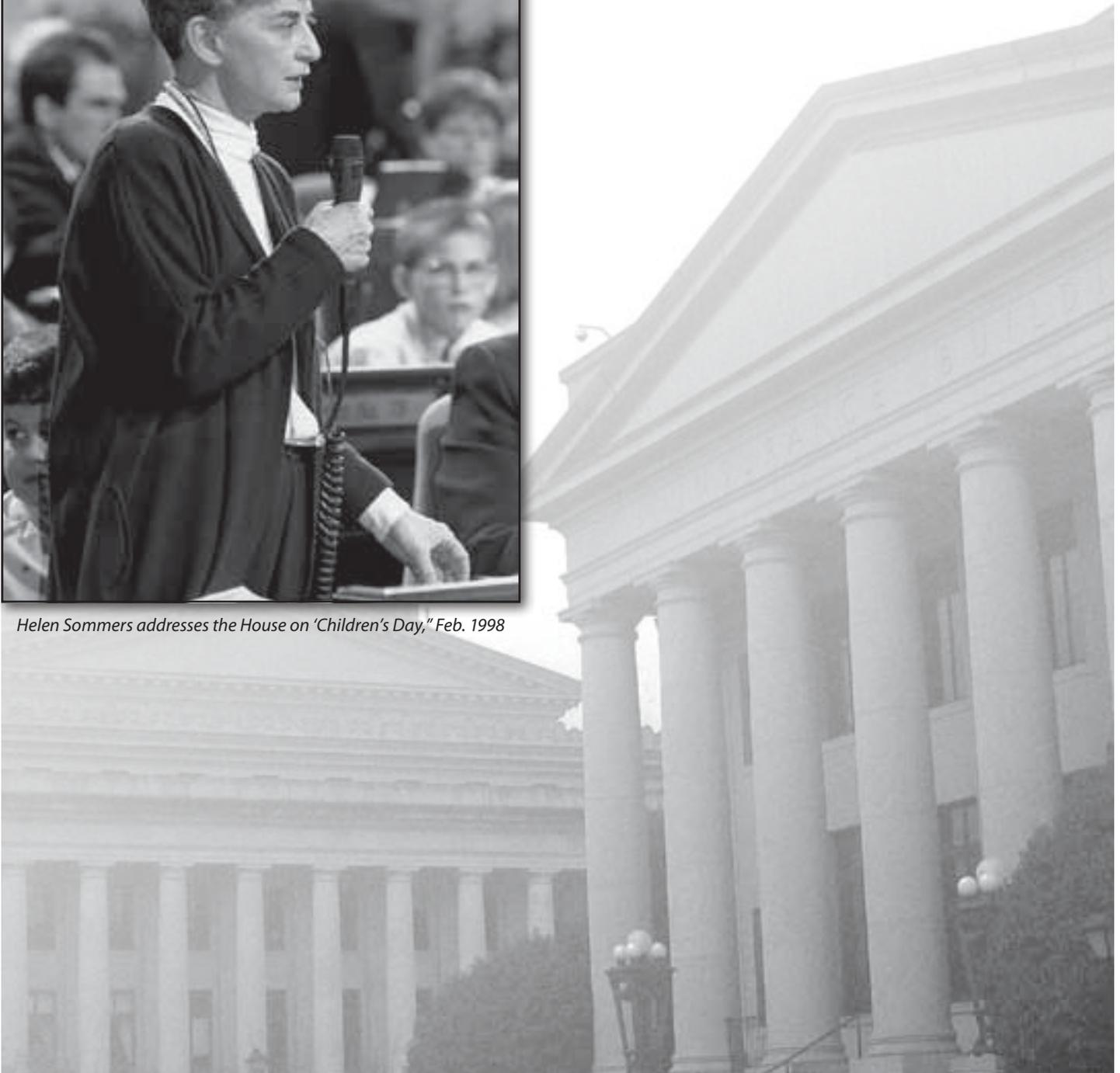
Representative Sommers: It's too bad that we set aside the idea of a smaller number, but a full-time Legislature. I agree with the concept.

But one of the major steps we did take was the professional full-time staff. That was a huge change for us, and certainly toward a more efficient, better prepared, more knowledgeable Legislature. The change meant legislators were more in the loop than ever before. Legislators are involved with Olympia

many times during the year for committee weekends and such. And the professional, non-partisan committee staff, a full-time chief clerk, the administrative staff, and also partisan Caucus staff, I think these changes gave the Legislature a more-equal footing. But the idea of a smaller, full-time Legislature certainly could have made a big difference.



Helen Sommers addresses the House on 'Children's Day,' Feb. 1998



Chapter 24

2009 Session begins without Helen Sommers

Monahan: In the 2009 session – the first session in 36 years in which you were no longer a member of the House – the Legislature approved and the Governor signed the creation of an underground tunnel to replace the Alaskan Way Viaduct. It was 2001 when the Nisqually Earthquake put the Viaduct at great risk, and you have long been a proponent of fixing the Viaduct before another earthquake caused even greater problems for Seattle and King County. Each year you focused your committee and your legislative efforts to resolve the concerns for the Viaduct. What are your thoughts on the 2009 session legislation on the Viaduct?

Representative Sommers: I've never been an enthusiast of the concept of the tunnel – for several reasons. There's no more spectacular view of the waterfront than from the Viaduct! You cannot get the same view from the ground. You don't get anywhere near the view or the grasp of the beauty of the Sound, the water and the ships! This is my personal opinion so I supported a major repair of the existing Viaduct as it stands.

The underground tunnel leaves a lot of major questions for me. As I understand it now, the Viaduct will go underground downtown along 1st or 2nd Avenues, with entrances in SODO near the stadiums and over by Mercer Street, in the Seattle Center area.

The early discussion had focused on the tunnel virtually at the water's edge, the 'cut and cover tunnel.' That concept was of great concern to me. But, still, construction below sea level has huge complications including the need to build a major sea-wall. With the construction of a tunnel, there's the question of earthquakes in our area. There is the probability of future major earthquakes. So I've never been a proponent of the tunnel, but that is the direction it appears to be going. I just want what's best for Seattle.



The Alaskan Way Viaduct, looking southeast

Chapter 25

Sales Tax vs. Income Tax & Referendum/Initiative

Monahan: The issue of a state sales tax vs. a state income tax has been a difficult issue going back more than 80 years. In the 1930s, Washington State adopted the sales tax as a method of raising revenue to operate state government. Over the past 80 or so years, the state sales taxes grew from about 3-cents on the dollar to today's 8.5 percent (plus or minus, depending on the city and the county). What are your thoughts on the tax system in Washington State?

Representative Sommers: The viewpoint is that the Income Tax falls more on the higher-income payers across the board. Although, that may not be quite as true or of the same magnitude as we experienced in the past, people with higher incomes buy a lot more things where they pay a significant sales tax.

The issue of the Sales Tax also has been controversial throughout those 80 years. To many legislators over the decades, the concept of a sales tax is a problem because it affects the state's lowest-paid workers who are required to pay the same amount as the richest residents of Washington.

An income tax is seen by some as less discriminatory toward people who have the lowest wages, but it is opposed by the higher-income taxpayers who don't

want to pay taxes based on their annual revenue.

Monahan: For all 36 years you spent in the House representing the 36th District, you have supported the income tax as a more fair approach to paying taxes based on one's ability to pay. Many times, since you were elected in 1973, the Legislature has tried to deal with the issue of the income tax, to no avail.

Representative Sommers: Shortly before I came to the House, Governor Dan Evans in 1970 proposed an income tax by amending the state constitution to enact a graduated income tax which would benefit those whose income is the least. It passed the Legislature, but it was not passed by the voters.

Over the years, a number of ballot measures have made it very difficult to raise taxes. Tim Eyman's Initiative-960 requires a two-thirds vote for the Legislature to raise taxes, and that makes it almost impossible. It's very difficult to get public support for taxes, when perception is: 'that will cost me more.'



That's something this state has dealt with for a long time and it's still not resolved. The sales tax has been a fairly good method to raise money for state and local government programs, but it is harder on the low and middle-income people.

Monahan: The Initiative/Referendum process to allow ballot initiatives was established by Washington voters in 1912. The citizens of Washington nearly 100 years ago followed the 'populism' of Oregon with the creation of the

Initiative/Referendum.

Discuss your view of the Initiative/Referendum as it is in Washington. Has Tim Eyman's career of creating initiatives as a personal business enterprise been detrimental to the efforts of the Legislature

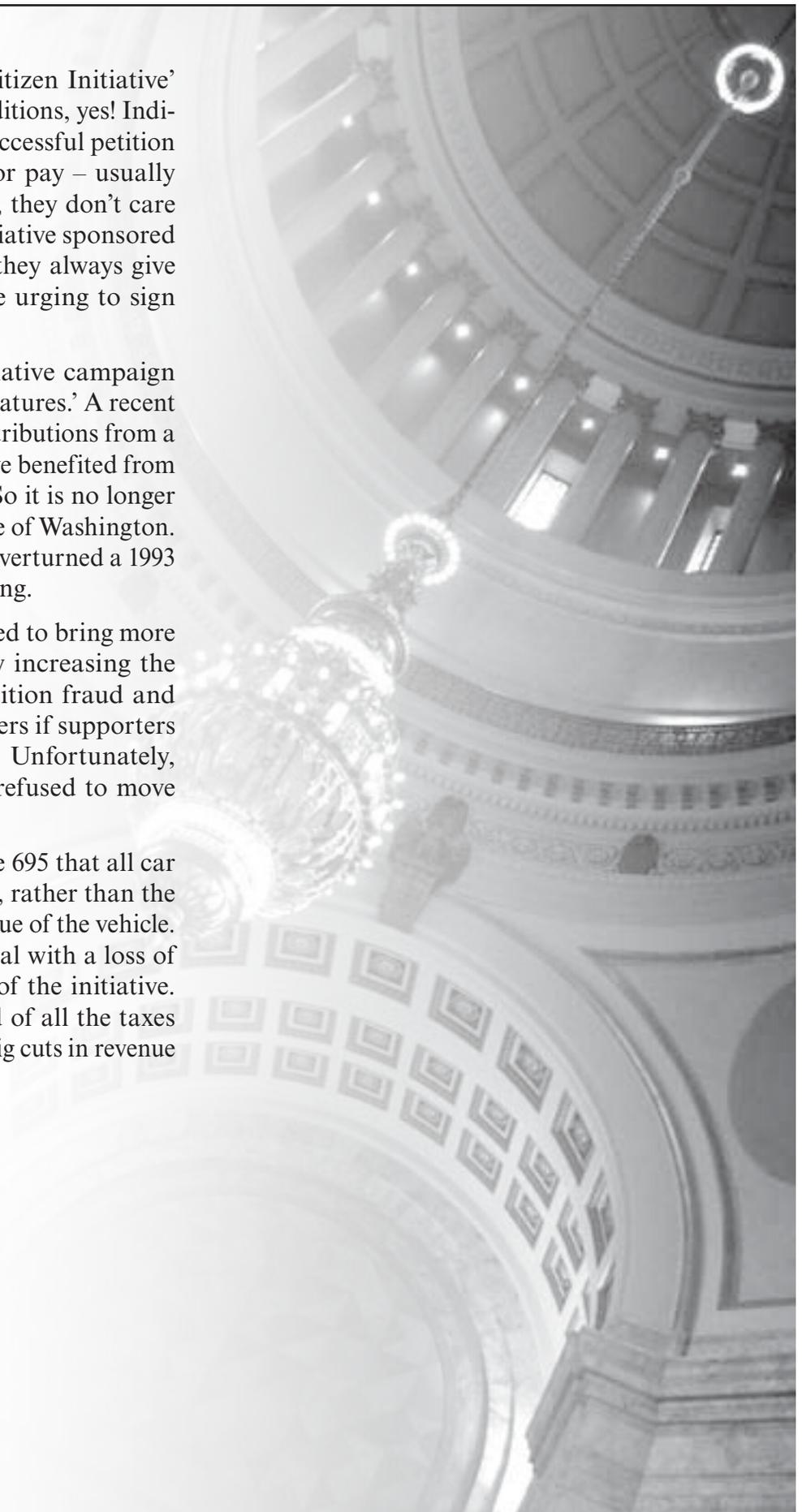
to meet its ability to govern?

Representative Sommers: Our ‘Citizen Initiative’ process is losing its grassroots traditions, yes! Individuals collecting signatures in successful petition drivers are now often working for pay – usually one dollar for each signature. So, they don’t care about the negative sides of an initiative sponsored as a business, and I don’t think they always give honest answers to people they’re urging to sign the petitions.

The 1995 property rights initiative campaign turned in hundreds of ‘forged signatures.’ A recent initiative drive was funded by contributions from a single individual. Another initiative benefited from large out-of-state contributions! So it is no longer intended for the good of the people of Washington. Tragically for citizens, the courts overturned a 1993 law to ban paid signature-gathering.

In 1996, a bi-partisan group tried to bring more accountability to the process by increasing the fines and penalties for voter-petition fraud and by requiring disclosure to the voters if supporters paid for collection of signatures. Unfortunately, the House Republican majority refused to move the proposals out of committee.

In 1999, voters passed Initiative 695 that all car tabs cost \$30 for the state’s driver, rather than the system of licenses based on the value of the vehicle. In the 2000 session, we had to deal with a loss of \$1.1 billion in revenues because of the initiative. That was a loss of over one-third of all the taxes dedicated to transportation, plus big cuts in revenue for local governments.



Chapter 26

Looking back at Helen Sommers' 36-year career

Monahan: Your 36 year career in the Washington State House of Representatives ranks second only to **Rep. John L. O'Brien**, the former-Speaker and Speaker Pro Tempore who had 51 years in the Legislature (1939-1992, with a two-year hiatus in 1947-49).



Rep. Helen Sommers bids farewell

During your 36 years – 1973-2009 – did you consider seeking election to higher office? Your 18 consecutive

elections to the House showed you to be ‘invincible’ in your district.

For example, during your tenure in the House, 36th District, Senators included **John Murray**, **Ray Moore** and the current Senator, **Jeanne Kohl-Wells**. Did you give any thought to running for the Senate? Or, perhaps a government position in King County, Governor or Congress?

Representative Sommers: There were a couple of opportunities to run for the Senate, and I think most people would have done that. But, I was Chair of five House committees, including the House Appropriations Committee, so I did not want to give up those positions with that authority and that influence, so I did not choose to run for the Senate. Now, I could have been in the Senate long enough to pick up influence there, too, but I was very happy in the House. I liked the way it ran, I liked the number of people and so on, so that was my reason to stay in the House.

Monahan: I heard about an occasion or two during your service in the Legislature that members had encouraged you to run for Speaker of the House, but you didn't. Had you been encouraged? And, if

so, did you give it any thought? What persuaded you to not seek to be the first woman to be Speaker of the House?

Representative Sommers: Some people did ask me to go for it, but, I did feel more comfortable in the significant influence in the position of Chair of the Appropriations Committee that I had. I felt that my personality, the way I function and my background, were better suited to lead the House Appropriations Committee. After all, chairing that committee does give one a lot of influence in decision making authority. And that's why I decided I was happy in that role, so I did not seek to be House Speaker. I had the position I wanted.

Monahan: Another very significant event in Washington State history was in 2003, after a Supreme Court decision came down overturning our state's very popular ‘Blanket Primary’ election process. The primary had been in force in our state for some 70 years! The two major political parties in the state opposed the Blanket Primary, and they wanted state law to require that voters choose between Democrat or Republican ballots in the primary election. The citizens of Washington were outraged, and they demanded their right to cross political lines to vote for candidates regardless of their party.

Representative Sommers: Oh, yes! Our voters are free thinkers. The “Open” or “Blanket Primary” was strongly supported by all voters. They liked to move around the ballot in the primary, and they still do! So, that court decision might have been appropriate technically, but it sure didn't fit Washington voter's preferences. The people of Washington loved their right to choose without regard to party, and as you point out, they voted that way for the previous 70 years!

We were one of several states with that kind of Open Primary election where voters could pick and choose and our voters loved it; but when the Supreme Court struck down California's Open Primary, the political parties in our state were quick to act to require Washington to come up with a new method that would be constitutional.

There was one election year 2006 where Washington citizens, begrudgingly, had to request a Democrat or Republican ballot in the primary. The people really didn't like that, and I believe many

voters refused to participate.

The best solution that came to the forefront was the “Top Two Primary,” which so far is acceptable to the courts, but the parties are fighting that, too. The ‘top two’ is a variation of the open but it gives people choices.

In some ways it is a little bit surprising that the courts didn’t toss that out, as well. But they didn’t, so, people do have a choice to continue to vote in the primary election without regard to political party, which Washingtonians really like.

I do sense that people are happy with the Top Two Primary, even though the final candidates could both be from the same party; and that’s what happened in the 2008 primary election to replace me after I retired. In my 36th District, which is pretty strongly Democratic, **Reuven Carlyle** and **John Burbank**, both Democrats, were the ‘top-two vote getters.’ Then, in the general election, Reuven Carlyle won my 36th District position.



*In 2008, Rep. **Helen Sommers** did not seek reelection to the 36th District seat she held for 36 years. In 2009, **Rep. Reuven Carlyle** succeeded Helen Sommers*

Monahan: What advise would you offer to newly-elected legislators, given your 36-year career as a House leader?

Representative Sommers: Well, I’m not inclined to give advice, but I guess I’d say my belief is that new legislators must carefully pick the committees on which they would hope to serve, which is not so easy for first-termers because they don’t exactly know what area they want to be involved in.

My position on it as I progressed through my career in the House, was to be an active member in the Legislature and to aspire to chair a committee. That can make a huge difference because the chair of every committee has a lot of influence. I was focused on policy issues.

So, when you’re new, you can really learn from staff and direct staff on what direction you’d like to go and what you hope to accomplish. I think that is key! That’s why in the 1970s, when Leonard Sawyer was Speaker, we established full-time professional staff. You can learn a lot from staff just by asking questions, and thoroughly reading the briefing papers they prepare, and so on.

Monahan: Changing the subject, I wanted to ask you about a great loss in the House. Just days before the 2009 session began, longtime **Rep. Bill Grant** (D-Walla Walla) died unexpectedly. He was preparing to come out to Olympia for the session, but he died suddenly. He held the post you’d once held in your career, too, as House Democrat Caucus Chair. What are your thoughts on the 22 year career of Rep. Bill Grant?

Representative Sommers: Bill Grant was always stalwart. He was a strong, solid leader. He wasn’t too political. He did come from an area that was so different from western Washington, and I felt that he shouldn’t have been pushed to run again. I wonder what impact that had on his health, and his well-being and his survivability. Outside of Spokane, he was the only Democrat in eastern Washington in the House! So, he was pushed to run again.



***Rep. Bill Grant** (D-Walla Walla) served 22 years in the House (1987 to Jan. 7, 2009), when he died prior to the opening of the 2009 session. Grant was Chair of the Democratic Caucus for 17 years*

I was Democratic Caucus Chair in 1993, and in 1994 I became Appropriations Chair, so Bill succeeded me as Caucus Chair and

he continued on in that leadership post until 2008. He was a great Caucus Chair. He wasn't so much into issues, but he had things that were a big concern to him in eastern Washington – especially agricultural issues! He was always very solid and he'd vote with the caucus and support the decisions and so on. But he did retain his eastern Washington philosophy in great part, and he certainly was very able to gain support for those issues in our caucus. Bill got along very well with everyone, and I believe he had a strong impact on the issues important to him. He was a real loss to the Legislature.

And, sadly, we also lost another



Rep. Mary Skinner
(R-14th Dist) served in the House from 1995-2009

outstanding lawmaker, **Rep. Mary Skinner** of Yakima. She was a member of the Republican Caucus and was a wonderful friend to me. She had retired from the House after 14 years of service, (1995-2009) and died of cancer just a month after her term ended.

Another big loss to the Legislature was when **Rep. Ruth Fisher** left after 20 years (1983-2003). Ruth retired from the House in 2003 and she died on Feb. 21, 2005. Ruth was a special friend and a fine Legislator. Her frank, open leadership serves as an inspiration for many members from both sides of the aisle. She had an extraordinary ability to see the bigger picture, and the courage to vote her conscience. She was wonderful.

Monahan: We're getting toward the end of this



Rep. Ruth Fisher (D-Ta-coma) served in the House from 1983-2003.

series of interviews on your historic 36 year career in the House. What are your views on Washington's progress in your 36 years? You've been here not only to observe the progress, but to help create that progress as a legislator!

Representative Sommers: High Tech is certainly vital to Washington. We were very fortunate that we had the entrepreneurs

and the brain power here for that kind of development. Not only Seattle, but certainly on the east side. The birth of Microsoft, that was hugely important because there were so many spin-offs on those things.

You know, **Bill Boeing** and **Bill Gates** were both



Bill Gates Jr.

born here; and we are darn lucky! Those entrepreneurs have had a strong impact on our state's and our nation's economy and growth over the decades.

Greater Seattle grew into a high technology powerhouse because of the 'two Bills!' But the developments also occurred because of investments we made in the University of Washington and other educational institutions. They've drawn the need for advanced higher education to this state. Something I'd worked my whole career was to advance higher education.

When I came to the Legislature 36 years ago, I



Bill Boeing

I remember we had typewriters, mimeograph machines, dial phones; those kinds of things. The high-tech options we have today, from computers, the internet, cell phones and the like, were just on the drawing-board back then.

With the advance of computers and cell phones and so many high-tech advances over the years, its just mind-boggling to imagine how far we've come in the nearly four decades since I first came to Olympia.

Politically, you can certainly say that Seattle has become very Democratic city. When I first ran in 1972, I was the first Democrat to win in my 36th District in many, many years. That was a big change. And, it even spread across to Bellevue and other areas around Seattle. That's another one of the changes.

Monahan: Helen, I have one last question. As you look back on your amazing career, how would you

like to be remembered as a Legislator of the State of Washington?

Representative Sommers: Oh my gosh. That's a tough question! I'm not sure how I'm remembered now. I think I was respected as a pretty decent committee chair through many years from the State Government Committee, the Revenue Committee, the Higher Education Committee, Capital Budget Committee, Democratic Caucus Chair and, of course, the Appropriations Committee where I had a very good opportunity to lead on the state budgets. I wasn't too enthralled by the



House Appropriations Chair Rep. Helen Sommers discusses the 2007-2008 budget in committee during her final term after a 36-year career in the House

politics because I was more interested in policy. To be able to serve as Chair of so many committees has been the highlight of my career.

I am very proud of some of the accomplishments of the Legislature on Education, Higher Education, and research institutions in Washington. And, certainly health care issues for people who weren't in a position to afford it. I was also involved in early childhood development and teen pregnancy issues.

When I came to the House in 1973, there were

just 12 women in the House, and none of us had much influence. When I left the House, we had a woman as Governor and two women as U.S. Senators! The Majority Leaders of the Senate and the House are women – Senator Lisa Brown and Representative Lynn Kessler. In both the state House and the Senate, women have leadership roles on many committees.

The landscape has changed, and women have made major advances since I came here 36 years ago. I know it will continue to extend into the future.

Monahan: Your position was always one of respect. The people I've talked to in this interview process, including **U.S. Commerce Secretary Gary Locke** and former **Governor** and **U.S. Senator Dan Evans; Lt. Gov. Brad Owen;** Speakers of the House; your fellow legislators; Chief Clerks and professional staff you've worked with all have the highest regard for you through all of your career!

I think you'll be surprised when you see the kind of comments I've been getting from so many people who were there to observe and to share your career. You'll know how much they appreciate you and the importance you've played in the state of Washington over nearly four decades.

It's been a pleasure for me to work with you on this Oral History. You've had such an amazing history in the House of Representatives; and your involvement and your accomplishments are a very major part of the history of Washington state for generations to come. Thank you, Helen!



2007 House Democratic Caucus
This is the House Democratic Caucus Class of 2007, Helen Sommers' 18th and final term. Helen Sommers is on front row step, 4th from the right.

Chapter 27

Helen's final day of her legislature career!

House of Representatives honors Rep. Helen Sommers for her 36 years of service to the State of Washington – House Resolution 4717 – March 14, 2008

Majority Leader Lynn Kessler: Mr. Speaker, I move adoption of House Resolution 4717, honoring Representative Helen Sommers.

Speaker Chopp: It's been moved and seconded on adoption of House Resolution 4717! Remarks.

Rep. Lynn Kessler (D-24th District): "Well, there's some good news and the bad news. The good news is, Helen, you've been with us for 36 years, and you've been such a wonderful leader in our state and in the Legislature! The bad news is we're going to tell you how much we love you! *(laughter)*



Rep. Lynn Kessler

And, we may even tell you things that you haven't heard for a long time. I know you sat over there in the Senate this morning and on the podium for 90 minutes listening to how much they love and admire you over there. I hope you will give us at least some time to let you know how we feel about you.

I want to say that when I came to the House in 1993, you scared the hell out of me! *(laughter)* Well, I was frightened of you. *(laughter)* In 1995, we were in the 'super minority' and there was a large Republican majority, and I was trying to do due-diligence for my district. I got some funding in the budget for my timber communities. The vote came up for the budget, and all the Democrats voted red (NO), except me! I was a green (YES). And, I heard you coming down the aisle, saying: "What in the world are you doing?" And, I said, 'Oh my

god, I don't know! I was just voting for my timber communities."

Well, since that day, Helen, I will tell you that I no longer fear you, I respect you! And, I have enjoyed getting to know you both as a leader, as Appropriations Chair, as a Legislator, but also as a person!

Helen and I share a great love of art; she travels like nobody I've ever known. One quality that I don't know if you all had an opportunity to be aware of, is when you go out with Helen, you don't talk about legislative things! You talk about anything but legislative things, because she has such a wide variety of interests; and this Legislature is just one of them! The fact that you've been here for 36 years tells me you were really very interested in this place. I do want you to know, without getting 'syrupy,' that I do think you're one of the strongest women I've ever known! I can see why the women in this Legislature have roles of leadership because we followed in your footsteps. We followed as you as paved the way for women to have strong roles in the Legislature!

Thank you Helen for all that you do; Thank You for being a good friend; and Thank You for those Wasabi peas and banana chips from Trader Joe's. They were sort of good!" *(laughter)*

(Editor's note: Rep. Lynn Kessler retires in 2011 after nine terms in the House from the 24th District)"

Rep. Richard DeBolt (R-20th District) Republican



Rep. Richard DeBolt

Minority Leader: "It's a pleasure that I rise to celebrate one of the most storied careers in Olympia. I remember when I was in a talk show after I had become leader, and Dave Ammons said to me: "Richard, you don't seem to fear much!" I told him, "only one thing scares me – Helen Sommers!" *(laughter)*

I don't know if it was the looks I got sitting in the corner in the Appropriations Committee trying to do my job and I would get the "Richard, please!" look as I was trying to make my points through the day, but I will tell you it was always with great respect. We would do what we could to move the

process forward.

You are a strong woman role model, but you're also a model for all of us. You have stood up and stood strong for the people of your district and the people of the state of Washington. It has been a pleasure to watch you work. It is almost defying at times to see how you can turn the entire process at your will.

So, a very humbled man stands in front of you and realizes that this state has lost a treasure! I will miss you and I know my (Republican) Caucus will miss you!"

Rep. Hans Dunshee (D-44th District) Vice-Chair of the Appropriations Committee



Rep. Han Dunshee

when Helen was Chair: Madam Chair: "Thank you!" I've learned at the knee of a Great Chair! As I think about what I have learned first of all, I know that a few words are best, so this will be short and no fuss. Thank you for enduring us again; I know you were adverse to this.

The things I've learned, like "the look" that can freeze a legislator in his or her tracks are admirable things. A glance that can freeze a buffalo, in fact, as the representative from the 13th District will testify to. (*laughter*) A pause of a nature that makes the legislator realize that, if they withdraw their request right now, they might survive the next few minutes. An "eyebrow" that can make you question your intelligence – I got a lot of those! (*laughter*)

But really, and to be short, no person has advanced the cause of liberty, justice, equality and wisdom in our state as much as you have! Your shadow will be long. I'm not going to give you the list of your amazing accomplishments, for it, too, will be very long and very large. But because of you, our communities are safer, our schools are better, our families are safer, our environment is cleaner, and our economy is stronger because of you!

You cast a long shadow, but that shadow is light! And that light will go far into the future. I want to thank you for that light. Thank you, Madame Chair."

Rep. Gary Alexander (R-20th District) Ranking Minority on House Appropriations Committee:



Rep. Gary Alexander

"Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've had the pleasure of working with the great lady from the 36th District for about one-third of her tenure in the Legislature, about 12 years. During those 12 years I've either sat two seats down; or in the last four years, right next to the great lady. I'd look over there, and

occasionally I kind of glance at that gavel she has in her hand, and she turns to me and says "Look, but don't touch!" (*laughter*)

I can't tell you how many members from my (Republican) caucus said, "Gary, can you go talk to Helen?" (*laughter*) We can't go in there, can you?" Like, I'm going to have some kind of influence on that process. (*laughter*)

What dignity, what respect, and what amount of history! I'm going to miss Helen dearly, but this whole institution is going to miss the historical information she has in her head. Let us not forget about history, but make a commitment to remember. That is the best we can do for Helen Sommers. We can commit to remember what she brought to this body and the information imparted to us, and the leadership she provided us; and the guidance she's given us on both sides of the aisle.

I hope that someday there will be a building named on this Capital Campus for one of the great leaders in our budgetary operations in the state. Helen, it's been a pleasure to work with you! Thank you very much."



Rep. Bill Hinkle (R-13th District) acknowledges Helen's 36 years of "Integrity"

Rep. Mary Lou Dickerson (D-36th District) Helen's



Rep. Mary Dickerson

seatmate for 15 years: "It's my honor to rise and salute my dear seatmate.

You know I was thinking about all these comments about being scared of her! And, I was thinking," I wasn't scared of Helen, why is that? "Then, I realized I'm so nearsighted I never saw that 'withering stare' or the

'raised eyebrow!' (*laughter*)

Despite her small stature, Helen is a giant, and she has been a giant in this institution for 36 years! She has been a person who has broken through so many ceilings. She's been a role model for all the members, but especially for the women of Washington, and, certainly for young girls. She has always led with integrity, both personal integrity and integrity for this institution!

I know she's now saying to me, "Now, Mary Lou, keep it short!" I would like to keep it short by closing with a very short piece of prose:

"Helen, she's petite yet casts a long shadow.

Kind, yet strong men quake at her withering stare.

Known to take special interests with a firm hand and to teach social skills to her vice-chair.
(*laughter*)

Archeologist, Gardener, Economist, Budgeter, but most of all 'Teacher to us all!'

She's our Super Helen and has left an indelible mark on this chambers and on our souls."

Thank you, Helen. We love you!"

Rep. Charles Ross (R-14th District): Helen Som-



Rep. Charles Ross

mers has been an amazing person to watch in Appropriations. As a brand new member, I was allowed to sit at the card-table down at the front of Appropriations. (*laughter*) Helen was so kind to let me talk twice during the Appropriations Committee; (*laughter*) and I'm still wondering if my comments had any affect on

policy. So tonight, I thought I wouldn't talk about the budget! (*laughter*)

On a serious note; last year I came here as a freshman and I've learned that this institution is built on seniority and it's built on experience. Helen has served in this Legislature nearly as long as I have been alive. From my standpoint, Helen, I'm so thankful for your commitment to serving the citizens of this great state.

Last year, it was on the 105th day of my first session, and my leadership came to me and said, "Charles, we want you to criticize the budget. It's our job, so get ready." I thought, OK, I'm ready. So I put some remarks together and I thought, here's Helen over there, and here's this brand new kid gonna sit here and criticize her work?

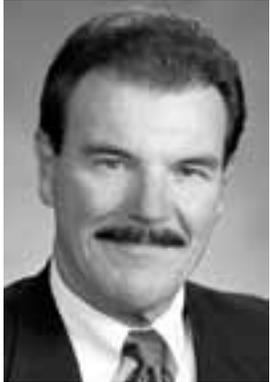
When I got done, I thought I did OK. 'Sine die' began, and I had no idea what was going on. It was my first time, and Helen comes over and grabs me – and I thought, "here it comes!" But, she said to me, "You're new, get over here. What you're about to witness is one of the most amazing events we do in this building; 'Sine Die!' We open the doors; you'll see both gavels (House & Senate) come down. You need to be right here in the middle." She literally took my arm and walked me up to the best spot to see it happen – the same doors that nearly brought me to tears when I first came into this building. Helen Sommers wanted me to see the amazing event.

Just think about it. After 36 years, she still had the capacity and concern for me as a new member, and more than that, the love of this institution and what we stand for to spend her time with me!

We're in different parties politically, but we're of the same heart. Helen, to me you are an amazing individual. I want to tell you, if you're ever looking for a grandson, I'd love to have you call me!"

Speaker Chopp: "Can I entertain an amendment to the budget? (*laughter & applause*)

Rep. Bill Fromhold (D-49th District): "Helen, as someone who has served as your vice-chair for a number of years, I want to start off by thanking you very much for allowing me to do that. It was very important to me, and I thought we worked very well together, and I enjoyed that time immensely!



Rep. Bill Fromhold

We've all recognized the great things you've accomplished with the big issues as with the Capital Budget, so I want to talk about a couple of small issues that made a difference to me.

For those of you who will have an opportunity to chair a committee and be responsible for the committee process, there are two things I think are important that Helen Sommers surely showed me. As chair of a major committee in the Legislature, if you came to testify before Helen's committee on the Saturday marathon, you got an opportunity to speak. The meeting started on time and the vice-chair had the stop watch. The person at the end had the same opportunity to testify as the person who was first to sign-up. That may not seem like a big deal, but if you come here from Spokane, Republic or Vancouver or wherever, the fact that the chair of the Appropriations ensures that you have your time to speak is an important lesson for any of us who may chair a committee to learn.

I came to this process being naturally bi-partisan, I hope, but the other thing I learned from Helen – and we all can learn from her is as tough as that budget can be sometimes, and as contentious as it can be, the Appropriations Committee members always had a laugh. We all got along and it was due to the fact that Helen ran the meeting in a fashion that even at the end of contentious discussion – sometimes disagreement – we could put that aside. The ranking

minority always expressed appreciation for Helen's willingness to listen, and involve everybody, allow questions to be asked and full discussion. Those are perhaps you'd say two small things, but they're what makes this process work, and Helen was an outstanding example for me and I hope for others, in that regard."

(Editor's Note: Former Rep. Bill Fromhold, 68, lost his fight with an aggressive form of leukemia, Sept. 30, 2010. Fromhold represented the 49th District in the House (2001-2009). He retired at the end of the 2008 session. He had served as Chairman of the House Budget Committee. Before being elected to the House, Fromhold had served as president of the Greater Vancouver Chamber of Commerce, and previously, longtime Educational Service District 112 Superintendent and Evergreen Public Schools administrator.)

Rep. Glenn Anderson (R-5th District): "This tribute would not be complete without recognizing that Helen Sommers – back in 2003 – actually accomplished the most profound political event that I have ever seen in any forum! At 2:00 in the morning we were over at the 'people's portable' (the Modular buildings) Under the Call of the House (security forcibly restrains you from leaving the



Rep. Glenn Anderson

building). Helen had decided it was a little too much for 2 A. M., so she managed to escape from Sergeant-at-Arms Finley (*laughter*) and all of a sudden we were out on one of the back patios of the modular buildings – and the word went out! "Has anybody seen Helen Sommers?" Helen Sommers has escaped! (*laughter*) Well, we saw Helen going over and getting into her car! She was looking over her shoulder, got in her car and one of the Security Guards came to us and asked if we'd seen her. We told him: "She's driving away right there!" (*laughter*) Shortly thereafter, the 'Call-of-the House' collapsed, and we got to go home. We thank you, Helen, for everything!"

Rep. Sam Hunt (D-22nd District): "I look at this



Rep. Sam Hunt

through a little different perspective because I spent time on the Senate staff where we feared Helen Sommers, and I spent time as an agency liaison, where we had to sit in those chairs in front of Helen, so I got to see "the stare!"

I remember early on at the agency, we drafted a piece of legislation and we tried to dot every 'i' and cross every 't' to make sure none of the loop-holes. I went into her office and she asked me, "Who drafted this?" I said, well, I did, Madam Chair. "Well, it's way too specific. You have no leeway to work here!" She redrafted it and we got a good piece of legislation, but that was one of my first real lessons in working with legislation, so I thank you for that. And I thank you for giving me the opportunity to work with you and serve on the Appropriations Committee with you. Have great fun when you travel in your well-deserved retirement!"

Rep. Kelli Linville (D-42nd District): Everyone's



Rep. Kelli Linville

talked about being afraid of Helen. I'll bet none of you went to ask her if it was OK if you said something about her today, like I did! I had the pleasure and honor of seeing Helen deliver both her first budget speech in 1994, when she first became Chair of Appropriation, and now her last speech. Nothing has changed. Helen was my mentor

when I first came to the House. I didn't know her at all when I first came here. I was from the hinterlands of Whatcom County, and it took me awhile to understand how lucky I was to have somebody who was such a good role model be a mentor for me. During the time Helen was our leader on the Appropriations budget, she was in the majority. And she was in the minority and she was in a tie! But the one thing I've learned from Helen is, it didn't matter if you were in the majority or the minority if you stayed focused on what you

wanted to do, you could get things done!

Helen, one of the things I learned from you is, be tenacious and it doesn't matter as long as you're focused on what you want to do. And, I know now that you've been focused on a lot of other things, and I appreciate you letting me stand up and say thank you for all the years we'd worked together on Appropriations! I appreciate it, and best of everything to you."

Rep. Jim McIntire (D-46th District): "Helen, I guess



Rep. Jim McIntire

I discovered tonight why I didn't get to become vice-chair of Appropriations and why I didn't do as well as I could have in my 10 years down here. It's because I was never afraid of you. *(laughter)* And, you know that!

I have to say that I have thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to work with you because your sharp mind and your command of this process and the policies here, the depth is just astounding! The quality you bring to this institution is simply remarkable, and the respect you have for this institution that you have passed on to all of us, I hope will live and support long after these walls crumble! Thank you, Helen."

(Editor's Note: In 2008, Jim McIntire was elected Washington State Treasurer.)



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES RESOLUTION

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 4717, by Representatives Chopp, DeBolt, Ahern, Alexander, Anderson, Appleton, Armstrong, Bailey, Barlow, Blake, Campbell, Chandler, Chase, Clibborn, Cody, Condotta, Conway, Crouse, Darnelle, Dickerson, Dunn, Dunshee, Eddy, Eickmeyer, Ericks, Ericksen, Flannigan, Fromhold, Goodman, Grant, Green, Haigh, Hailey, Haler, Hankins, Hasegawa, Herrera, Hinkle, Hudgins, Hunt, Hunter, Hurst, Jarrett, Kagi, Kelley, Kenney, Kessler, Kirby, Kretz, Kristiansen, Lantz, Litas, Linville, Loomis, McCoy, McCune, McDonald, McIntire, Miloscia, Moeller, Morrell, Morris, Nelson, Newhouse, O'Brien, Orcutt, Ormsby, Pearson, Pedersen, Pettigrew, Priest, Quall, Roach, Roberts, Rodne, Rolles, Ross, Santos, Schindler, Schmick, Schual-Berke, Seaquist, Sells, Simpson, Skinner, Smith, Springer, Sullivan, Sump, Takko, Upthegrove, VanDeWege, Wallace, Walsh, Warnick, Williams, and Wood

WHEREAS, Representative Helen Sommers has honorably and distinguishably served the people of the 36th Legislative District for 36 years; and

WHEREAS, Representative Helen Sommers has led with wisdom, grace, and dignity, and taught lesser souls such as ourselves the way, we kneel in reverence and deep appreciation; and

WHEREAS, Helen's past is just as interesting as her present; as a very young woman, she had the courage to leave her home in New Jersey to go live and work in Venezuela; and

WHEREAS, Helen Sommers can just as easily contrast alternative state pension funding methodologies as she can different geological eras – in Spanish or English, no less; and

WHEREAS, Many generations of Washington students owe a debt of gratitude to Helen for her unwavering belief in the benefits of a good education; and

WHEREAS, Over her many years in the Legislature, various members have used many varying terms when describing their relationship with Helen including trepidation, intimidation, fear, love, but most often respect; and

WHEREAS, Helen has, when faced with being blamed for many things throughout her illustrious career, merely shrugged it off with the comment, "What's another stripe to a tiger"; and

WHEREAS, Woe be to the staff person who handed Helen a document without the pages numbered; and

WHEREAS, Helen, pound for pound, packs more power than any other person on campus—yet she remains a font of common sense; and

WHEREAS, Although the intricacies of pension law confound many public policy experts, her persistent dedication to the sometimes obscure principles of pension funding has ensured a stable, well-funded pension system for the taxpayers and public employees of the state; and

WHEREAS, Helen saw to the nutritional needs of her fellow appropriations committee members by pulling endless bags and boxes of Trader Joe's snacks out of her bottom drawer, thereby theoretically eliminating our need for a real dinner break; and

WHEREAS, The greatest joy for some members of her committee was to see her smile and watch her laugh at some of the worst jokes from the minority party; and

WHEREAS, Helen Sommers is the inspirational compost-turning champion of the 36th District; and

WHEREAS, Helen Sommers would never approve of a resolution honoring Helen Sommers; and

WHEREAS, Helen Sommers would ask that this resolution briefly conclude its remarks as there are a lot more bills to get through on today's agenda; and

WHEREAS, Helen has decided that 36 years of legislating is quite enough, thank you; and

WHEREAS, The Washington State Legislature will not be the same without her;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives celebrate and commemorate the distinguished legislative, professional, and, most of all, personal career of Washington State Representative Helen Sommers; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That copies of this resolution be immediately transmitted by the Chief Clerk of the House of Representatives to Washington State Representative Helen Sommers.

I hereby certify this to be a true and correct copy of
Resolution 4717 adopted by the House of Representatives
March 13, 2008


Barbara Baker, Chief Clerk

Speaker of the House Frank Chopp (D-43rd District):



Speaker Frank Chopp

“About the time Helen started in the Legislature (1972) I was a student at U. of W. Think about the numbers! Thirty-six years of service; millions, and millions of our fellow Washingtonians have gone through higher education in the state! The greatest advocate higher education has ever had in this state is Helen Sommers. I am a proud recipient of her ad-

vocacy over the years, having gone through U of W myself. I want to Thank You, Helen, for all your work for higher education! Millions have gone through the process in our state and they all owe you a debt of gratitude.

Resolution Adopted!”

Representative Helen Sommers (D-36th District):



*Rep. Helen Sommers
& Speaker Frank Chopp*

“There are many things I could say, but I want to make a confession about what I feel makes a successful committee meeting. It’s been my long-standing rule that unless there is some laughter in a committee meeting, it is not a successful one! I’ve never confessed to that, but I want to say I think I have an un-

broken record. There has been some laughter in each and every committee meeting. I now ask the committee chairs to think about that because it makes a huge difference!

You’re overwhelming. What can I say? I was in the Senate this morning, and I thought that was too much. But this is way out of bounds! (*laughter & applause*)

I appreciate your thoughts, I appreciate your friendship. This is a wonderful institution. I’ve learned a

lot here. It’s a grand atmosphere; a grand building; this place where we work I hope impresses us all.

Just one huge thank you for your support, your kind words and all the good work that you do!”

(*Applause – Standing Ovation. Cheers – for more than three minutes!*)



Senate tribute honoring Rep. Helen Sommers' 36 year career in the Legislature – 3/14/2008

Earlier on Helen Sommers' last day in the 2008 session, she was invited to the Senate for what she thought would be a brief acknowledgement of her. But, like the House tribute to Helen Sommers, what she experienced in the Senate was equally overwhelming to her and heartwarming.

Senate Majority Leader Lisa Brown (D-3rd District):



Sen. Lisa Brown

"I can't help but notice that one of the most distinguished legislators I've ever served with is accompanying you to the rostrum, Mr. President!

As Rep. Helen Sommers takes her most deserved retirement, I want to take this opportunity to say an incredible "Thank You, Helen" on behalf of the service you've

given to the people of the State of Washington!

I want to tell you on a personal note that I've learned so much from you. I've learned from your dignity, from your tenacity. I've learned from your ability to delve into the deepest details of the state budgeting process. I've learned from your willingness to stand up against the more popular or politically advantageous forces on behalf of preserving future budget capacity.

I've also learned from you as a woman legislator! So, I simply want to say, although we've been adversaries and allies, I've always considered us friends! In the pantheon of legislators who leave an enduring mark on the state of Washington there are few female faces, but yours is prominent. And though you are small in stature, you are a giant among people, who contributed to the state of Washington!"

Sen. Bob McCaslin (R-4th District):



Sen. Bob McCaslin

"I've been here 28 years and you've been here 36. We have never spoken (*laughter*) which is perhaps a blessing for one of us! (*laughter*) I want to say that I concur with what Sen. Brown said. From afar, I have admired you. I have total respect for you for all the years that you spent here. I do admire you tremendously. You are a blessing to your constituents and

to the state of Washington."

Sen. Jim Hargrove (D-24th District):



Sen. Jim Hargrove

"We affectionately refer to Helen as 'Darth Helen,' and we learned to never ask her a question because the answer is 'No!' (*laughter*) Helen, we really appreciate the incredible skill with which you've worked these budget issues over the years. You have stood up to many powerful interests to try to do the right thing for the state of Washington. We're

going to miss you a great deal!"

Sen. Harriet Spanel (D-40th District):



Sen. Harriet Spanel

"I met Helen when I came to the House many years ago. In my early years in the House, I was appointed to the Pension Policy Committee.

Many of you see my votes on this floor as a little different from yours. But I got a lot of training from Helen, and one of the very important things I learned in those years is: you

can never take away what you giveth. So I'm quite conservative on some of the issues because I know we have to be able to provide the money. I thank Helen for giving me that early training and it stuck with me."

Sen. Val Stevens (R-39th District): “I remember as



Sen. Val Stevens

a much younger person when I was in the House, I was seated next to Rep. Bob Morton. He told me to ‘shhh’ and listen. I said, “Helen is standing, but it’s so quiet.” He said, “that’s my point. When Helen speaks, everyone listens!” I’ve learned so much from that because she couched her words very carefully; she was purposeful in what she said, and

what she said had meaning. People listened because they knew when she was speaking it was important. I learned a lot from you Helen. It was very many years ago and you had no idea how we were watching what you were saying and not saying! God bless you in your future retirement.”

Sen. Joe McDermott (D-34th District): “As you know,



Sen. Joe McDermott

this is my first year in the Senate, but before that I served the previous seven years in the House.

One of the greatest accomplishments for me – perhaps my proudest moment – was in the second year of my second term when I learned Helen Sommers actually knew my name!

I was a budget analyst when I was first elected to the House. I was appointed to a seat on the Appropriations Committee – I think they were afraid to let a budget analyst on that committee. It was a great pleasure to sit on that committee, to watch Helen work; to learn from her. As has already been noted, she had great knowledge of the budgeting process, she brings integrity to it, and she works with the stakeholders’ needs across the state and weighs those against our future needs.

I think my greatest accomplishment working with Helen on the Appropriations budget was actually by lobbying her over breakfast repeatedly on the members’ need to fund school breakfast programs for students. I thought it was effective lobbying.

You find her in the cafeteria every morning, and you can talk to her. We’ve also shared several meals in her living room – pizza & beer, scheming about something with several other colleagues. Some of those have been quite successful and I’ve paid a political price for some of those other conversations. I don’t regret any of them.

It’s been an honor, Representative Sommers, to serve with you, and also to enjoy dinner at ‘Xings’ restaurant on a regular basis. Congratulations on your retirement!”

Sen. Ed Murray (D-43rd District): “I served with



Sen. Ed Murray

Helen for 11 years in the House. We sat near each other on the floor of the House during those 11 years. There are two thoughts I want to share with you. First, we know Helen’s tough. When I became a brand new Capital Budget Chair of the House and was having a little trouble with leadership, Helen taught me how to be tough with leadership and it

worked! It worked when I went on to the Transportation Committee Chairmanship, as well. I learned how to write budgets from Helen Sommers!

The second thing is there were times on the floor in the ‘90s when we debated some very difficult subjects for me personally. But Helen is not only tough, she is incredibly compassionate! Before and after those debates, Helen’s warmth and caring and compassion to me personally is something I will always remember, and I think it’s an important aspect of Helen that we sometimes don’t talk about because she is so tough!

So, Helen, thank you for friendship; for your mentorship; and for your 36 years of service to this state!”

Sen. Karen Fraser (D-22nd District): “I met Helen Sommers before she was even a legislator – sometime in the early ‘70s when we both were actively engaged in efforts to advance the status of women. She was a true leader in that. Then, later on, to my surprise, I became a legislator and in the House I served on the Capital Budget Committee that she chaired. I learned a lot about how to approach



Sen. Karen Fraser

the Capital Budget. I never dreamed one day I'd end up chairing the Capital Budget Committee in the Senate many years later. Then we served on the Pension Committee together and, as so many people mentioned, she is just a tremendous leader on pensions!

We've all learned so much about fiscal responsibility from Helen being such a role model. Helen will not be here voting next session, but Helen's views will still be here. Helen leaves a great legacy and I think we'll all be asking: “What would Helen say?”

Sen. Mary Margaret Haugen (D-10th District): “I, too, want to say thank you to Helen. I probably wouldn't be here if it wasn't for Helen. Back in the ‘80s when women were looking to run for office, it was pretty hard, and we didn't often get much encouragement. But that's one thing Helen did. She encouraged women at that point to become leaders!



Sen. Mary Margaret Haugen

She's been a great role model and a wonderful mentor to all of us. But I want to tell you a kind of personal story about Helen. We had this group called the “steelhead fishing group.” In Skagit County they'd been trying to get some money for a hatchery. So we finally convinced Helen to go up and go fishing with these gals. It was a great experience. Helen learned about Marblemount in Skagit County. But more than anyone else, Helen really showed those men that Helen was a true person because oftentimes she's

known as a woman who says “no” to everything! But she laughed and had a good time that day and she showed the citizens that legislators care about you. Helen Thank you! We'll miss you!”

Sen. Cheryl Pflug (R-5th District): “I rise to honor one of the great ladies of the Legislature. I arrived in the Olympia with a respect for Helen on the other side of the aisle, because my first seatmate, Rep. Brian Thomas said “You watch her; she's brilliant and she's fair. If you need something, just talk to Helen; she will teach you.” I've often found that to be true. We haven't always agreed; but we often have.



Sen. Cheryl Pflug

It's been a joy to serve with you and to watch the grace with which you have conducted yourself in an environment that's not always that easy. Everyone will connect the word ‘integrity’ with you; both for your courage and for truthfulness. I have always appreciated your passion and your vision for higher education and I think that is one of the legacies you leave behind, as well. I wish you much happiness in all you do.”

Sen. Ken Jacobsen (D-4th District): “I met Helen in 1982; she and Seth Armstrong were my mentors when I was first running for office. Helen got elected in 1972 she was the first Democrat in the 36th District. A few years later, her Republican seatmate flipped over to take Helen out, but he didn't realize what a tough race he had. She took him out!



Sen. Ken Jacobsen

Another great time I had with Helen: I stood firmly on her side when SEIU decided she wasn't ‘dutiful’ enough. They must have spent a half-million against you. There were “doorbellers” everywhere! You were so energetic in that race. One of your posters said “Unboughten, Unbossed!” One of my treasured memories of this place is the framed poster I have in my office! Helen signed it “Unbought,

Unbossed and Unbowed" – It's a treasure! And now she's leaving 'Unbowed.' You've got so much to be proud of, Helen. Thank You!"

Sen. Linda Evans Parlette (R-12th District): "Two



Sen. Linda Parlette

things I'll never forget: As a freshman in the House and also on the Appropriations Committee, Helen reached out to me. When you're brand new you don't forget who first comes up to you, and Helen Sommers happened to be that person!

Secondly, I don't know how many of you have had the opportunity, but in Helen's "real life," she has a real passion for geology. I didn't know that until I just happened to mention to her the ice age flood, because in my district that is a big thing. When Helen visited the museum at Dry Falls, she had such a passion you could sit there for an hour or two. She has all this knowledge!

So I would like to say, Helen, when you have more free time I hope you'll continue to visit eastern Washington, specifically my district which is full of "erratics;" and I know you know what those are! I hope I get that opportunity again!"

Sen. Rosemary McAuliffe (D-1st District): "I would



Sen. Rosemary McAuliffe

like to stand and recognize all the work Helen has done over the years for education. Always the House budget put a high priority on education of our one million children in our many schools.

But what I really delight in the most is the excitement in your face when we learned at the University of Washington of their research of our littlest learners; when we saw that children at birth could learn! We looked at the fact that you could hold a baby just born, and you stick your tongue out, and the baby will stick out their tongue back at you! You were so excited in all this, so we met and talked about how we would take our children from birth all the way through

to kindergarten, and on to 3rd grade so their life would be successful for our very littlest ones who struggle the most!

Thank you Helen, for the work you've done on their behalf. I think you have made a very significant improvement in the lives of those babies and their families!"

Sen. Jeanne Kohl-Welles (D-36th District): "I have



Sen. Jeanne Kohl-Welles

the distinct pleasure and honor of all the members of the Senate to be Helen Sommers' seatmate. I have to say, while it's been a pleasure; it's been an honor; but it's not always been easy either!

I've certainly never gotten special consideration from Helen. I'm sure I've had as many "no's" said to me as everybody else has had. It's been very hard to live up to the high standards of Helen in terms of her being especially concise and short when talking. I'm sure my colleagues know that.

I've also gotten to know Helen on a very personal level. I don't know that all the members of this Senate are aware of her absolutely killer sense of humor! She will be a real gas when she's in the right setting – not on the floor of the House or in committee – she's so fun and she's just a ball!

I'd like to share one story that my twin sons will never forget. About 1996, Helen was going to sponsor one of my twin sons as a page, one in the House and one in the Senate. One son had purple hair at the time and the other one had orange hair. "You can't page for Rep. Sommers with purple hair," I told him. So they dyed their hair black. She's always been so wonderful with children and youth.

The other thing I want members to know, is when she'd had meetings with constituents and lobbyists, I had the pleasure of being in the district office where she held meetings for years. I'd have meetings in my office and people would know that Helen was in the other room having meetings. It was very hard for me to have full attention of the people I was meeting with because they were fully aware that Helen

was in the other room!

She's had the highest level of respect from constituents, lobbyists, and from all of our colleagues. I'm certainly glad that she'll still be in the 36th District and I will be able to continue to be with her. Thank you Helen You've been wonderful!"

Sen. Paull Shin (D-21st District): "I spent two years in the House in 1993-94. The first time I got to know Helen very well was about four years ago on a trip to Taiwan and Thailand. I watched her – she was so intensely interested in what she saw and the people she met. She asked questions that really touched me.



Sen. Paull Shin

She's interested in the national history, culture and trade, as well. This is when she earned my respect.

I think in the cold days of Seattle she will be interested to listen to our speeches, so I hope we give her a copy. Helen, I think you are one of the ladies I've learned to respect and love. Thank you!"

Sen. Marilyn Rasmussen (D-2nd District): "I rise also to give tribute to this remarkable young woman – and I say young because if you've ever traveled with Helen you know she's got more 'vim and vigor' and more interest in everything going on around her than those half her age.



Sen. Marilyn Rasmussen

When I came in 1987, I was scared of this whole process. And then, to be Helen's vice-chair on the Capital Budget Committee, I thought, "Oh, my gosh, we are so different, how will we ever get along?" I realized if you're on the Capital Budget Committee you're in charge of everything the state owns. So we looked at a DNR map and looked at the checkerboard of everything we own. If you think Helen hasn't been in your district, I will stand and prove it. We traveled all over this state: Northern State Hospital to Interlake, Clallam Bay to Walla Walla, walked on death row. We visited

everywhere across the state.

If you had a project someplace, believe you me, we went and looked at it. And we had fun doing it.

But also, when I came in, we were just coming off the WPPSS fiasco where our bond rating was very bad. But by investing in ourselves, we brought our bond rating up to a Double-A. We built buildings, such as a veterinary hospital at WSU and a state historical museum in Tacoma. All of these things were done because Helen took an interest in everything we owned in this state and made sure that we invested in ourselves.

You are a truly wonderful, gifted person as far as finances go and as far as personality. I regarded her as my mentor, but most importantly, I regard her as my friend. We have had wonderful times!

Thank for what you have done for this state. Every citizen in this state owes you a great deal of honor and praise, because you truly made this one Washington."

Sen. Jim Honeyford (R-15th District): "I want Helen to know that even though we sat on opposite sides of the aisle in the House, and also when I went to the Senate, I always checked to see how she voted on financial matters because I knew she was 99.9 percent right all the time! So I really appreciated having that opportunity.



Sen. Jim Honeyford

A little known fact: she is also a "viticulturist." So am I. I wish you well in your retirement."

(Editor's Note: Viticulture (from the Latin word for vine) is the science, production and study of grapes which deals with the series of events that occur in the vineyard.)

Sen. Karen Keiser D-33rd District): “Thank you



Sen. Karen Keiser

Helen, I wouldn't be here today without you recruiting me back in the 1990s. As many other members have mentioned, they too are here because of you. We've had the amount of success that we've had because you've given us your mentorship and your guidance along the way. So all I can say is Thank You, Helen!”

Sen. Rosa Franklin (D-29th District): “A few of the



**Senate President
Pro Tempore
Rosa Franklin**

young guys in the back of the chamber mentioned they were born when you were elected! But you brought them wisdom, and with your wisdom, you taught them. You, in-turn, have carved a trail — one of integrity and astute budget writing; One who examines every part of the budget very closely. While I have never sat on Appropriations, and while I've only served one

term with you in the House, one thing I've done is I've watched you very, very closely.

I'd often watch the Appropriations Committee on TVW when I'd go to my room, my second home when I was in Olympia. I'd watch how you conduct yourself, and, your attitude and your caring in your 36 years of service to the people of the state of Washington. Your fingerprint has been on every budget. I would say to you, you are not retiring; you're moving on to something more. I really appreciate the time of service you have given this state.”

Sen. Margarita Prentice (D-11th District): “My favorite



Sen. Margarita Prentice

moment that told me everything I needed to know about Helen Sommers was my first term in the House. The Speaker wasn't getting something out of the Capital Budget and I remember he yelled to her, “Helen, this is not your money that you're spending!” And, she said, “Oh, I thought it was.” He had the same frustrations a

lot of people had. She could say “no” real easy when it was the right thing to do!

But I owe you a very personal vote of gratitude. You have helped me so much to an extent that other people here don't even know about. One of the things you and I decided when I got this job to chair Ways & Means, was the two of us would meet every Friday. Helen and I needed to talk about what our respective Houses and our respective caucuses had to say. One reason we did so much for Special Education, was because I made it clear ‘this was not a caucus priority, it was a Senate priority.’ She conveyed that to the other chamber. We also talked a couple times in a day – what about this? We haven't had the rancor that you sometimes have.

Your concern about kids assimilating into this country, and the ability to learn other languages is one of the things that convey your faith in our ability to absorb new people into this country. I've admired that so much about you. I can only thank you over and over!”

Lt. Gov. Brad Owen, the President of the Senate:



**Lt. Gov. Brad Owen
(Senate President)**

“We're incredibly honored to have Representative Sommers with us today. It's not the place of the President to make a speech, but he certainly wanted to share with you how much he appreciates you. He believes Helen to be one of the most dedicated, caring, one of the brightest people to ever serve in this process! As well as the fact that when you

leave, I will then become the longest serving elected person here! I can't even tie you, unless I get elected and then serve four years more. *(laughter)*.

It would be a great honor if you would wish to make any remarks to defend yourself. *(applause)*"

Rep. Helen Sommers: "As many of you are aware, I'm a woman of few words. But on this occasion, I am virtually speechless! I was invited to come over because you were discussing a resolution or that you would be speaking about my career, relationships and partnerships. So I thought, I'd like to go over and hear it.

I must say that I am deeply touched – deeply touched by the things you said, the things you'd reminded me of, much of the history of the things we have done together in the past – which I treasure! And, I just want to say I'm so grateful for this expression of friendship and working together, that I barely have the words to tell you just how deeply I am touched by your support, your friendship and the working relationship that we have! Thank you!"



Lt. Gov. Brad Owen (Senate President) honors Rep. Helen Sommers on the floor of the Senate for a tribute on her 36-year career.

SECTION II
INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

Governor Daniel J. Evans Interview on Rep. Helen Sommers' Oral History

Daniel J. Evans, former Governor and U.S. Senator, is recognized as one of the most distinguished leaders in the history of Washington. A study at the Univ. of Michigan named him one of the 10 Most Outstanding Governors of the 20th Century.



*Daniel Jackson Evans 1965
(Courtesy Washington State Archives)*

Evans' public leadership began 53 years ago, when he was first elected to the Washington State House of Representatives (1957-1965 –

43rd District). Evans was elected governor in 1964, the youngest governor in the history of the state, and the only governor to be elected to three terms. Evans declined to run for a fourth term in 1975 and became president of the Evergreen State College, an institution that was created during his tenure.

In 1983 U.S. Sen. Henry "Scoop" Jackson died. Evans was appointed to the U.S. Senate by Gov. John Spellman, and then Evans won a special election to serve the remainder of Senator Jackson's term.

Evans retired from politics in 1989, and returned to the Northwest, where he is active on a number of boards and commissions, including the Board of Regents of the University of Washington, with two years as President of the Board.

Dan Monahan: This interview about Representative Helen Sommers is with Washington Governor and U.S. Senator Daniel J. Evans. Governor Evans, thank you so much for taking time to remember Representative Helen Sommers, who retired from the Washington State House of Representatives in 2009 after a 36 year career representing Seattle's

36th Legislative District.

I conducted a series of 25+ hours of interviews with Helen Sommers in 2009, covering her 36-year career - second only to former Speaker John O'Brien, who had served 52 years in the House. Helen's first session was in 1973, and she had a pretty fascinating career, 36 years serving the 36th Legislative District.

Helen Sommers was first elected to the House in November 1972, the year you won your third consecutive election as Washington's governor; and the only Washington governor to serve for three consecutive terms (1965-1977).

But, Helen told me that she had her first dealings with you in 1971, before she was a legislator. She was the first president of the new Washington Chapter of the National Organization of Women (NOW) and also a member of the Seattle Chapter of the League of Women Voters. She told me her group came to Olympia to talk to you about issues of interest to NOW. She said she remembers well how comfortable and cordial you were to the new women's group, and how supportive you were to the issues they brought to you.

When she and her group first met with you, you agreed to establish a Women's Council in your administration to look at issues, opportunities and programs for the advancement of women issues.

Governor Daniel J. Evans: I do remember when the group came down to talk about women's rights and the Equal Rights Amendment. I was very interested in working with them and I remember my promise to form a Women's Council – which I did – so we could not only deal with the specific issues they brought forward at that time, but, on a more regular basis, continue our dialogue about women's issues.

I came out of the Legislature into the governorship. I had served in the House from 1957-1965 from Seattle's 43rd District. During my legislative career, my Republican party was in both the minority and the majority. So, in 1965 when I was elected governor, one of my real advantages was the fact that I knew all the legislators from both parties. As governor, I made a point to really get to know the new members as they came along, and keep in

touch with the others.

While the direct powers of the Washington state governor are limited – I was a “Teddy Roosevelt Republican” – I believed in the “bully pulpit” and, that you could get out in front of the Legislature. The governor didn’t have any vote in the Legislature, but you could affect very strongly what the Legislature was dealing with. In other words, you could help set the agenda. So I got to know all the legislators well. At some times we were at odds with one another, but at least knowing them helped in moving ahead the things I wanted to do.

The 1960s and ‘70s was a time of real activism. African-Americans were moving forward to solidify the rights that had been granted to them 100 years before. Native Americans were, for the first time, really becoming involved in the process. And so were women. So, in all cases, we had major groups in our society who were becoming very involved in the process. Women, of course, were a majority of our society; but really did not have – and had not had – an equal opportunity, an equal shot at everything from jobs to the legal rights that I thought they all should have.

Each legislative session we would make some progress – but progress is sometimes in small steps, so you need to come back and make another step the next time around.

In those early days, it was obvious from the very start that Helen Sommers was a very smart, able and dedicated legislator. Some come and the thrill of winning kind of overcomes the challenge of legislating. But, that was not the case with Helen. She, from the very start, was a real student of government and a hard worker, and those are the kinds of things that lead you up the ladder in a legislature pretty quickly. She made a real impact in the Democratic Caucus and in the House of Representatives in just a few years.

Monahan: Everybody I talked to, including Dean Foster, who was Chief Clerk of the House in the beginning of Helen’s career; and Gary Locke, who had worked with her when they both served on the Appropriations Committee, said Helen wasn’t so much a politician as she was a brilliant policy person. Her focus was on policy.

Governor Evans: I think she was more than that. She had intelligence way above the legislative average! She became a leader because she studied more and knew more about what was going on. She was really interested in fundamental policy. She grew in stature primarily in the budgeting arena and the spending arena. But she not only wanted to be someone who could work with the numbers and the figures, but even more important, Helen was interested in what the money was being used for and how it affected the state and the people! Helen really had an interest in and a dedication to what policies we were focusing our money on and how we were doing it, not just the fact that we were doing it.

Monahan: One area of particular interest to Helen – and I’m sure you had involvement with her in this area – was higher education. After your three terms as governor, you did not seek a fourth term, and you became the second president of The Evergreen State College in Olympia. And, later, you’d served on the Board of Regents of University of Washington, including two years as President of the Board. Helen was a great protector of higher education as chair of Appropriations. She worked through her career to protect, beyond probably anyone, the need to finance and expand higher education.

Governor Evans: In the mid-1960s and early ‘70s, we were beginning a Community College system in our state, as well as The Evergreen State College. The challenge then was really funding, because our Community College system was growing extremely rapidly, and not only in the institutions we had, but in new ones that were springing up all over the state. So funding the expansion of higher education in Washington was a real challenge.

When I first became governor in 1965, we didn’t even have Medicare and Medicaid. Those hadn’t even been invented. So the cost of health care to the state was reasonably minimal at that time. Then, President Lyndon Johnson’s “Great Society” programs of the 1960s came about, and dramatically affected every state in the union because those big programs of the federal government were “partnership programs with the states!” In other words, the states managed those social programs, not the federal government directly, and the states provided varying percentages of money depending on the

economic well-being of the state. In Washington's case, we had to provide about half of the money for those new and rapidly growing programs.

So expansion of community colleges and health care put a real strain on the state budget, because those programs started competing then with the other programs of the state which up to that time had been primarily both common school education (K-12) as well as higher education, corrections and some welfare programs. But, those were the ones that grew very rapidly.

When we got into Helen's time as chairman of the House Budget and Appropriations committees, that also became a time when citizens and the Legislature came to be tough on crime, which required a rash of new prison construction. So that became another stream of spending that budgeters at the state level had to cope with.

Here she was with fairly limited revenue, and these rapidly expanding elements that we were spending money on. When you add common school education, the rapidly rising expenses of social programs from the Great Society effort, and the rapidly rising prison system costs, higher education was in danger of being left out. You have a constitutional requirement to provide common school education. Then you have the requirement – common sense, I guess you'd call it – to actively support the "Great Society" and other federal programs because if you didn't, you'd lose a federal dollar for every dollar you saved. So those were heavily prioritized programs. Then the corrections system was one the Legislature was heavily in favor of. So these new programs that needed funding, left higher education as sort of the balancing act; what higher education would get, was what was left over!

Helen understood very well that with the growing new funding requirements of the state, it would take a toll on higher education. Helen understood and she was devoted to the need to support higher education, both at the community college-level and the four-year level. But when you get into the need for higher education funding, the community colleges had a natural advantage within the Legislature, because there was a community college in virtually every legislator's district, and there are

only six four-year institutions in the state.

So, we fell on really difficult times. Helen stood there and demanded that we have a reasonable support level for higher education. Helen became literally, you know, the "Dutchman with his finger in the dike" to prevent things from just collapsing! It got to the point she was in conflict with members of her own caucus, like Speaker Frank Chopp. Even though the University of Washington is in his district it was not a priority of his.

With all this going on and Helen's effort to reasonably fund higher education, a large social service union ran a campaign to try to beat Helen in the 2004 election. In fact, that was the only time in my life that I sent a campaign donation to a Democratic candidate for the Legislature (*laughter*). Because she was such a great supporter of the University, she was an essential person to have there, and I admired her very much! So that was my one-break from being a total Republican.

And, boy, when she left after 2008, the dam broke, and higher education – particularly at the University of Washington – has had a bigger decrease in support than any other major university in the nation, I believe.

Monahan: Dean Foster and others had told me that there's nobody standing up to take her place to defend higher education. There are now branch campuses of the major universities in other communities in the state, but there isn't that one person willing to focus on the U. W. and other universities in the state.

Governor Evans: Well, I'm sure someone will step up because it's too important not to have that support. I've watched it for many, many years, and eventually, there will be a leader who is strong for higher education.

Monahan: On the subject of higher education, I read something very interesting. You were invited to a function at Whitman College a few years ago to speak to students – and I believe your wife, Nancy, was on the Board of Whitman College. There was a reference about you in a college publication that said, "Dan Evans, a Republican, reinforced the value of working across party lines and being willing to let

others take credit, as two of the most effective ways to get something accomplished. When you reach out to others and work with people in a bipartisan way, it's amazing what you can accomplish."

I know that was your position; and I know Helen Sommers felt very strongly the same way!

Governor Evans: When you start out in politics, you have a belief, and it falls closer to one party than the other. So that's the party you join to work with, and work for. But when it comes to issues, at the state level particularly, I've often said I've never seen a "Republican fish" or a "Democrat highway!" These are the kinds of issues that you may have a little different view on how you accomplish those things. But good ideas are not confined to one side of the aisle. It really is worthwhile to work across the aisle to pick up the good ideas and the things you think will work, and then work with legislators who will help you out. I also tried to do that between the House and the Senate.

And that's where I think today our political system has run into real road-bumps, because at the local, state and the national levels we're just not as inclined to be bi-partisan or to work across the party lines. I think that leads to a lot of stalemate, which is what we're seeing at the national level right now.

Someday, somebody is going to figure that out. People will win elective office without using negative advertising, and they'll go across the aisle to get ideas to be successful, and they will be successful! And people will look around and say, "Well, hey, that's the new way we ought to go!"

Politics is a game where people follow what they see as successes. The whole intense negative advertising and the sharply partisan politics seemed to work for awhile, but I think it's reaching the end of its string; and somebody's going to come along and move the other way. Then we'll have a new era of more bipartisanship, I think; I hope.

Monahan: Helen was the only Legislator to serve during both 49-49 House ties. She had a good relationship with Rep. Ellen Craswell, who was her co-chair of the Revenue Committee in the 1979-80. And again, in the 1999-2003 tie, Helen had a par-

ticularly good relationship with Rep. Barry Sehlin and also Tom Huff, as co-chairs of Appropriations. So, like you said, Helen has been the kind of person who could reach out to others – across the lines, and never worried about who got the credit.

Governor Evans: That made Helen Sommers, in my view, an All-American Legislator!



Former **Governor Dan Evans** addressed a Feb. 24, 2007, joint session of the Legislature. **Gov. Chris Gregoire** presented the state's highest honor, the 'Medal of Merit' to Evans, who served as a member of the House (1957-65); three terms as governor (1965-1977); and six years in the U.S. Senate (1983-1989).

U.S. Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke Former Governor and Representative speaks about his friend, Helen Sommers

Gary Locke was appointed by **President Barack**



Gary Locke

Obama as the 36th Secretary of Commerce and sworn into office on March 26, 2009. At the Department of Commerce, Locke is charged with helping implement President Obama's ambitious agenda to turn around the economy and put people back to work.

As the first Chinese-American to hold this post in a president's cabinet, Locke

has a distinctly American story. His grandfather emigrated to Washington state from China, initially finding employment as a servant, working in exchange for English lessons.

Locke's father, meanwhile, was a small business owner, operating a grocery store where Locke worked while receiving his education from Seattle's public school system. His strong work ethic and determination eventually took him to the highest office in the state of Washington. He served two terms as governor of Washington.

Prior to his appointment, Locke helped U.S. companies break into international markets as a partner in the Seattle office of international law firm Davis Wright Tremaine LLP. There, he co-chaired the firm's China practice and was active in its governmental relations practice.

As the popular two-term governor of Washington, the nation's most trade-dependent state, Locke broke down trade barriers around the world

to advance American products. He helped open doors for Washington State businesses by leading 10 productive trade missions to Asia, Mexico and Europe, significantly expanding the sale of Washington products and services. He also successfully strengthened economic ties between China and Washington state. His visits are credited with introducing Washington companies to China and helping more than double the state's exports to China to over \$5 billion per year.

As part of his considerable trade and economic development efforts, Locke launched the Washington Competitiveness Council with business and labor leaders working together to effectively position Washington state for success at home and around the world. During the eight years of the Locke Administration, the state gained 280,000 jobs.

Locke earned a bachelor's degree in political science from Yale University and a law degree from Boston University. He is married to **Mona Lee Locke**, they have three children: Emily Nicole, Dylan James and Madeline Lee.

*Interview with U.S. Secretary of Commerce
Gary Locke - 9/9/2009*

Dan Monahan: Today, I have the pleasure to speak with U.S. Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke, Washington state's former two-term governor and a long-time member of the state House of Representatives.

Secretary Locke, thank you for taking the time from your very busy schedule to talk about your longtime House colleague, **Rep. Helen Sommers**, who served in the House alongside you and also as a strong ally in the House when you were governor.

Helen Sommers served 36 years in the House, and she succeeded you as chair of the Appropriations Committee in the House (1994).

Commerce Secretary Gary Locke: Helen Sommers was a legend even before I came to Olympia. I'd heard so much about her even before I was sworn in. In fact, my first exposure to Helen Sommers was shortly after my election as the House Democratic Caucus was organizing in December for the 1983 session of the Legislature. There was a very heav-

ily contested battle for chair of the House Ways & Means committee in the house between Rep. Helen Sommers and Rep. Dan Grimm.

Hearing so much about Helen and meeting with her shortly after being elected, I was so much in awe of her. She had been in the House for 10 years when I first came to Olympia. She had incredible command of the issues and of the challenges facing the state of Washington, so I quickly became a real fan of hers. She had extraordinary knowledge and fiscal leadership on issues from unfunded liability of our pension systems to the need for money for higher education. She did not, of course, win the contest to become Ways & Means Chairman. Rep. Dan Grimm was chosen by the caucus leadership, and after several votes, Grimm was ratified by the caucus. But, from then on, I became a very big fan of Helen Sommers – and of Dan Grimm.

Helen was always a champion of higher education. From early on, she kept emphasizing and reiterating the fact that higher education is an economic engine and the research that occurs at our colleges and universities becomes the incubator for so much of the high tech and good paying jobs throughout the state of Washington.

Helen was an incredible person who knew facts and figures and the budget inside out. Her mind was like an encyclopedia. Above all, she had a very good institutional memory, so a lot of us young legislators would say, “We ought to try this,” or “Let’s try that,” and Helen would tell us that this approach has been tried, and it didn’t work, for this or for that reason. Or, she’d tell us, “Here’s a better way to approach it.” She was invaluable in offering that perspective and helping new legislators learn the ropes quickly, and who to trust and who to depend on and how to be successful in our own careers.

Monahan: She had a 36 year career, second only to Speaker John L. O’Brien, your former House seatmate, who had 52 years as a member of the House. Helen, as you know, served as chair of many committees. After you were elected King Co. Executive in 1994, Helen became Appropriations chair, succeeding you. Talk about those times.

Secretary Locke: The 11 years I was in the House,

I served on the Ways and Means committee, which later became the Appropriations committee. Helen was always a member of that committee, too, so I learned all that I knew about budgeting at the feet of both Reps. Dan Grimm and Helen Sommers. In 1988, Dan Grimm was elected State Treasurer, and I became Appropriations Chair. Helen was the most trusted colleague I had, and a very strong advisor. She chaired the Revenue committee, but was still a member of Appropriations. I very much valued her advice, her wisdom and her counsel.

When I was elected governor in 1994, she was Appropriations chair and we really teamed up a lot, making sure we were able to put new money into colleges & universities, to increase our enrollments, focus on research, to hire more staff and to increase the compensations and pay for the faculty, and so on.

Again, we recognize that higher education is an economic engine for our state. So much of what we take for granted in our daily lives has come about through the innovation and the research at places like University of Washington, Washington State University, and our community and technical colleges. Ultrasound, bone marrow transplants, dialysis – a lot of these things were pioneered at U. W.

Helen really understood the need to support our colleges and universities as sources of good paying jobs throughout our state as well as benefitting our quality of life. It was a real pleasure being able to serve with Helen Sommers.

Monahan: She told me in one interview that remarkably Bill Boeing and Bill Gates were both born in the Seattle area, and they made such a significant impact on our state and national economy. She thought those were inspiring events that happened to lead Washington to where it is now.

When you became governor, your Democratic Party was in the minority in both the House and Senate through much of your term as governor, and then three years of a tie. Helen told me when the tie went on for three years of your term, “Gary Locke understood what he had to do to make it work and, of course, Gary used his veto power extensively to try to moderate actions by the Legislature.”

Can you tell us about your term with the tie and also the Republican majority?

Secretary Locke: The first two years of my term I had a Republican controlled House and Senate – very large majorities in both the House and Senate. I made it very clear that we need to move forward as a state, that I was eager to work with Republicans who would move our state forward. But, I told them that I would reject all proposals that would divide us, or that were mean spirited.

But I enjoyed working with Republicans on issues like welfare-reform, privacy issues, and on modernizing and reforming our juvenile justice laws – holding kids accountable, but also working on some reforms of the criminal justice system. I did use my veto pen extensively to veto bills in their entirety or partially, to take out offensive provisions, or provisions that I felt were an intrusion to the executive branch of government.

Having come from the Legislature, I'm very respectful of the prerogatives of the Legislature, but we have three independent branches of government for a reason: the Legislature sets the policy, but the actual administration of the policy is up to the Executive branch. So, in that first two years I vetoed, either fully or partially, a third of all legislation that came to my desk! That set a record for the state of Washington, but I think it also set a tone that, as governor, I wanted to work with the Legislature, but they could not take my Administration lightly even though they had strong Republican legislative majorities. It did set a tone, and enabled us to work together on things like welfare reform. I'm very proud that we worked on welfare reform together.

That very first year of my term as governor, the Republican-controlled U.S. Congress eliminated food stamps and various social service benefits for legal immigrants, and I told the Republican leadership in our state that, as much as we had almost reached agreement on Welfare Reform, I would veto the entire welfare reform proposals that we'd worked on together, unless the state of Washington provided food stamp assistance for legal immigrants.

The Legislature took me seriously and we, in fact, put together a "state-only" program of food

stamps for legal immigrants. We were the only state in the country to do so, and we had that distinction for about two or three years before the Republican-controlled Congress, working with **President Bill Clinton**, reinstated food stamps for legal immigrants in the United States.

So that's an example of how people knew I would use the veto pen, having used it already and would use it again if necessary. They took me seriously and we were able to come up with a "win-win" situation on both welfare reform and on food stamps for legal immigrants in the state of Washington.

But, you know, most of the issues we face in Olympia do not have to do with Republican or Democratic politics, urban or rural. We are just trying to make sure that every person in every part of the state has better opportunities for their life and their children's lives. So there were great opportunities to work together with the Republicans on education, welfare reform, job creation, safe streets. I'm very proud of what we were able to accomplish my entire eight years as governor!

Monahan: In 2001, during the third year of the tie, Helen was co-chair of Appropriations committee. Her new co-chair from the Republican Caucus was Rep. Barry Sehlin. She had a real fondness for Barry Sehlin, when he served as her co-chair in 2001.

Secretary Locke: Barry Sehlin was such a great guy! He was a class act, and Barry was well respected by everybody in the state Legislature. I know Helen really admired him, and so did I.

Monahan: Helen Sommers was the only member to serve in both House ties in history – 1978-80, when Co-Speakers were John Bagnariol and Duane Berentson – and again in 1999-2001, when Co-Speakers were Frank Chopp and Clyde Ballard. Did her perspective perhaps provide guidance during the second tie?

Secretary Locke: She was an incredible counselor to everybody. She also had the institutional knowledge of what would make the Legislature work. I know she shared that perspective with Frank Chopp and other Democratic members on how the Democrats and Republicans could work together to be successful in a mutually beneficial fashion. She also reminded

everybody in her caucus that the Republicans have veto power in a tie, and the rules had been devised that nothing could move forward in a committee unless the committee co-chairs agreed. And, also, nothing would come to the floor for a vote unless both Speakers agreed. That forced everyone to work together and to prioritize issues.

During my eight years as governor, Helen and I would confer frequently. She'd come to the office, we'd have coffee and we'd chat. She was incredible giving me advice on how to be a more effective governor, and I very much appreciate that.

At the same time, the governor is not part of the tie situation, so as governor I was able to really push things, and get the Senate to agree. At one point during the tie, we had a Democratic-controlled Senate. The Democrats could work together and eventually send it to the House. And, through the force of votes, public opinion, and the momentum of the Legislative process, get some House Republicans to agree to bring it up for a vote. Or, adding things on from the Senate side, and bringing it back to the House for concurrence and final passage.

Yes, Helen gave us a lot of tips on strategy on how to help us get beyond the initial Republican reluctance on legislation, despite the tie.

Monahan: Many people I've talked to have mentioned to me that Helen's comfort level was in the House and that's why she stayed for 36 years and never sought to seek election to another office.

Secretary Locke: Part of the reason is she was always on the cusp of high leadership positions in the House, whether as chair of the Appropriations committee or other leadership positions she'd held in the House. Had she gone to the Senate, she would have had to start all over again at the bottom of the seniority ladder, and work her way up. It would have taken a lot of years to build up as much influence in the Senate as she already had in the House. And, she was poised to have even greater leadership in the House. So I think perhaps that was a factor in, for instance, not running for Congress. Also, I don't think Helen loved the more aggressive campaigning that would be required to run for Congress.

And, then again, whose seat was there to go

after in U.S. Congress? Helen's 36th House District is in the 7th Congressional District. Congressman Mike Lowry (who served from 1978-1989, followed by one term as Washington governor 1992-96) and Congressman Jim McDermott (elected in 1988) together have been there for more than 30 years.

Congressional campaigns are very expensive and it requires being out and about campaigning for very long hours and for many, many months, so I'm not sure that type of aggressive campaigning ever suited Helen Sommers, she was a policy wonk, and the respect she had earned was from all her work! Had she decided to run for the state Senate, I think she surely would have won, but, as I said, she would have had to start over again.

Monahan: I've been told that what Helen liked about the Legislature was, she could focus on the Legislature during session, and then when it ended she could travel anywhere she'd like to go. She saw a lot of the world during that time. And, also, during her campaigns, she was rarely challenged.

Secretary Locke: So many of us envied Helen Sommers. She epitomized life-long learning. Through her travels she learned so much and studied so much about different cultures and different languages. We used to hear about her travels around the world, so we were very much envious of Helen. That was one of the benefits of being in the state House. During the interim she could travel and enjoy herself. She worked so hard, so in the off-sessions she deserved the opportunity to travel, and relax to recharge her batteries, but also satisfy her thirst for knowledge and discovery.

Helen was so respected by her constituents; she rarely had a challenge if at all. She always won with wide margins with Democrat and Republican support. That gave her the freedom to speak out on the issues; to really speak her mind, and to focus on what was best for the state – and to even take on unpopular and complex issues, as well!

Helen was a person who read every single bill she voted on. She was almost always in her office until very late at night. When I was chair of the Appropriations committee, I'd leave the office around midnight – and often times, as I walked to the elevator, I'd see the light on in her office.

Sometimes I'd just bop into her office and sit down and chat. Or she'd come to my office. We enjoyed each other's company and enjoyed talking about the issues – just “shooting the bull” about the process as well as fiscal policy.

I can't tell you how often I turned to Helen Sommers for advice from when I first came to the Legislature. When I was Appropriations chairman we conferred a lot, and I turned to her for advice. I very much valued her friendship, her advice, and her counsel. I know Helen really wanted to chair the Appropriations committee when I was chair, while she was Capital Budget committee chair.

Monahan: She told me: “Throughout his legislative career, I knew Gary Locke was destined for higher office and to continue on in positions of extraordinary power. Gary is very personable, very bright and very articulate; and he's also a minority! All those qualities and his leadership made him an outstanding candidate for political office and also an excellent leader.”

Secretary Locke: I think the world of Helen Sommers. I don't think she's ever received the recognition she deserves, and I don't think the people of Washington truly understand and appreciate her incredible contributions to Legislature, to higher education and certainly to state of Washington.

We are such a better state because of Helen; and we have set such a “high bar” in so many areas in our state. Now that I'm in Washington, D.C., people here know Washington state and the pioneering and innovative programs and policies that developed in Washington state. And, so much of it has the stamp of Helen Sommers on it.

Monahan: How are things going for you as U.S. Secretary of Commerce? Helen said “Gary was destined for higher office and for being in positions where he was influential. As a state, we've got to be so proud of Gary's position, and I think he will be an enormous benefit to the Obama Administration.”

Secretary Locke: I've tried to bring a lot of innovations and the approaches that we devised in our Washington state, to this Washington D.C. The federal bureaucracy is very slow moving, very entrenched, and not as nimble and proactive as we

were fortunate to have in the state of Washington.

The Congress here focuses on a few issues at a time, and isn't able to juggle so many things like we were able to do in the Washington State Legislature. But, clearly this is a very trying time for the country with high unemployment; and with the collapse of the financial markets. President Obama inherited the worst economic conditions from the previous administration.

President Obama has done an incredible job with the members of his Administration and with Congress in avoiding a second “Great Depression;” a depression that my father grew up in, with my aunts, uncles and grandparents, so it is tough trying to “turn this ship around,” but we're making progress. But, at the same time, we have to focus on a lot of the issues we pioneered in Washington state: focusing on education reform; focusing on job creation; economic diversification; healthcare reform; and energy! We're making progress on those major issues, but it's not easy.

I'm just so honored to have this opportunity to serve the President of the United States because we want him to succeed in the very difficult tasks ahead. If the President succeeds, American succeeds! It doesn't matter if you're a Republican, a Democrat or an Independent; whether you're from the Pacific Northwest or the Southeast. If the President succeeds on issues, affecting every-day Americans – middle-Americans – on education, quality affordable health care, energy independence, economic recovery, good-paying jobs and offering family-wage jobs to people, then the whole country is better off!

Monahan: You bring so much to the Obama Administration.

Secretary Locke: I'm very proud what I was able learn as a legislator and as governor – as a manager and an administrator from Washington state, and I hope I make the people of my Washington state proud!

I have to thank Helen Sommers for a lot of that. She was an incredible counselor to me. She gave me the benefit of her wisdom so I didn't have to repeat some of the trials and errors of other legislators and

other administrators when I was governor. She could have gone on to higher office if she wanted, but she didn't want to. She loved the House of Representatives. We were so pleased and blessed to have her serve 36 years in this institution.

Helen was impatient. She didn't have much use for chit-chat or campaigning. She just wanted to get into issues. Helen did things her way, although it wasn't always the most popular way. Sometimes Helen's demeanor, her frankness, and her business-like approach may have cost her a chairmanship earlier in her career, but she always does it her way. And she leaves Olympia after an amazing 36 year career on her own terms!

I know that Helen and Speaker Frank Chopp had a lot of differences of opinion during the final 10 years of her career. Helen really focused on higher education as an economic engine creating good family-wage jobs across the state, especially at the community colleges, where we have them in virtually every county in our state! So much of our innovations and a lot of what we take for granted in our daily lives comes about in the research and discoveries that our colleges and universities provide.

Helen also really cared about social issues, such as family planning, working with infants and young children, children's self-esteem, good prenatal services for women, and pediatric care for women.

Frank Chopp is also very much interested in human services, but he is very much focused on safety-net for the down and out, whereas, Helen preferred to focus on prevention and education.

Frank is a very activist Speaker. He is actively into legislation that flows through the committees, he helps set the agenda, and has a lot of influence on what happens in each of the committees.

Helen had served with so many different Speakers throughout her tenure. She respected the Speaker because it is a very, very tough job. And, I have to tell you that Frank did an amazing job of holding that caucus together. When Frank was first elected in 1995, the Democratic Caucus was in the minority. The Republicans controlled the House with a 61-37 majority – then, a three-year tie with Frank and Clyde Ballard as Co-Speakers.

In 2002, Frank was elected Speaker, and each year since, he has won a larger and larger majority in his career. Often a large majority is much more difficult for a Speaker to control than a slim majority. Helen was able to work with Frank, putting together budgets, trying to address the concerns and priorities of the state, and reaching compromise with her interest in higher education and his interest in human services. They were able to reach accommodation and they were an effective team of advancing issues for the Democrats in the House.

That's one of the great things about Helen; she's able to work with just about anybody and still move her agenda and priorities forward while being respectful and accommodating to the priorities and the interests of other people.

Helen Sommers is an institution. Since 1972, she has been a stabilizing influence in the Washington State Legislature. She had respect of Democrats and Republicans, urban and rural. She had incredible knowledge and people would go to her for advice – and she gave it willingly. She really advanced the cause of women during her amazing career, and I feel so fortunate to have worked with her through much of it. Washington state is so much better because of Helen's dedicated service.



July 7, 2010 - **President Barack Obama** is joined by **Commerce Secretary Gary Locke** and Boeing Company's President **Jim McNerney** to announce the creation of the President's Export Council and talk about his administration's promotion of exports in an attempt to grow the economy and support jobs in the East Room of the White House. (Photo by Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images North America)



Christine O. Gregoire
Governor
State of Washington



Chris Gregoire

A Tribute from the Governor

One of the longest serving legislators in Washington State history, Helen Sommers dedicated 36 years to bettering communities in the 36th District and our state as a whole.

Helen's service spanned seven governors, and her distinguished tenure in the State House of Representatives was consistently marked by integrity and insightful leadership. I always admired her strong work ethic and commitment to excellence, qualities that earned Helen the respect of her colleagues and peers. She was truly an icon in Olympia, and her many accomplishments and years of dedicated service are part of the very fabric of our state's progressive history.

The people of our state, particularly those in the 36th District, owe Helen a tremendous debt of gratitude for working so tirelessly on their behalf, especially in the area of higher education. Washington State is a better place because of dedicated individuals like Helen, and I am deeply grateful for her unwavering commitment to public service.

I have no doubt that Helen's legacy of thoughtful and steady leadership will continue to have a lasting impact on our communities, as well as be held in high esteem, for generations to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Chris Gregoire".

Christine O. Gregoire
Governor



Lt. Governor Brad Owen Comments on the 36-year career of Rep. Helen Sommers

Lieutenant Governor Brad Owen: I was first elected



Brad Owen

to the House of Representatives in 1976 from the 24th Legislative District that then included Mason, Clallam, Jefferson and part of Thurston County. Rep. John Bagnariol was the new Speaker of the House. Rep. Helen Sommers had served two terms before I was elected. At the time I came to the House, Helen was chair of the House Revenue

committee. I don't believe I'd served on any committees with her, my committee assignments at the time were the Local Government and Corrections and Parks committees.

When I was elected, there were only 16 women in the 98-member House, and Helen was a 'rising star' in the House. After three terms in the House, I was elected to the Senate in 1982, which after the 1981 redistricting had become the 35th District. I served four terms (16 years) in the Senate, so while I knew Helen and respected her, I didn't deal with her a lot in either the House or the Senate.

My dealings with Helen actually began when, in 1996, I was elected Lieutenant Governor of Washington. At that time, Gary Locke was the newly-elected governor and both the Senate and the House were under Republican control. Helen was a liberal on social issues but was more conservative fiscally.

As Lieutenant Governor, I am the President of the state Senate. I succeeded Lt. Gov. Joel Pritchard, who had served for eight years, and I had worked for many years with Lt. Gov. John Cherberg. Cherberg served as the state's Lieutenant Governor for

32 years (1957-89). He had a remarkable career.

When I was elected Lieutenant Governor and served as President of the Senate, I dealt with the leadership of both the Senate Ways and Means and the House Appropriations committees, so that's when I got to know Helen Sommers quite well. I found her to be very cordial, not a lot of conversation, but she listened to us about funding needs of the Lieutenant Governor's office. I can't remember a time when she wasn't there to help us.

She served as Appropriations chair in 1994; was ranking Democrat on the House Appropriations committee from 1995 to 1999 when Republicans were in the majority; and she became co-chair of Appropriations when the House again had a 49-49 tie, the second tie in state history. In 2002, the Democrats regained their majority, so Helen was elected Appropriations chair and served in that post through the end of her career, when she retired in 2009.

In all budget discussions I had with Helen, she was always cordial. When Helen was dealing with legislative issues, she was all business and focused on the committee and the process. She was very knowledgeable and focused on fiscal responsibility.

In 2004, I headed a goodwill and trade mission to Taiwan and Thailand. There were legislators, higher education officials and many leaders of trade from our state. We had meetings in Taipei and then in Thailand. Helen was a part of that mission. What you learn about Helen is that when she's doing her job as a legislator, she's all business! But when she is away from here, her focus shifts and she is much more outgoing.

My perception of Helen is she's incredibly intelligent and very focused in this Legislative Building and the process and the job she has to do!

Helen was a real leader in the budget process for all of her 36-year career. You couldn't talk budget even over here (Senate) without talking about Helen Sommers. Her name always had to be a part of any conversation in the House or in the Senate. Part of the conversation would always be, "well, what would Helen think about that?" You couldn't have a conversation without her name coming up and

people wondering how she would deal with it. In the Senate, the Ways & Means Committee would always take into account Helen's perception. "What do we need to do to get Helen to go along with this?"

In many ways, this process is like a chess game. It's a challenge first of knowing the game and making the right moves at the right time. You need to be willing to sacrifice a play once in awhile, give up something in order to get to the ultimate goal: "Checkmate!"

My perception of Helen is; she was always "tough" but you respected her! With Helen, she set her goals and fought for them. She probably won a lot more than she lost. And though she didn't always reach her goals, I don't think she took anything personally or let it bother her. In budget debate, no one individual ever reaches all his/her goals. She's accomplished a lot in her 36-year career in the House and was greatly respected.

Lt. Governor Brad Owen Biography

Born and raised in Tacoma, Bradley Owen was elected Washington's 15th Lieutenant Governor in 1996 and reelected in 2000, 2004 and 2008. His more than 33 years in public office includes service as a finance commissioner for the City of Shelton; as a member of the state House of Representatives; the state Senate; and Lieutenant Governor.

Over this time Lt. Governor Owen has focused on providing leadership in public health and safety, with an emphasis on substance abuse and prevention. In addition to his day-to-day duties as lieutenant governor, Owen is the co-chair of Washington State Mentors and chair of the Legislative Committee on Economic Development and International Relations. He is founder and president of Strategies for Youth, a non-profit organization that partners with his office to develop and deliver positive messages to youth, as well as to the community at large.

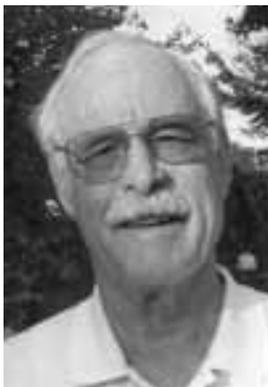
He has conducted many foreign trade and goodwill missions to countries in Asia, Europe and South America. Among his numerous honors is the bestowment of a Spanish order of Knighthood by the King of Spain in 2007, which he received in formal ceremony in 2008.

Lt. Governor Owen is the former owner of a small business in Shelton. He is an avid outdoorsman, and enjoys playing the guitar, drums, and sax. He and his wife, Linda, live in Shelton. They have six children and 17 grandchildren.

Speaker of the House Wayne Ehlers

Interview for Rep. Helen Sommers Oral History

Speaker of the House Wayne Ehlers Bio: Rep. Wayne



Wayne Ehlers

Ehlers (D-2nd District) was elected to the House in 1973, the same year Rep. Helen Sommers was first elected. He served for 10 years in the House, serving as chairman of the State Government Committee (1977-80), as House Democratic (Minority) Leader 1980-82, and he was elected Speaker of the House in 1983, when Democrats regained the majority.

He served two terms as Speaker (1983-1987).

Monahan: Speaker Ehlers, you and Helen Sommers both came to the House after the 1972 election, you and Helen were two of the 18 new Democrats elected, giving the Democrats a 57-41 majority after six years of Republican majority. That '72 election also brought to Olympia 13 new Republicans, so almost one-third of the House were brand new members. The newly elected Speaker of the House was Leonard Sawyer (D-Puyallup).

Speaker Ehlers: Yes, our caucus grew by 18 seats following the '72 election. Back then, the freshmen would sit in the very back of the chamber, that actually started in 1971 before we got there. So, we were the "back-benchers!" The Majority Leader on the floor would sit in the very front row and he'd give the "thumbs up" or "thumbs down" to instruct the back-benchers how to vote on whatever bill was up for a vote on the floor. That didn't happen for very long though because we told leadership if they did that, they'd probably get a different hand gesture from the freshmen! *(laughter)*

In that first session for the new freshmen (1973) with the Democrats back in the majority, a group of us freshmen pretty much hung together: Barney Goltz, Helen Sommers, I, and a few others sat in a little cluster on the floor in the back.

In the early days of the 1973 session, one problem we faced was Leadership wouldn't give the rest of us a list of the changes the Senate made to bills that were coming back from the Senate with amendments. And, they would never call a caucus on what the Senate amendments were, or what they involved. The Speaker would just bang, bang, bang go through them, and we would finally get a list, but we wouldn't have a discussion.

So many of the back-benchers would take turns speaking on the floor to extend discussion and get information on the changes to the bills by the Senate. Helen was one of the leaders on that. We would go down the bill books and say "it's an OK amendment from the Senate," and we'd sit and talk among ourselves. Even then, in that first session, Helen took some real leadership with Barney Goltz and some of the rest of us. From very early, on we saw Helen was going to be a star.

Monahan: And she continued on for an amazing 36 year career in the Legislature, so your perception then was right on.

Speaker Ehlers: Well, whenever someone would raise an issue about 'term limitations,' I would use Helen Sommers and Reps. Irv Newhouse and Jeanette Hayner, both Republicans from eastern Washington, who came in with us in the same class of 1973. Maybe for some members two years was two years too long! But when you consider people like Helen Sommers, Irv Newhouse and Jeanette Hayner, they got better and better as time went on. They served as some of the best examples on why term limits in the Legislature were not a good thing. I'm pleased that Washington has never gone to term limits.

Monahan: You and Helen were both on the state government committee, I recall.

Speaker Ehlers: Yes, in our freshman year, Helen and I were both members of the Ways & Means Committee. She was on the Revenue side and I was

on the Appropriations side. We were the only freshmen appointed to Appropriations in 20 years. She was a leader right away. As a freshman, Helen was named vice chair of Revenue, to Rep. Bob Randall, who was chair. When both Helen and I were elected to our second term, Helen was appointed chair of the State Government Committee, and I was the vice chair so we worked very closely together. She was very good.

Rep. Leonard Sawyer was House Speaker from 1973 until 1976. During the '76 session, there was a group of members who were troubled with the way House Leadership was not giving younger members a voice in the process. To the surprise of many, we called on him to step down, and eventually he did step down early in the 1976 session.

Monahan: Yes, I talked to Helen at length about that. She said it was a difficult situation because Sawyer had really changed for the better the Legislature and the way it worked. He brought full-time professional staff and he was working toward annual sessions, to give the Legislative branch a stronger voice in state government.

Speaker Ehlers: Yes, Leonard really made changes for the good. Under Gov. Dan Evans, we had annual sessions just because Evans believed that it was necessary, but it wasn't in the constitution, so he'd usually call us back in the second year of our terms. In addition to Evans calling "special sessions" to modify the budget and to handle other issues that had developed, Leonard had instituted on-going legislative gatherings in Olympia for committees during the interim to consider issues for the upcoming session so we'd be ready to go when the next session started. It also gave us a lot of oversight of the Executive Branch agencies which hadn't been going on before.

One of the reasons Sawyer started this oversight was Evans and previous governors when legislators were back home and weren't in Olympia, the Executive Branch would get chunks of federal money and would arbitrarily spend it. The governors were making commitments for federal money. They'd get, let's say \$5 million for Social & Health Services and would arbitrarily spend it on some program. But, then the next time around, the Legislature

would have to pick up the money when the federal dollars ran out.

Helen was one of the leaders very early on pushing for more of an oversight of state agencies, so she was very much ahead of her time in the issue of oversight, as was Leonard. He was responsible for the continuing Legislature and the emphasis on improvements to the Legislature that Leonard brought. I would also say that Speaker John Bagnariol deserves a lot of credit, too. He followed Sawyer and was probably the best Speaker I had ever seen, until his fall from grace.

Truly Bagnariol was very good and he got some very tough issues though the Legislature, like pension reform, basic school funding and a number of other historic measures for our state. But, sometimes when something happens it brings down your whole career.

Monahan: You were there in the first-ever 49-49 tie. Helen was the only Legislator to serve during both of the ties, (1979-80 and 1999-2001). Helen had told me that despite the difficulty of a 49-49 tie – it never happened before – that Leadership had to come up with a method and a proposal on how to do it.

Speaker Ehlers: The big difference in the first tie – and we were very lucky – John Bagnariol and Duane Berentson (the Co-Speakers) were very good friends, so they could work things out pretty well. It was somewhat irritating to those of us who were committee chairs because we had to run everything by leadership, but Bagnariol and Berentson did work well together.

I remember once waiting to meet with Speaker Bagnariol in his office. The press had set up cameras in his office, and John was being interviewed. The press team planned to finish their interview with John and then they would go to Berentson's office to interview him. But Berentson was in John's office, sitting on the couch.

Bagnariol was chewing out the Republican Caucus in his comments for the press. So, when John was done with his interview, his Co-Speaker Berentson said, "Oh, you don't need to go down to my office to interview me, we'll just do it here." So Berentson sat down and blasted the Democrats.

Then when it was done, Bagnariol and Berentson went out and had a few drinks together. (*laughter*)

The Co-Speakers and their caucuses had real legislative history and memory. The relationships between Democrats and Republicans were far different when we first came in than they are now. Those kinds of relationships changed over time, and not for the better. For two years, the tie lasted and it went surprisingly well.

One of the unfortunate things that happened in the first tie was when a group of lobbyists talked to the Republican members and said there were a number of partisan Democrats who were working on the non-partisan legislative staff. They told the Republicans they should identify which non-partisan staffers were Democrats and which ones were Republicans. The lobbyists wanted to replace the non-partisan people lobbyists didn't like because lobbyists said they were partisan Democrats. So that started creating partisan staff.

Up to that time, there were just a few staff people in partisan positions in the caucuses and a few in the Speakers' offices, and the rest of staff were non-partisan and worked for committees and administration. But because of that incident by lobbyists, it created a whole partisan staff whose jobs depended upon their getting in the majority or staying in the majority. So it became a situation where staff was doing opposition research so they could find things to 'zing' the members and the parties on in the next campaign.

That really changed the way the Legislature worked. It all started, I think, primarily because of the tie, and we started a process of having maybe 20-some partisan staff people being identified who then became full-time partisan. I think that was one of the downsides of the first 49-49 tie. It created a much more partisan Legislature after that because it really started the move to real nasty campaigns based on opposition research. So, it was hard for members who got attacked, but still reelected, to go down and be civil to some members and staff people who tried to do them in. It really changed everything.

Monahan: In the 1980 election Republicans won both the House and, with a switch by one Demo-

crat to Republican, the Senate. Republican John Spellman was the new governor after a single term by Gov. Dixy Lee Ray.

Speaker Ehlers: Yes. In 1981, the Republicans controlled the House with a 56-42 majority. Rep. Bill Polk was elected Speaker by his caucus. And the new governor was John Spellman. In the Democratic Caucus, there was a three-way race for Minority Leader of the House. It started with me competing for the leadership role against Rep. Rick Bender, but Bender dropped out after the first ballot. Then, Helen Sommers jumped into the race, and I did beat her in an election for Minority Leader.

Monahan: Polk was Speaker for just one term, and the Democrats in the House gained control of the House by a 54-44, so you picked up 12 seats in the election. You went from Minority Leader to Speaker of the House and you served as Speaker for two terms.

Speaker Ehlers: I was the first speaker in 30 or 40 years who actually completed two terms. Leonard Sawyer was elected twice as Speaker, but he never finished as Speaker in his second term because we forced him out in 1976.

Monahan: When you served as Speaker, the first two years (1983-84) Spellman was governor. In the first two years of Spellman's term, when he had the Republican majority in the House, I remember his reference to the House Republican Caucus as 'troglodytes.' I think he must have had an easier road with the Democrats, with you as Speaker than he did with the House Republican caucus.

Speaker Ehlers: Yes, In fact, this year, just before the 2009 session started, Gov. Spellman, Speaker Bill Polk and I were on TVW for an hour program talking about the economic crisis we were going through in 1981-82. We wanted to try to give some advise to what the Legislature should do in light of the current 2008-09 fiscal crisis the nation and our states are going through. We talked about where the parallels were from that experience and what we did wrong and what we did right.

At one point the commentator asked Gov. Spellman about how he got along with the Republicans in his first two years in office. I can hardly choke it

down, but Spellman said “Oh, we got along OK.” Well, that wasn’t true! Spellman did not get along at all with the House Republican majority! He got along OK with Senator Jeanette Hayner and the Senate Republicans. But, he and Polk just did not get along! I think Speaker Polk abused him badly; and there are all kinds of examples of that.

While I must admit that I was guilty of giving Spellman a bad time sometimes when I was Speaker, I had a lot of respect for Spellman as a decent person, and generally a pretty good governor. He was probably much closer to our caucus when we had the majority (1983-84), than he was to Polk and the Republican majority in 1981-82. When Polk was Speaker, I was Minority Leader, so I was in the midst of this. I’d go to leadership meetings and see the hostility that was there. I remember it very well!

Monahan: When you completed your second term as Speaker, you did not run for the House again. When you left the House in 1987, did you go to work for Gov. Booth Gardner?

Speaker Ehlers: No, initially I went to work for the Dept. of Social and Health Services as the Secretary’s representative for Region 6, which is King County. I was working in Seattle, and I reported directly to DSHS Secretary. I was kind of a trouble shooter for children’s services. DSHS asked me to come down for part of the session in 1990 before I would retire, to work for Jule Sugarman, but he got bumped by Gov. Gardner, and Dick Thompson was appointed by Booth to be the DSHS Secretary. So, I spent the 1989 session working for DSHS and I did handle the Mental Health Reform Executive bill for Gov. Gardner.

I planned to retire, but Booth asked me to come over to his staff. I didn’t want to originally, because I wanted to retire. But, I did agree to work for Booth to head his Legislative Office. He also had a federal office, so I supervised them as well. I did that for 2 ½ years and then I did retire!

Monahan: Tell me a little about Governor Gardner and your friendship with him.

Speaker Ehlers: He is beyond... when everybody talks about him, and even when he used to play golf with us when he was no longer governor, we would

go to a restaurant or wherever, Booth would be out talking to people and meeting people in the kitchen of a restaurant. There would be times when he was supposed to be doing something as governor, and he’d have some major leader or a VIP in his office, and I was supposed to be getting him back to the office for the meeting! But I’d find Booth talking to and visiting with a lot of kids in the rotunda, or someplace.

There are all kinds of Booth Gardner stories I could tell about things he did for people – you know he had a lot of money. When he was in college, he was living down in Seattle’s Central District. He was coaching baseball for some young teams in the Central District, and the teams didn’t have balls, gloves, uniforms or anything. One day, a truck pulls up with bats, balls, uniforms, bases and everything else. Nobody knew who it came from. It clearly was from Booth, but he never let anyone know. He did things like that for lots of people. I could tell you a lot of stories about his generosity and his friendliness.

Booth had a tough childhood with his mother and sister having died in a plane crash. He lived in Lakewood with his father, who was an alcoholic. He understood the problems people had. People spent a lot of time talking about how rich he was, but they didn’t talk about all the generous things he did for people or about him losing his mother.

Monahan: When you were Speaker of the House, what was Helen Sommer’s position then?

Speaker Ehlers: I always thought Helen would become Speaker long before I ever would! She had all the abilities and skills and was very, very bright. She could be a great team player. When I was Minority Leader and Speaker, if we had something we were going to do, she would do it as part of the team.

But sometimes she couldn’t help herself. If it was something that she just didn’t want to do, she wouldn’t be upfront about it, she would arrange for someone else – usually a freshman – there would be some issue. She knew she would get in trouble with us if she was out front, so I had cases where a bunch of people from a committee or the Caucus would come to me, objecting to me putting her on a conference committee. I had conversations with

her; told her to back off. Otherwise, there were people who wanted me to have a caucus meeting and appoint someone else.

When I became Speaker, she thought she'd be chair of the Ways & Means Committee. But I appointed Dan Grimm instead. That caused some early problems with Helen and some of the women in the caucus. Not all, but some. There were people in our caucus who had been around for a long time, and would have made a big issue had I appointed her as chair. She certainly deserved it – there's no question about that. But even when she didn't get the appointment, when it came time to pass taxes and work the budget to get the votes, she was good, she was with us, and she was a team player!

Helen, Dan Grimm, Denny Heck, Lorraine Hine and I would divide up the caucus, talk to members and she would diligently go out and get the votes to pass the measure. She never held it against us that she was passed over for chair, at least not for any period of time.

That was her one weakness, I think, and that's why I think she never became Speaker because over a period of time there were instances when, unfortunately, someone would complain about some instance that happened. We certainly all respected her ability and skills and she really was a great team player. I counted on her a lot.

Monahan: Helen and I talked about when she ran for reelection for the second time in 1974 and, to everyone's surprise, her Republican seatmate, Ken Eikenberry, decided to challenge Helen for her seat, rather than run for his own seat. He said something like, "This Legislature isn't big enough for both of us!" Well, Helen won, but about all she'd say to me about that was, "I guess he was right!"

Speaker Ehlers: I went up and door-belled a couple of precincts for her in the 1974 election. I went up maybe three different occasions and spent the day doorbelling for her campaign. They sent me into what should have been Republican precincts, but she was widely respected by so many people I talked to. There were a few who had a problem. But so many of them were very positive about Helen and asked me, "How is she down there?" I'd tell them about her and they'd respond, "Well, that's what we heard, she

seems to be doing a good job."

I now live in her district, and a couple of years ago some unions ran a candidate against Helen. Her name was Alice Woldt. They put up a lot of money to defeat Helen, but she still won big! I loved Helen's signs: "I'm not for sale." It reflected what the district knew across the board. Even if you disagree with some of her other decisions on fiscal matters or philosophy, there is wide respect for her abilities.



Helen Sommers is honored in a reunion of the class of House members elected in 1972. On Helen's left: former Speaker of the House Wayne Ehlers and former Rep. and Senate President Pro Tempore Sen. Barney Goltz. On Helen's right, Former Rep. Rick Bender (who went on to serve as President of the Washington State AFL-CIO), and standing, former Rep. and Sen. Gary Nelson, among other 'Old-timers.'

Helen and I had that conversation back in 2002. It was the 30th Anniversary of our legislative class, the Old Timers. Gary Nelson, was a Republican who came in at that time, was there, so Gary and I quietly on our own got Helen to agree to come. We got all the members on both sides to sit together. I brought a case of champagne and we had a toast to Helen sort of like the last survivor from the Class of 1972 – the year we all were first elected. Helen was the last of the class of 1973.

Speaker of the House Joe King Remembers Rep. Helen Sommers



Joe King

Rep. Joseph E. King (D-Vancouver) was elected to the House of Representatives in the 1980 election. He served for three terms representing the 49th District (1981-87) before he was elected Speaker of the House in 1987. He then served three terms as Speaker (1987-93). In 1992, he ran for governor when Gov. Booth Gardner did not seek reelection to the post he'd held for eight years (1984-1993).

King lost the primary to Congressman Mike Lowry, who went on to win election as governor.

Rep. Joe King has fond recollections of the 12 years he'd served in the House, working with Rep. Helen Sommers and other leaders in the Legislature. Joe King continues to work with and advise a host of organizations on how to make government work for them.

In an interview for Helen Sommers' Oral History on Sept. 17, 2009, former Speaker Joe King talked about Helen's 36-year career serving the people of her 36th District and certainly the people of Washington.

Speaker Joe King: When I came to Olympia in 1980, Republican John Spellman had just been elected governor of Washington; and both the House and the Senate were controlled by the Republican Party. We had very difficult economic times. It was, in its own way, every bit as difficult as our economy today (2008-10). In 1981, we Democrats called it the "Reagan Recession." But, the truth is, out of a \$7 billion general fund budget then, we were \$1.5 billion out of balance! So, on a percentage basis, it was about as bad as what our state is going through now.

It was a very difficult time – the worst time for our state since the Depression of the 1930s! Governor Spellman was a moderate Republican, but he had a very conservative Legislature. Rep. Bill Polk was Speaker of the House from 1981-83. And, the Senate Republicans took control of the Senate by a single vote (25-24) when a Democrat, Sen. Peter von Reichbauer, switched parties. Many legislators in Spellman's party wouldn't work with him because they opposed any tax increases to balance the budget. All they proposed were tax cuts! Despite the economy, they passed property tax limits and wiped out the inheritance tax, adding to the deficit. Gov. Spellman labeled many of his fellow Republicans as the "troglodytes." Eventually, in 1982 the Republicans did pass a sales tax on food.

But, in the 1983 session, Democrats took control of both the House (54-44) and the Senate (26-23). That was my second term in the House, and we worked to gradually improve the economy. I think Spellman worked better with the Democrats than he had with the Republicans.

Looking back, the early 1980s was a special time. Helen was one of a lot of very good legislators in 1983. It was an era that I heard talked of as "the Golden Age of the Legislature." We had some amazing leaders in the House Democratic Caucus at the time I came to Olympia. The Class of '83 included Gary Locke, Jennifer Belcher, Pat McMullen, Dennis Braddock, Janice Niemi and, of course, Helen Sommers were all part of that 'Golden Age.'

(Editor's note: The 'Golden Age of the Legislature' saw Joe King become Speaker of the House (1987-93); Gary Locke (House 1983-93) went on to serve two terms as governor (1997-2005) and in 2009, President Barack Obama appointed Gary Locke the Secretary of Commerce. Jennifer Belcher served in the House from 1983-93 and two terms as State Lands Commissioner, the only woman to hold that post. Pat McMullen served four years in the House and six years in the Senate; Dennis Braddock served nine years in the House and eight years as Secretary of the State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS); Janice Niemi was elected to the House in 1983, the Senate in 1987 and was elected King County Superior Court Judge in 1995; and

Helen Sommers, who served 36 years in the House, chairing five committees including the House Appropriations Committee for 12 years.)

Speaker Joe King: Helen describes herself as a policy wonk, and becoming Appropriations Chair was her chance to drive policy at a level she was comfortable with. She made an incredible impact on the state for years to come. When I think back on those times, Helen was one of the key leaders in the House that Democrats, as well as Republicans, really admired. She was a strong leader who was respected by both sides of the aisle. With Helen's help, particularly her ability to reach across the aisle, throughout my 12 years, we accomplished major, significant improvements to state government.

With Helen, as I said before, she was very much a social liberal, but fiscally, she was conservative. She marched to her own strong fiscal tune. She just thought we ought to govern responsibly, and if there were momentarily political pressures to bend in one direction, Helen just didn't bend that way. A lot of us would do that, but not Helen. She just didn't bow to political pressure!

Sometimes it was very hard for her to acknowledge political realities. I remember on more than one occasion telling her, "Helen, we just don't have the votes to do this! We're not going to get the support for that." That kind of thinking was hard for Helen.

What I remember most about Helen, was how she was able to gain influence by working with newer members of the Legislature coming in. She'd reach out to them and help them learn the process. She had been a House member for 10 years when many of us came on in the early 1980s. She was fond of legislators who were, like Helen, pretty fiscally conservative, but socially quite liberal. She just had an eye for developing those kinds of relationships with new members.

When I first came to the House, I was pretty green. I don't know how I identified myself at that time as far as being a 'moderate' Democrat. One area Helen would cultivate me on is pension issues. I thought we needed to be careful in doling-out pensions, and making sure we funded them. That was also a prime crusade for Helen throughout her career, making sure our pensions were fiscally

conservative, so I'd say on that kind of issue I, too, was fiscally conservative.

I remember, as a freshman, I once made a comment in Caucus on my concerns on the pension system. Helen followed me out of the room and said to me, "I'm glad to hear you say that. I have a pension issue I'm working on and I can certainly use your help on it." I can't remember if she wanted me to sign on the bill, but she had some role in her mind that I could play on the pension issue. I think she did that for two reasons: she may have actually needed a little help on the measure, but much more likely, she wanted to reach out and befriend a new freshman legislator, and to build a bond. We did have that bond.

Helen really understood how budgets were connected, and she was always very clear about her priorities, and higher education was high on her list. Higher education is one of the most vulnerable parts of the state budget. It's not constitutionally mandated; and it's not caseload driven like social services programs. She really knew if you have unchecked spending in one area, it would negatively filter down and eventually impact the Higher Ed. budget. So, if she was working to hold down pensions, or she was working not to increase health care case loads, she knew that any extra spending in those areas, would come at the expense of higher education.

She wasn't being tough just for the sake of being tough. She just kept her eye on the whole picture.

Helen could be a very intimidating force. Lots of people were intimidated by Helen, and there were a lot of freshmen who would tippy-toe around when they needed something in Appropriations. She'd be very direct.

One of the best anecdotes about Helen comes from Rep. Jeff Gombosky. It was during the Nisqually Earthquake in 2001. Helen, Jeff, Bill Grant, Eileen Cody, Lynn Kessler and others were in a meeting with Speaker Chopp in his office. During the conversation, someone had opined that higher education was going to have to take a hit in the budget. At that very moment, the earthquake hit and walls started shaking, and some in the office started to panic. The Speaker said, "Come on, follow me; let's get out of here!" Bill Grant was in

there cool and nonchalant, as always, and they all started running out of Frank's office, as everyone was terrified by the earthquake. But, on the way out, Helen grabs hold of whoever it was that said "Higher education was going to have to take a hit," and said, with the walls still shaking: "Did I understand you to say that higher ed. was going to have to take a hit?" (*laughter*)

Helen and I didn't always agree on issues. We had some knock-down battles. She could be a fierce opponent; and she could be a strong ally. Even when we were on opposite sides of an issue, we still were friends, and we always respected each other. I don't think Helen ever let differences on issues get in the way of trust and friendship.

When I was Speaker of the House, one of the most difficult decisions I had to make was to name a new Ways & Means Committee Chairman when Rep. Dan Grimm left the House after he was elected State Treasurer. By anybody's account, Helen would have been entitled to be chair. But, I ended up picking a very bright young legislator, Rep. Gary Locke. I broke up the Ways & Means Committee into three committees, and Helen did not take kindly to that.

I named Gary Locke to be chair of Appropriations Committee; Helen was chair of the Capitol Budget Committee and Art Wang was chair of the Revenue Committee.

Helen's goal was always to chair the Appropriations Committee. She had great respect for Gary and worked well with him. When Gary was elected King County Executive, Helen became chair of the Appropriations Committee. Helen served for 12 years as Appropriations chair (including three years as co-chair).

The 2009 session was the first session in 36 years that Helen Sommers wasn't there! She'd retired! There was no one to push the issue of higher education, and I'll tell you, the Legislature – and the colleges – really felt the loss of Helen Sommers this past session. I'm sure she's hoping someone in the current Legislature will step up to that role of protecting higher education as she had throughout her career. But last session, her absence was really felt and sadly missed.

Helen describes herself as a 'policy wonk,' and becoming Appropriations chair was her chance to drive policy at a level she was comfortable with. She made an incredible impact on the state for years to come!"





**Statement from Speaker of the House Clyde Ballard
about working with Representative Helen Sommers**



**Speaker of the House
Clyde Ballard – 12th District**

Helen Sommers is the type of person who always did a good job; not only for her own constituents, but for all of Washington. I'd served in the House for 20 years, and she was there for 36, so I've known her well during my career. She was smart, tough, and she didn't appreciate people who played games! She was always direct and to the point and she was fair.

When I was Speaker, she had a bill up and I voted for her bill. She came to me with a quizzical look: "You voted for my bill!" she said. I told her it was a good bill. She was appreciative.

Once, I remember, I checked in on her when she was in negotiation with some gnarly people on the budget. She was straight forward; she was strong and stood her ground! She was always direct and didn't put up with foolishness.

I think, had she not at times had pressure from her leadership, she would probably have been 'more tight' with the people's money.

In the Appropriations Committee, she was the glue that held them together. She will go down in history as someone who had a lifetime of success as a legislator. I enjoyed being around her and I appreciated her honesty and her directness.

Clyde Ballard



Statement from Speaker of the House Frank Chopp for inclusion in the Official Oral History of State Representative Helen Sommers



Speaker of the House
Frank Chopp – 43rd District

Representative Helen Sommers was already an institution in the Washington State Legislature by the time I was elected to the House of Representatives in 1994. She had been a House member for 22 years by that time, and had served in many leadership roles, including chair of the House Democratic Caucus.

Helen's longtime goal was to be the chair of the Appropriations Committee. She was able to fulfill that goal and serve as chair, co-chair, or ranking member of that committee for the final 14 years of her legislative career.

Helen was a stalwart supporter of higher education during her entire career, believing it to be a major economic driver of our state's economy. The ferocity with which she defended higher education spending in the budget has become somewhat of a legend, highlighted perhaps by a story that has been circulating for years.

One morning in 2001, Helen and several other members were in my office in the Legislative Building discussing the budget, which was facing serious reductions due to the economic downturn following the 9/11 crisis. Someone at the table mentioned that higher ed was going to have to take a cut that year and, at that very moment, the Nisqually Earthquake hit the Capitol with a 6.8 magnitude. While we were madly ducking for cover, trying to figure out what was happening, Helen was cornering the person who had made the comment about trimming the higher ed budget.

Now, that tale has been somewhat embellished over the years, but the core of it is true.

Helen and I shared many common interests. She was a great supporter of early learning and she often invited national experts to her committee to testify about the brain development in children.

Helen was well-respected by members from both Chambers and from both sides of the aisle. Our state owes her gratitude for her many years of dedicated service, and I personally wish her the very best in retirement.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Frank Chopp".

David Ammons

Interview with longtime Associated Press Reporter by Melinda McCrady & Dan Monahan

Dan Monahan: You came to the capitol Press Corps. in 1971. Governor Dan Evans in second term.



David Ammons

In 1973, Helen Sommers was elected to the House of Representatives, the first Democrat to be elected from the 36th District in more than 30 years. You've been with the Associated Press as a Capitol Press Corps reporter longer than Helen was in the House. Did you have any dealings

with her early on?

David Ammons: Yes, I did. I took a liking to Helen from the very beginning. For one thing, being a woman in the Legislature was a rarity in those days. There were very few women in either chamber, so Helen was a novelty in that sense. And, I remember over time – and with Helen being right in the middle of it, women becoming a rising political force on their own! Helen once told me that it was like a men's locker room – sort of a macho environment of Olympia then because it was mostly an all male bastion at that point. Women didn't have separate restrooms, and didn't have a lot of the amenities. But, they soon demanded that notice be taken that "women were here and you'd better get used to it!"

Helen talked about the usually subtle, but on occasion it was very demeaning, sexism that she encountered. On both sides of the aisle, people calling her 'sweetie.' I think much of it at that time was ill-informed but not mean spirited, as we might think of sexism, but she clearly grated under that. She was an interesting feminist. I think most of all,

she saw herself not on a 'gender basis,' but as one who had proven herself in the private sector, and who'd proven herself in King County government; and felt like she was as good as anyone. She wasn't arrogant, but she was definitely feeling like, if she was going to make her mark she wasn't going to play the gender card, she was going to be the best in the room on whatever the issue was. I kind of watched her early on, and 'the rise of women in the Legislature and in government in general' was always one of my favorite stories. So, I wrote a lot of pieces on that issue. So it was fun to watch from the earliest days.

When Helen was first elected to the House in 1973, there were a total of just 12 women in the House. That was up from eight women the previous term (1971-72). There were no women in the Senate at that time. Now, 37 years later, what we take for granted now is women controlling the Democratic Caucus in the Senate; and women controlling both the Governor's Mansion and U.S. Senate seats all women; all of that was built on the shoulders of women like Helen Sommers!

Through all the years I knew Helen, she never really talked much about family. I understand she was married at one time, but she never really talked about the private side of her life. You know, like Patty Murray when she was in the state Senate, she always talked about anecdotes from home; about her children, about her husband, about kitchen table issues and all of that, so she really effectively brought out the family-side of issues. Lisa Brown did when she was in the House; I remember she was reprimanded when she brought her little son on the House floor!

Helen was all business, I would say. I think she scared people with her sort of gruff demeanor and sort of looking down at the floor and not engaging their eyes as they went by. I think part of it was a sense of pride – or, I don't know if shy is the right word but – she definitely was not a glad hander so it was on the rare occasion when she did crack a smile or she did "B.S." about the weather or sports teams or something, we always thought that was a good moment. (*laughter*). We always wished she could have leavened her obvious ability with a bit of the human side, but she really didn't want that.

And maybe it was that old sense of privacy that we're here to do a job, and we're not here to have a good time.

Melinda McCrady: Helen actually stayed at a hotel most of the time she was down here, usually at the Governor's House. So she kept her life very private. She was always very brief about her personal life.

Monahan: When she was elected to the House in 1972, Rep. Tom Swayze was Speaker of the House, but the November election saw the Democrats picked up nine seats to win the majority, and that's when Leonard Sawyer was elected Speaker of the House.

Could we get your observations on that change? Leonard, I believe really chose the way the Legislature would work. He introduced the idea of a professional fulltime staff. What are your reflections on the changes that took place in the Legislature when Leonard took over?

Ammons: I think that was the great professionalization of the Legislature. I was very supportive of it. Until then the Legislature was much more beholden to – or a 'secondary player' almost – to the Executive Branch. The Executive Branch is here all the time, has all the employees at their disposal and of course the lobbying community is in Olympia year around, too. So to have better staffing – non-partisan staffing as it developed.

The idea of Legislature constantly updating their knowledge base as the year went along with the interim work, never quite materialized. Leonard had hoped it would with bills being prepared, voted out of policy committee throughout the year; sent to rules; and then either have a 'mini-session' to an agreed-upon calendar; or to do it promptly when the session convened. It seemed like no matter how much of that 'interim work' had been done, once they convened in January, it started all over again and you had the same hearings with the same people, so they couldn't quite make that leap.

I think there was, and still is, resistance to a full-time Legislature. People here cling to the notion of a Citizen Legislature. So, today, we're sort of in no man's land with expectations that you spend at least fulltime being a legislator, so I don't know how much longer we'll be stuck there. I guess

California is even talking about rolling back from being a fulltime Legislature.

Monahan: I had talked to Helen about Don Brazier's books ("History of the Washington State Legislature") the idea there should be a full-time Legislature with fewer districts and a smaller number of members. Helen was in full agreement with that, but it never happened.

Talk about Speaker Sawyer's situation in 1976 when a group of Democrats in his caucus brought him down with out him being even aware that it was coming!

Ammons: I think Helen would have been part of the dissident group, but not one of the leaders perhaps. She didn't like the hand's on. I always got the sense of Helen that she wasn't into those political machinations and the uprisings and all that behind the scenes stuff. What I really remember her for is higher education and the early childhood issues – brain development. I know she was just such a leader on those issues, and then, of course, the budget. I think she seemed to be really suited to the analytical aspects of the budget. She's a lot like Gary Locke in that regard, very willing to spend a lot of time digging in to the minutia of the budget.

Very early on in my career, I realized that if I was going to understand government, I had to know the budget, so I paid very close attention. I spent quite a bit of time with Helen, and Gary Locke and Dan Grimm (Grimm was the chair of the Ways & Means Committee in the early 1980s). He was followed by Locke and Sommers who both served as chairs of what became the Appropriations Committee.

Eventually I discovered how important staff is. They are amazing resources for the members. That's when I most often met with Helen was on the budget and its pieces. I would say that Helen was mostly bloodless about much of the budget issues. She didn't believe in a lot of things like some traditional liberals would. In fact I'm not even sure I would call her a liberal!

I think Helen was pretty tight-fisted in her way but, better than anyone through the years, I give her credit for putting higher education on the table.

The University of Washington wasn't in her district, but she saw sort of the 'big picture' of higher ed. as the economic engine of the state, and she understood the nexus before anyone was talking about economic development, job creation, job training, and sort of how you want to get there! If you want to progress, you have to have a world-class higher education system that's going to cost real money. And, of course, higher ed is the one piece of the budget where there's no constitutional protection as there is with K-12; and no entitlement as there is with many social programs. So if you have to make cuts, it turns out that higher education is always the budget balancer and Helen was in a position to really call that out.

That's my view of Helen; she was kind of a technocrat. Maybe she hid it from me and other visitors who were in the room, but I don't get the impression that she was into the power politics of it, which is so fascinating to probably a third of the legislators; that's why they really enjoy coming here. I think she loved coming here to do her job, represent the people of the 36th, but again, to really put her stamp on a good sustainable budget!

She was talking about pension policy and sustainability. She was preaching the gospel on that long before. Even during flush times, she was preaching on that!

Helen wrote the law about unfunded liability; and she was talking about that long before it was cool. She did some important things – sort of big picture budget history of the Legislature. Her work ethic is very admirable. I never caught her in a lie. She never told me something that wasn't so. She was very fact-based on how she did her politics and how she wrote her budgets.

McCrary: Yes, but she never volunteered information, you had to ask the right question. I could have had her do a seminar for my other members (*laughter*).

In your sign-off article for A.P., you talked about Gov. Dan Evans pursuing state income tax. Helen had great interest and enthusiasm for an income tax and worked with it.

Ammons: I think that was a motivating issue for

many progressives in both houses. I think it was probably Dan Evans' biggest disappointment of his entire tenure that he wasn't able to persuade people that you could reform the whole system and cap other taxes and that the Legislature wouldn't sneak around and jack them up again. The public was just always thinking that it was subterfuge for higher and more taxes! It's one of the greatest disconnects between Olympia and the public I've ever seen, and I'm not seeing that level of trust coming back to the point where you could get a simple majority!

In this day and age, the place is so partisan, you probably couldn't get two-thirds coming together on that! You'd see the 'hit pieces' in the fall campaigns. It was a different era back then when Evans was governor. He put the issue on the table twice, and legislators from both parties gathered a two-thirds vote to put it on the ballot both times! Back then, you could have genuine dialog on the issue, and you could have a really good campaign that wasn't shriek; and hit pieces, and all. Then, it was either "Do you think the system needs reformed; and is this a trustworthy way of doing it or not?"

That was how Helen operated in Olympia; having a good, high quality conversation, the likes of which we haven't seen since! There was a little bit of conversation last year on Lisa Brown's 'soak the rich' tax. After the Gates Commission came out with their report on tax options, there was at least conversation about it, but nothing more. I'm sure that was a big disappointment for Helen. Anybody who truly believes that our state has one of the country's most regressive tax structures and how it hurts the poor must be disappointed.

Monahan: The other thing Helen commented on was the difference between the first tie and the second tie. She was the only member to serve in both. She talked about Bagnariol and Berentson having a good relationship; that they were drinking buddies; there was camaraderie in the first tie (1979-80). Helen was a co-chair of the Revenue committee in the first tie with Rep. Ellen Craswell. They were absolute opposites, but she said 'we've got to make this work!'

Ammons: I think the campaign cycles have gotten so nasty, that that kind of camaraderie is unheard

of today.

Monahan: During your career at Associated Press (1971- 2008), you covered seven governors – from Dan Evans to Chris Gregoire. Two were Republicans and five were Democrats; also, two were women. What are your thoughts about the governors you'd covered during your years as a reporter?

Ammons: Each governor had their own unique approach. Some came out of the Legislature. Dan Evans was the Minority Leader of the House before he was elected governor in 1965 and he loved the give-and-take, and he worked with whichever party was in power. The early environmental movement included a whole bunch of moderate Republicans, so with Evans and colleagues from both sides of the aisle they invented the Dept. of Ecology and Shoreline Management and Public Disclosure. The 1970's was the 'golden era' of cooperation between the Legislature and the Executive. It was a great time of creativity and activism. They passed all those bond issues. Washington Future bonds, for infrastructure, water and waste projects and so forth. Evans was talking 'tax reform' as was the Legislature. So it was a real 'golden time' for that.

Dixy Lee Ray came in and warred against the Legislature. She was an outsider; she was a disaster in many respects; she was a difficult and prickly person; and she didn't believe in partnering with the Legislature.

John Spellman, a moderate Republican, was a victim of the economy 'going to hell,' and the Legislature, Speaker Bill Polk and all, tried to fix it in little incremental ways and not getting enough tax money; so had to come back about seven times, and that was just a nightmare.

Booth Gardner, who had spent one term in the state Senate, was a breath of fresh air; he was very collaborative by nature. And Dean Foster and Denny Heck were on his staff, so they were back to a collaborative time with the Legislature. Education reform was a real good example.

Mike Lowry was not a good fit. He was a legislator by instinct, but he hadn't quite figured out how to be a governor and how to work with this Legislature.

Gary Locke was a sweetheart to deal with. When he was in the House, he was Appropriations chair and really liked the Legislature a lot. I think he had a pretty good collaborative relationship. He wasn't great in the leadership department, but he did collaborate well. He did have a Republican majority through much of his two terms. I think he didn't mind working with Sen. Dino Rossi, chair of the Senate Ways & Means Committee and the rest. He didn't mind writing 'skinny little budgets,' I think if the truth were known. He was always kind of a skin-flint when he was in the House. And, despite his background, and coming from the Central area of Seattle, he wasn't a great social liberal. He was more a business Democrat.

Chris Gregoire hadn't been in the Legislature, but she's had amazing people around her, such as Denny Heck, Cindy Zehnder, Victor Moore, and Marty Brown. My impression of the Gregoire Administration is there's respect of the two branches with each other. The view is that you have to have collaboration or else nothing gets done.

McCrary: Helen always had a saying: The Republicans are the opposition; and the Senate is the enemy.

Ammons: Yes. I think with people after they stay in the House particularly, they become a creature of the institution. I see that with a lot of really good people, any number you could mention that could have easily moved over to the Senate. I think the House is fun. It turns over every two years, and I think it's more alive and open to new things. This is really stereotyping, but I think the fresh ideas come from the House, and the Senate sort of sits in judgment of that; takes a longer view and has to be convinced of the legislation. It's probably good to have the tension between the two chambers. I actually enjoy it when the two chambers are divided. We got a lot of stuff when House Speaker Joe King and Senate Majority Leader Jeannette Hayner were opposites; Growth Management for example.

And even the crazy ties in the House (1979-80 and again in 1999-2001) must have been awfully frustrating! To force everyone to the table and say 'we'll pass nothing' if we can't agree; it rubs all the edges off everything! But I don't know how else in this day and age you can get people from both

parties talking with each other respectfully, and not getting into the bomb-throwing.

McCrary: Dave, what are your overall thoughts about where we are today? We have a female governor, House and Senate Majority Leaders and our two female U.S. Senators.

Ammons: Well, the women have arrived! Other than the Speakership, but for Lynn Kessler blinking, she could have been Speaker! So I think the glass ceiling has been broken in the state Legislature for sure. I think the pollsters say it is an advantage to have a female name on the ballot, by some small increment. At some point it will probably be a non-issue. Probably, total progress is when just people of good qualities step forward and gender doesn't matter! Just like, hopefully, race won't matter some day. But at this point, it's still noteworthy when women achieve the governor's mansion or whatever it might be. I find myself still writing it and still thinking 'gee-whiz isn't that amazing!' When you look at the rest of the country – and the rest of the country isn't like us. So, there's something going on in Washington; the pipeline has been excellent. The mentorship and success breeds success. If girls and young women see women as the Majority Leader, the Governor or the U.S. Senator, it puts it in their brain. If they're interested in public service, "Why not? They did it; I can do it!"

I think, generally speaking, having women at the table really gives a broader view of legislation and people! It's no longer considered weird to think about the family influence and impact of things. We've been talking about 'kitchen table issues' for maybe a decade now. I think that came from the women who said, "let's not be all abstract about what we're legislating – let's talk about our family, our kids, safer streets, the schools! Is there a job for everybody in my household who needs one? Let's talk about education and higher education."

I think that even the way we talk about things has changed. I would give women a lot of the credit for that.

Monahan: Dave, after 37 years covering the Legislature; and Helen Sommers throughout her career, what are your thoughts about Helen?

Ammons: I think she had such a distinguished career. Just one of my very favorite people I covered in my career as a 'press guy.' She had great intellect, great work skills and work habits; she was very focused on everything she did. She didn't jump on everything. She very carefully picked issues that she thought she was good at and that she could bring something to the table.

I think after 36 years, to have people look back at your career and say, "She made a difference on pension policy, on budget policy, and on higher education! And keeping that focus on early childhood and brain development and education! That's a handful right there. How many Legislators really are associated with even one thing that truly mattered for everybody in the state? I think Helen was a giant! And I don't think people realized at the time, how important she was to the life of the state as she was serving, but as time goes on, people will really honor her.

Helen is very humble. She wasn't a publicity hound at all. She wasn't into it for the ego; she wanted to make a difference, and she did!

Former Representative Jim Boldt Comments on Rep. Helen Sommers' early years

Dan Monahan: I'm talking with Jim Boldt, a former



Jim Boldt

member of the House of Representatives from Kennewick, and a longtime lobbyist. Jim, you were first elected to the House in 1975 at the age of 24. Talk about your career and also your friendship with Rep. Helen Sommers.

Jim Boldt: I grew up in the Tri-Cities. I went to Washington State University and graduated with a B.S. in Environmental

Science Biology. When I graduated from WSU, I had an opportunity to do an internship in Richland for Congressman Mike McCormack, who was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1970. Mike had represented what was then the 16th Legislative District in both the state House (1957-61) and the state Senate (1961-70). When I got the internship, Mike was in his second term.

After my internship, August of 1973, McCormack offered me a staff job, so I loaded my car and drove to Washington DC for the job with Mike. I worked in D.C. from September, '73 to April '74. When I was in DC, Richard Nixon was President and I was one of the "Watergate babies." It was a fascinating time in D.C. The Watergate controversy was the dominant event in the nation's Capitol all the time I was there. It was shortly after I left, that Nixon resigned the Presidency (August 9, 1974).

I had returned to the Tri-Cities in April, 1974. I was 24, I had my college degree in Environmental Science and I had a realtor license, but I wasn't sure what I was going to do next! I was really fascinated by my work with Congressman McCormack and with the process of government. When I got home

in April, the two incumbent legislators in my area, Reps. Doris Johnson, a Democrat, and Max Benitz, a Republican, both announced they would run for the open Senate seat for the 8th District, which was part of Benton County. Sen. Damon Canfield, who served eight years, was stepping down. So, I decided I'd run for the state House of Representatives.

I won as a Democrat and my new seatmate was Rep. Pat Cochrane, also a new Democrat. Benitz, a Republican, beat Doris Johnson for the Senate seat. When I was elected, I had never even been inside the Capitol Building in Olympia! But I had watched Congress and I said "this is so fascinating; this is so much Thomas Jefferson!" That's what drove me to run for the Legislature.

Helen was in her second term when I was elected. She was chair of the State Government Committee in her second term, which was very unusual for a second-term member to be named a chair of a committee.

Over her career, Helen had a knack of taking new members under her wing and working with them. When I came in as a freshman Democrat from Eastern Washington, Helen and I formed a friendship, and I was another one of the new members she befriended and she worked with me to show me the ropes. People gravitate to each other for a variety of reasons. Sometimes it's intellect; sometimes its mutual interests; and sometimes it's chemistry. I must say, I was attracted to her because of her wit – her very dry wit – and her intellect. She was very smart, and very informed when she spoke.

One thing about Helen, when she was on the job, she was extremely focused on the Legislature. She was very serious all the time and always had a serious look on her face. She could make people feel a little uncomfortable, particularly if they didn't know her well, but she would always identify people she could work with. She did that for me when I was new. She befriended me and helped me as the process went on.

Having been in and around the Legislature for much of the past 35-plus years now, I can tell you that Helen was unique. She was all about policy, and she never played politics! Once you had her word, if she was with you, Helen was with you!

And, if she wasn't, she would tell you. If she hated your idea, she'd let you know, and you'd have to get ready for a good fight. Helen and I had a lot of similar philosophical views, but, because I was from eastern Washington and she was from Seattle, frankly she didn't always support my personal choices. There were times that we argued to the point that we'd just pick a different issue to continue with. But we were friends early on and I respected her more than anyone else. I was 24 and she was 10 to 15 years older than me. I had a lot to learn, and she was there for that.

When I first came to the House, there were a couple of freshmen on Ways and Means Committee. John McKibbin and I were the only two freshmen who got the nod. So that put us working on appropriations issues and working with Helen right away. The other thing is, I had a strong Latino population in Benton County and I, frankly, was not as sensitive to immigrant issues as I should have been. Well, Helen had lived and worked in Venezuela, she was fluent in Spanish, and she was knowledgeable about the Latino issues. I was on the Education Committee and Helen guided me through the state's first bi-lingual bill that I sponsored. She was, and still is a good friend! We socialized together at political functions, and we kind of hung around together in those years.

The Democrats had only been in the majority for two years when I came to the House in 1975. In the '73 session we had a 57-41 majority. The Republicans had been in the majority the previous six years. In 1973, when the Democrats were in charge, Rep. Leonard Sawyer was elected Speaker of the House. In the 1975 session, after I was elected, we had a 62-36 majority! And, there were a lot of new, young legislators who came to 'change the world!'

Now, Leonard Sawyer was a brilliant man and he was a strong Speaker of the House. I respect him for what he did to give the Legislature a greater role in state government. He probably, single handedly, is the person that made the Washington State legislative branch an equal partner in governance. When Lenny became Speaker, he wanted to establish the Legislature as a more equal branch of government. For the first time, the Legislature brought

on year-around professional staff. We incorporated some of the Boeing software information into our budgeting process.

Before that, Governor Evans would throw a budget on the table that his office had devised and the House and Senate would all scramble around and see if our districts were taken care of, and vote yes or no!

The House and Senate actually became a participant in the fiscal aspect of state government with the arrival of Len Sawyer and the Office of Program Research, which he established. He also tried to implement almost a full-time Legislature with his 'continuing session.' We would only recess; we would not adjourn. In 1975 I think we went clear until September in a rolling recess.

But there was a group of us newer members who felt we should have more involvement in the process; more to say. Our major objection was that Sawyer just closed us out of the process. We were considered the 'back-benchers.' That drew most of the younger and newer members together. There were some people there philosophically involved, but for me, it was process. That culminated in discussions of what we felt was the inappropriate direction the caucus was headed as far as total governance under Leonard Sawyer. A handful of members started late in the spring of 1975 to actually lay the now historical process in place for Leonard's resignation and replacement!

During the 1975 session, Helen was chair of the State Government Committee, the first committee she chaired. She also worked closely with Rep. "Bud" Shinpoch, essentially as Bud's 'aide-de-camp' on the Appropriations side because of her revenue interests. She had her fingerprint on a lot of the fiscal issues early on.

I think there were about seven of us who started this Speaker of the House thing! Rick Bender and I were roommates; Art Clemente, Chuck Moon, Marion Kyle Sherman, Donn Charnley. That was the core group. It was a secret core group during the discussions. Helen did bring balance to some of our fervor attitudes when she joined our effort later on. She was a good person to help us do the right thing. Helen respected Sawyer, but she understood

our concerns that so many members were shut out of the process.

The business community that was quite comfortable with Leonard's direction called us the 'dissidents.' The folks on the outside that thought change was a good thing called us the 'back-benchers.'

The truth of the matter is, we did not surface visibly to external audiences until January, 1975. We kept it under wraps somehow, fortunately. No one knew about it until we popped it! I remember driving out to Cooper Point one night to a secret meeting place, and Rick Bender and I couldn't find the place and almost got lost.

I'll tell you my recollection of the events leading up to Leonard Sawyer's departure. We had the core group that met secretly. My recollection is (and, I don't mean for it to sound boastful) I'd just read a book about the French Underground in World War II and how they recruited members. I shared that process with the group, and basically we used a hybrid of it. We had drafted a resolution requesting that the Speaker step down. We had 40 lines for signatures on the page. That master list was kept by one member of our group. When we knew someone in our caucus would be sympathetic to our movement, one of us would go to that member – never divulging the names of the other members. We would explain what we were doing and why, and we'd ask them to sign our resolution. However, they signed an original of the resolution of 40 lines with nobody's name on it. That 'master form' was kept by one member of the group. The new recruits would bring their list to the next secret meeting. They would then affix their name to the big list and we'd tear up the one they signed. So, we opened up that session with about 30 signatures of support. We picked up a couple more the first day of session and dropped the resolution on the table. We had 32 signatures out of the 62-member Democratic Caucus. Of course, the 36 members of the Republican Caucus were unaware of what was happening, as were the 30 Democrats who supported Sawyer.

I'll tell you it was a great day when Bud Shinpoch and I were sent to Dean Foster, the Chief Clerk of the House. We told Dean that we wanted

to have a caucus immediately! We put some people in very awkward positions. I know that Leonard, Dean Foster and Sawyer's supporters didn't know at all what was going on. I think John L. O'Brien was probably aware of it from about mid-point on, but he kept quiet about it. By now, Helen was in the middle of all this; and she was a balance for me and other back-benchers. I was a young kid who thought he was bulletproof, so Helen did help us keep in line. She was very helpful.

The caucus was called and we confronted Leonard in the caucus before we went to the House floor, hoping he'd agree to step down and it would be peaceful. But Leonard said "No," and walked out. We had 32 signatures in the 62-seat Democratic caucus.

So, I actually followed him with another group of people back to his office that day. Frankly, we were very confident; and we were young and cocky. We went in and told Len, "This isn't a bluff! We're ready to take this thing all the way and split it wide open!" We had lobbyists working against us, and people yelling at us. And it got a little tense for a few days until Leonard finally addressed the chamber and stepped down.

We wanted Reps. Joe Haussler or Al Bauer to become Speaker. Joe was everybody's 'grandfather,' somebody on the inside, and Al had strong support, too. But, as it turned out, we decided John L. O'Brien, the Speaker Pro Tempore, would run the session as he had done routinely when Sawyer was Speaker. John was very comfortable with that.

I still don't know how we were so lucky to keep this effort quiet, but we did. There are two things: there's a very different character of people in the Legislature now than in the early '70s. There was camaraderie with legislators back then, even across party lines. There's also an information and communication system that is not comparable. So I've learned to never say never in politics!

On May 1, 1978, I resigned from the House and I went on to lobby for 25 years. So I continued to be very involved in Olympia. I can tell you, it's become issue-oriented to a fault. It's become partisan to a fault, and it's become philosophical to a fault! I told one of my interns once "people used to dedicate themselves to public service. They would end up

eventually in the Legislature as they worked themselves from school board, to city council, county council and then they would run for the Legislature as a public servant.

Maybe in their second term, they would find an issue or a cause and they would go into that committee subject area or maybe they would go into leadership. Of course we had people who came in who felt strongly about issues. But it seems like today a lot of members are people who have a cause and in some cases are biasedly committed to that cause, so they come to the Legislature. And, all of a sudden they find out they have to be a public servant! It's just one guy's observation but I think it's now upside down. It's a whole different world!

I remember in the mid-1970's Rep. Bob Charette (D-19th District). One day in Helen's absence from the caucus, an issue came up about a fiscal matter. Someone said, "Well, Helen's not here so I don't think we should go into that right now because she feels strongly about it." Another member says, "Well she should be here!" Charette stood up and gave us one of the best quotes of all time! "We all know she is Helen Sommers; but if we bring that issue up now, without her here, she will be Helen Winters, too!" (*laughter*)

Helen was solid, information based. I respected her highly. After I left the Legislature, Helen and I would get together, sometimes it would be for lunch during session or we'd have a 'non-issue' dinner at least once a year. I don't know how many times I met her for lunch at a little Italian place in her district. I'd say, probably for the last three or four elections when we'd get together for lunch, Helen would say, "Maybe I'm not going to run again. Maybe I should step out of the way." And I'd say "Helen, what are you going to do? You know the place like the back of your hand; you can get what you want for higher education, you can help with a lot of causes. As long as you enjoy it and you have your health, stay with it!" I had the highest respect for her. I think one of the highlights for me was having Helen as a friend I could talk to.

One time, I rode my Harley Davidson motorcycle from Federal Way to Seattle so we could go to lunch. This was when I was a lobbyist, but nine

out of 10 times, I didn't even have an issue in front of her. We were in a café that day, so I took an extra helmet. I said, "Helen have you ever ridden a Harley?" She hadn't even been on a motorcycle! She had that look - you know how she used to raise one eye-brow and leave the other one down? (*laughter*) She said "yea!"

So we threw our helmets on and went out. I took a hard run through the parking lot; got out on the street, around a corner and slipped a bit. She let me know, politely that was enough, but she said, "Well, now I can tell everybody I've ridden a Harley!" I think she got a kick out of that. That was a big day for me. I thought getting her on the back of a motorcycle was one of the pinnacles of life.

Another great Helen story: I was a member – with her encouragement – of the Burke Museum. One of my side hobbies is amateur study of Northwest Native Americans. I was fascinated when in 1996 two men, who were watching the hydroplane races on the Columbia River, happened to find part of a human skull on the edge of the river. Later, deliberate searches turned up a nearly complete male skeleton that is now known as "Kennewick Man!" There is still question today about Kennewick Man. Initial studies indicate an age of 9,000 years, making Kennewick Man one of the oldest and most complete skeletons found in the Americas.

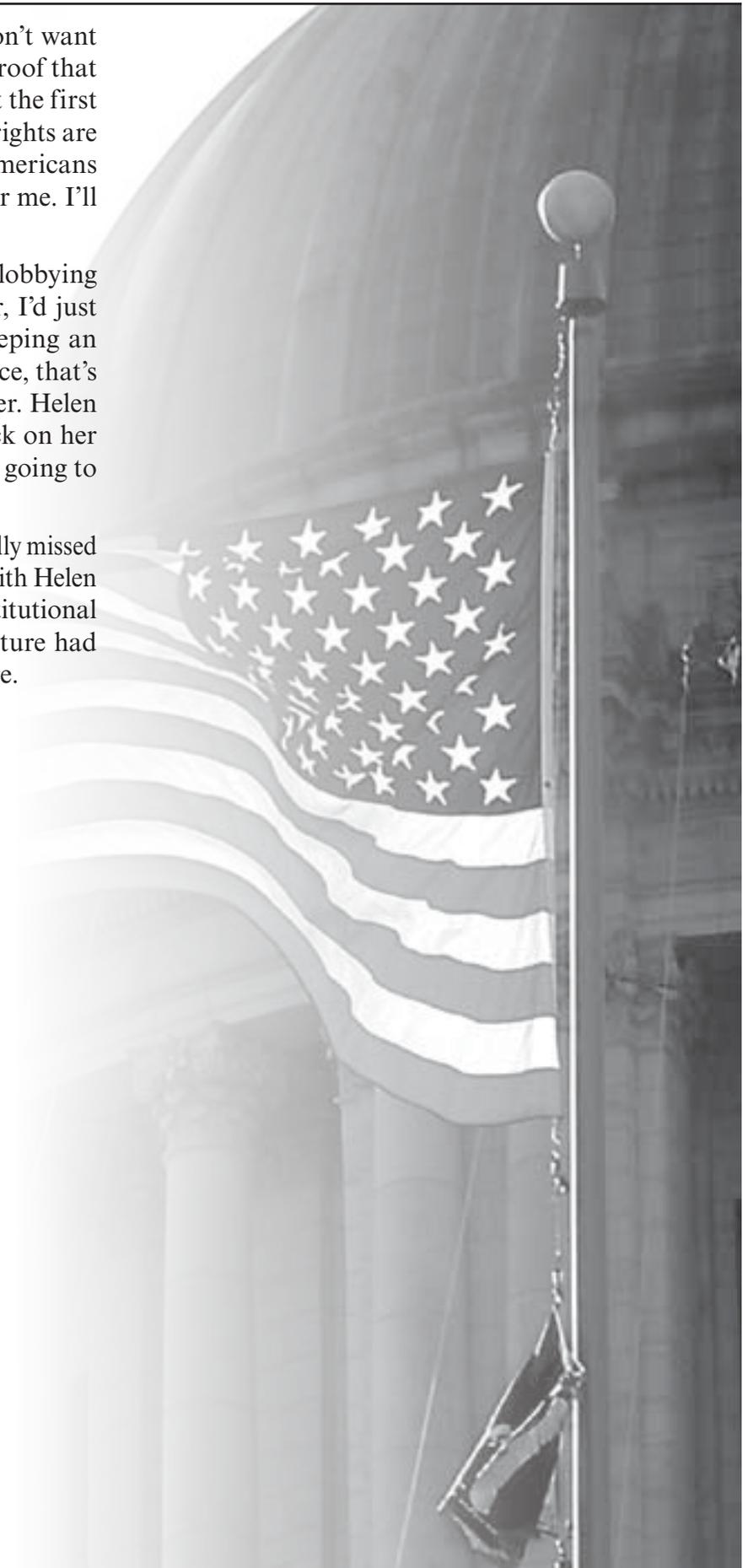
A lot of people don't understand the political undertone on the tug-of-war on this issue. They had the Kennewick Man bones at the Burke Museum for awhile until they got the court case figured out on whether or not the scientists could look at it. Northwest Indian Tribes claim the remains of Kennewick Man as their ancestors. So it's still an open case and the bones were locked in the basement of the Burke.

Helen, who is very active in the Burke Museum, took me there. She said, "I can get you close to the bones, but we can't open the door because it was sealed under a federal order." So, we went down in the basement. We went through a couple of locked doors, and Helen said, "Jim, I can't get you in, but touch that door because inside are the bones of the Kennewick Man." It was a real treat for me. You know, that was a serious debate. The

accusation that the Native Americans don't want the bones looked at because it's further proof that they were not aboriginal; so they were not the first Americans here. And, some of the treaty rights are based on the presumption that Native Americans were the first here. That was a big day for me. I'll never forget that.

After I had left the House, I started a lobbying firm. If I had an issue on a fiscal matter, I'd just say, "Helen, I want you to know I'm keeping an eye on this. So if you see me in the audience, that's why." I didn't do a lot of lobbying with her. Helen likes information; but she's solid as a rock on her position on issues. She knows where she's going to come down on issues.

I'm sure there are many members who really missed Helen during the 2009 and 2010 sessions. With Helen retired after 36 years, you lose all that institutional and functional knowledge. Helen's departure had to have left a 'giant hole' in the Legislature.



Representative and former Chief Clerk Denny Heck Comments on the Career of Rep. Helen Sommers

Former House Majority Leader Denny Heck:



Denny Heck

My introduction to Representative Helen Sommers was in 1973, when I was first a committee clerk to the House Education Committee, and later a research analyst to the House Education Committee when the Office of Program Research (OPR) was first created in 1973. So, my memory, my perception, my impression of Helen actually

predated our service together as legislators.

I was a member of the House Education Committee legislative staff, but Helen Sommers was not a member of the Education Committee at the time, as I recall. Remember, in 1973, legislative staff was something new. Prior to that time, there was virtually no full-time staff in the Legislature. But, in 1973, we had some full-time staff; we had joint committees on transportation and education, which were minimally staffed, but not aligned with the standing committees – those that convened during the legislative session. The joint committee staff continued, but eventually went away with creation of the Office of Program Research (OPR).

Helen was first elected in November, 1972. She was the first Democrat from the 36th District to win a seat in some 30 years! Helen ran against six-term Republican Rep. Gladys Kirk. In the position-2 seat another Democrat, Ian MacGowan, was challenging first-term Rep. Ken Eikenberry (R-36). I don't think the Democratic Party actually thought Helen would win her seat; but they had

high hopes for Ian. So I think the party focus was on Ian McGowan. But Helen really campaigned hard, particularly in 'door-belling,' and she pulled it off by a 53-47 percent margin. Ian MacGowan lost by a very narrow margin, and he went on to a very successful career as a lobbyist; and Helen went on to serve 36 years from the 36th District.

Helen was re-elected to a second term in 1974 with a huge win. But in 1976, the race was interesting. Helen had served for four years and her seatmate, Republican Ken Eikenberry, was seeking his sixth term. To many people's surprise, he decided to give up his 'safe-seat,' and challenge Helen for her Position-1 seat. He proclaimed "this district isn't big enough for both of us!" And he challenged Helen.

The most memorable part of the Sommers/Eikenberry race, for me, wasn't just that Helen prevailed, but it was a Helen Sommers billboard that someone painted a mustache on her face. Helen delights in telling the story about how her campaign group wanted to immediately correct it. But Helen said, "No! Let's let that run; it's going to backfire." The conventional wisdom is that that kind of defacing reflected poorly on Ken's campaign. I have no idea whether Ken was involved in that – I strongly suspect he wasn't – but it didn't matter. Helen beat Eikenberry pretty soundly. Of course, Ken went on to be elected Attorney General for a dozen years. He ran unsuccessfully for governor, and he was elected chair of the Republican Party, so he managed to survive the defeat.

After four years on House staff, I decided to run for the House. I ran for a 17th District House seat, against a Democrat in fact. It turned out to be an open seat, as the incumbent, Gene Laughlin, withdrew when I announced. He had served in the House from 1973-77.

When I came to the House, John Bagnariol was our new Speaker. My first term, Democrats had 62 member majority; my second term we had a 49-49 tie; and my third term, our caucus was in the minority! In my fourth term we won back the majority. I went all the way around the clock in four terms! I was elected to a fifth term, but I didn't serve because I resigned to become Chief Clerk of the House for one term (1985-87).

Leonard Sawyer resigned from the Speaker post in 1976 and didn't run for re-election from the 25th District. I didn't know Leonard very well because I was on staff when he was Speaker. I knew John Bagnariol though. I thought they were both 'Wiley Politicians' – pretty smart about things political. I wasn't close to Sawyer, so any observation I would have would be fairly limited.

It occurs to me that 'Lord Acton's rule' undid them both! Namely, "Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely." In Lenny's case, he got too far removed from his caucus. So his caucus decided to make the change. In John Bagnariol's case, of course, he got caught up and somewhat involved in illegal activities leading to federal racketeering charges that eventually imprisoned him. And Sen. Gordon Walgren, too, but he was later exonerated.

In both cases, I've been unabashed about saying I thought it was real border-line entrapment. I thought what was proven is that they were both subject to temptation. Who among us isn't? That doesn't excuse them, but I think it largely was what was going on at that time.

John Bagnariol was preparing to run for governor. And that would have been an interesting race. He didn't like the governor, Dixy Lee Ray, a fellow-Democrat, albeit a quite conservative one. John was preparing to run against her in 1980, and would have, had he not gotten side-tracked by a brief visitation to Lompoc (federal prison).

I've often said, Dixy should have watched the movie *The Godfather*, which was big back at this time. The phrase by Marlon Brando, "It's not personal! It's just business." The same is true of politics! Dixy should have watched that over and over again!

In my first term, I chaired the Basic Education subcommittee. Helen Sommers was chair of the House Revenue Committee. My second term, I co-chaired the Education Committee with Rep. Rod Chandler (R-45th). That was during the two-year 'first ever' 49-49 tie. (Chandler later became a Congressman in the state's newly created 8th Congressional District). Helen Sommers became co-chair of Revenue with a very conservative Republican, Rep. Ellen Craswell.

Helen was in the House when I was on staff and, of course, when I was elected in 1977. It's a bit embarrassing to admit this – Helen's like 20 years older than I am – but, as a very young man, I looked at Helen as a woman who was very, very smart and very attractive. The "full meal deal," sharper than a whip. I didn't really have the occasion to work with her directly when I was on staff or even much later. In order to really get to enjoy Helen as a person – her warmth threshold is pretty high, but when you get there, she's a lot of fun. My analogy is she has a long fuse to that point. But when you have dinner with her and a glass of wine with her, then she's a 'hoot.' In her work environment, she's really dialed in, it's really all about the business. And, in that sense, she's not especially warm. There is that side to Helen, but it's pretty much 'What are we here for and what are we about?'

When I talk to incoming members, I always tell them that this place is about relationships to a large degree; but I also tell them it is about substance and content. And, Helen always put her emphasis on the substance and the content in the analysis. That is, knowing the material and understanding the issues before you. That was a higher priority for her.

In my third term (1981-83), we Democrats were in the minority and I was elected Minority Floor Leader. In my fourth term I was Majority Leader, and Wayne Ehlers was the Speaker of the House (1983-87).

In 1981, John Spellman was elected governor. He had a Republican majority in the House and Rep. Bill Polk was the Speaker of the House. Bill and most in his caucus were very conservative, while Governor Spellman was a more moderate Republican.

There is always tension between the two branches. It doesn't matter whether they're members of the same political party or not. The genius of the American Democracy is that there is 'shared power,' but it's not always gracefully shared. So, there's going to be institutional tension between the executive and the legislative branches irrespective of party or personality. Sometimes it works better than other times, but there's always some tension. Secondly, bad times and bad circumstances make for bad

relations. So, you have to put it in perspective. The two branches are always in tension with each other.

In 1981 we were in the worst financial situation since the Great Depression. Of course, that time has been exceeded by what we're dealing with today (2009-10). But that does not make for happy circumstance either time; that makes for exacerbation of those difficult relationships and tensions. So that's the context. Yes, at the end of the day, John Spellman was more moderate than Bill Polk. There's no question about that. During Governor Spellman's second two years, Democrats had regained control in the House and the Senate. Our state wasn't out of the woods yet with the financial crisis, and we had to go back and fix things.

I would say that Gov. John Spellman was kind of detached in some ways. He had a cool temperament (and I mean it as a positive). But that can exacerbate tensions, too. I was majority leader, and the thing that would frustrate us when we were in the majority was that Governor Spellman would be very good about having regular meetings with us. We'd have breakfast meetings with the governor and Democratic leadership of the House and the Senate, but we'd never have any substantive conversations. And it just frustrated the daylight out of us. I suppose from Governor Spellman's perspective the point was 'We're going to meet regularly because I want to make sure the door's not only unlocked but open, and there's an ease in communication when it's appropriate and necessary.' But, he never defined those meetings necessarily as business meetings. We wanted to do work, and he wanted to keep the door open. That's the kind of stuff that makes matters difficult.

Here's my most memorable Helen Sommers recollection: Remember, I've said her warmth threshold is very high. And, remember I said that she tended to place an emphasis on the content and the substantive side of her work in Olympia. Remember also, that throughout her (and my) legislative careers, I often found myself on the other side of an issue and on the other side of the internal politics with her. We did great battle repeatedly. Her fiscal issues were always tough in the Democratic caucus.

I will never forget as long as I live – one time

after I had left the House and was president of TVW, coming back over to the House for some purpose, wandering out on the floor after session, and there was Helen. She walked up to me and gave me a hug and said: "Denny, I sure miss you!" I will remember that to the day I die. It will, no matter how long I live, rank in the top three hugs I ever got from anyone. Maybe it's because they were so rarely given. I adore the ground she walks on, even though we sometimes fought like cats and dogs!

There are, I believe, three things for which Helen should be remembered over the long, long-term of her 36 year career, and they're really counter-intuitive. Most people want to point to Helen's 'intellectual prowess' – and that's legitimately so. But in fact, Helen's Long-Term Legacy, I believe, is more 'values based.' It's more derivative of convictions than it is her intellectual prowess. And those three things are: a belief, commitment and advocacy for higher education; a belief, commitment and advocacy for fiscal responsibility – especially in the area of pension policy; and a belief, conviction and advocacy for women's rights. So, in my mind, those are the three things that 10, 20, and 40 and 50 years from now, Helen Sommers ought to be remembered for, respected for, and admired for.

You would be very hard pressed to point to any single woman who is more of a trailblazer in women's rights in this state than Helen Sommers. There are those who have made their contributions – certainly, in terms of the modern era – say the last 40 years. But, Helen Sommers is head and shoulders above everybody in that area. She did it when it wasn't easy and she became a leader. Remember, she was one of only 12 women in the Legislature when she was elected! It was a good old boy's club when she came here.

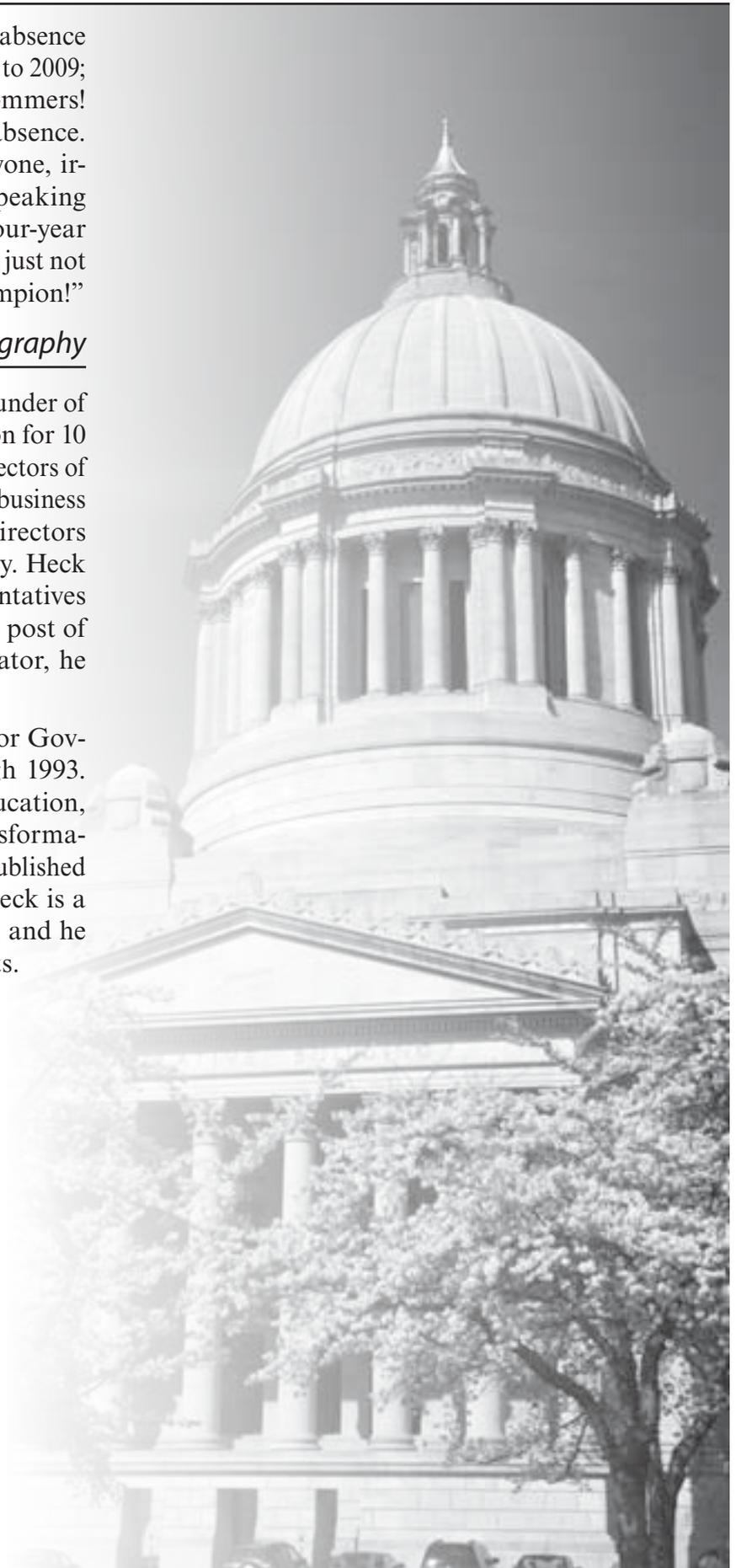
I'm proud to say that I'm now a member of the Board of Trustees of The Evergreen State College. And, as I said, Helen never lost her advocacy for higher education. If I had a nickel for every time in the last nine months I've heard anyone involved in higher ed. say, "We're getting hurt so bad because we don't have Helen anymore," I could retire on the interest!

If you want to point to a year where the absence of a member has had a profound effect, point to 2009; point to higher ed.; and point to Helen Sommers! Everybody in higher education feels her absence. You cannot have a conversation with anyone, irrespective of what school you're at – I'm speaking primarily, but not exclusively about the four-year institutions – without them bringing up “it's just not the same without Helen. She was our champion!”

Denny Heck Biography

Denny Heck retired as president and founder of TVW in 2003 after leading the organization for 10 years. He currently serves on the board of directors of Intrepid Learning Solutions and is an active business investor. He also serves on the Board of Directors of the Washington State Historical Society. Heck served five terms in the House of Representatives beginning in 1977, ultimately rising to the post of House Majority Leader. As a state legislator, he focused much of his work on education.

Denny Heck served as chief-of-staff for Governor Booth Gardner from 1989 through 1993. He authored an essay on the future of education, “Challenges and Opportunities: The Transformation of Washington's Schools,” which was published in 1987. A resident of Olympia, Denny Heck is a graduate of The Evergreen State College, and he now serves on the TESC Board of Regents.



House Majority Leader Lynn Kessler Speaks about Rep. Helen Sommers

House Majority Leader Rep. Lynn Kessler: I was



Lynn Kessler

elected to the House of Representatives from the 24th District in 1992, so my first session was 1993. That election saw Congressman Mike Lowry elected governor and an amazing 65-seat Democratic majority (65-33) in the House; as well as a 28-21 majority for Democrats in the Senate. It was the largest House majority in about 35

years. We had 37 women in the 98-member House, 23 women in the Democratic Caucus and 14 women in the Republican Caucus. When I first came to the House, Lorraine Hines had been Majority Leader, but she resigned in Jan. 1993 when she was appointed Chief of Staff to Governor Lowry. Julia Patterson was appointed to Hine's seat.

In my first year, the Speaker of the House was Brian Ebersole of Tacoma. And that year, Rep. Helen Sommers was the new chair of the House Democratic Caucus. Helen had been in the House for 20 years when I was elected, and she was a very strong voice in our caucus.

When I came to Olympia, Helen scared the Hell out of me!! (*laughter*) I knew – Oh my God, she's so knowledgeable; and she so spoke her mind! So, at the start, I was always terrified of her. When Helen was in Olympia, she was all-business! But, early on, Helen invited me to dinner with a couple other freshmen. At first, I was quite surprised, but as I got to know her, that was kind of her M.O. She would invite a few people to go out to dinner, particularly new members, and sort of talk with them on a more personal level. Not Helen Sommers

the Legislator, but Helen Sommers the person. She was very good at developing relationships with some of the new members and getting to know them on a personal level. If she had a glass or two of wine, she was very fun, and funny. We had one meeting at her house early on with a small group of new members, and Helen started serving wine. I always thought she did that on purpose just to get the crowd loosened up a bit.

What was interesting about Helen, when she was in the House, she was all business. Don't talk fun; don't talk anything, let's just do legislative stuff. But when she was out to dinner with us, she'd say. "Let's not talk anything about the Legislature. I want to talk about anything other than the Legislature!"

As I got to know her, I discovered that Helen was very accomplished, and had a broad range of interests; so I learned how very interesting she is herself. But, she was especially focused about bringing things out of members like me, who were new and usually scared to death of her. When you get away from the campus, Helen is really quite a charming person. Her, should I say, non-legislative life, brought out how charming she really is. She was very interested and interesting off campus. When the session ended, often Helen would travel the world. She had an amazing interest in art and world travel.

It was in 1994 that Helen became Appropriations chair, after Gary Locke left the House to become King County Executive So, Helen had achieved the post she coveted: chair of the Appropriations Committee. But, as it turned out, the 1994 election turned this place around as Republicans won the majority of the House. Helen served one year as chair of Appropriations and then became the Ranking Democrat for four years; followed by three years as co-chair (during the 1999-2001 tie); and then back to Appropriations chair again for the final seven years of her 36-year career in the House.

Something I remember about 1994 was when *The Seattle Times* conducted a survey of the most effective Legislators, and who had the greatest integrity. Well, Helen was rated the Number One Legislator in Washington, and I remember a fellow I knew who was at the bottom and was quite

disturbed by that. But Helen was at the very top! So she was highly regarded by both sides of the aisle both the House and the Senate as a formidable legislator.

When Helen was first elected to the House in 1972, there were only 12 women in the House and no women in the Senate. And, I would say, some of the earlier women thought they had to be fem-fatales or something to be successful. At that time, women weren't supposed to be in the Legislature even though we had women legislators in Washington as early as 1913. Helen never bought into that stuff. In fact, Helen won her 36th District seat when she beat Rep. Gladys Kirk in 1972 who early on, appeared on the ballot as "Gladys (Mrs. Douglas G.) Kirk." Helen's longtime friend, Georgette Valle, was more of the charming woman, but, Helen was just the opposite; Helen didn't pay much attention to that, even though she was extremely attractive.

In my third year as a legislator, 1995, our Caucus was in the minority after the 1994 Republican sweep. Helen had been the Appropriations chair for just one year, and now she was the ranking member with the Republican caucus in the majority. Rep. Jean Silver was the new chair of Appropriations. My 24th District had 19-percent unemployment. I was trying very hard to get something in my district for displaced timber workers. I had bargained with Rep. Dale Forman, Republican Majority Leader (who wrote the budget). He had said to me, "If you'll vote for this budget, I will get your bill to help the displaced workers in your district in the budget."

So, we have the vote on the budget on the floor, and I vote "Yes." Helen popped out of her seat, came down and stood next to me and just screaming at me! (*laughter*) "Why did you vote for that budget?" I said, "Because he put something in there for my workers, and I said I would, so I had to do it; I had to get something for my displaced timber workers!" Oh My Gosh, she scared the heck out of me. (*laughter*) I stood my ground because it was the right thing for my district. It didn't make any difference anyway. They had a lot of votes and didn't need me. They had more than enough votes to pass it. But, boy, she was pretty ticked off at me. (*laughter*)

I served with Helen on the Appropriations Committee much of the time she was 'ranking Democrat,' co-chair and then chair for the final seven years of her career. When I was Minority Leader and then Majority Leader, and serving on Appropriations, nearly every single night during session, the vice chair and I would go to Helen's office and we would discuss the budget; and go through it line by line. There was no dinner; we'd work right through dinner hour. So Helen would open up this bottom drawer in her desk that was always full of snacks from Trader Joe's, including Wasabi peas. So we ate snacks every single night. Of course we never had any social life. No dinners out, no receptions, and certainly no wine. I did that with her for many, many years, and we became very close friends and good allies on the budget.

Now, I was there to represent the Democratic Caucus; and Helen's job was to write a budget. So it was kind of this dynamic of me saying "the caucus really needs this funded." Or, I would tell her what the Speaker needs, because I would bring his needs in there, too.

But I think we ended up with a great working relationship and a great rapport. The only time she got kind of funny was when Hans Dunshee was vice chair. He worked so well with Helen, and Hans is so funny. Hans and I could 'play-off' one another and joke around to maybe ease the tension. It was so fun. But, sometimes Helen would get pretty irate. (*laughter*) "Stop it; quit laughing! We got to get back to business." (*laughter*) As I said before, Helen could have fun; but not during work.

I probably spent more hours with Helen than any living human being here. I had those nine years, every single night, Monday through Thursday, plus Saturdays often 16 hour days, all the Appropriations Committee meetings and those meetings at night. She was just an amazing woman, and I was lucky to work with her. Of course, my job was to get things included in the budget, so I'd say: "OK. I have a list of bills that we have to get out." And she'd say "We're not going to get those out." And, I'd say "Well, Helen, this is what the Speaker wants out." I fought these battles for years. "In the end, we're going to get these bills out!" One time she said to me, "You make him come in here and tell me that."

So he did. But, we spent a lot of time together; and she is a very remarkable woman.

I remember when a group of us were meeting in Speaker Chopp's office talking about the budget, when he was then Co-Speaker. It was Feb. 28, 2001, and we were routinely moving through budget issues. At one point, we got to the need to cut funding for the Higher Education Budget, a favorite of Helen's. It seems like at that very moment, the building began to shake. It was shaking and jarring! Now, I've lived in Washington all my life, and most earthquakes are more undulating. But this earthquake was very, loud, kind of like a series of trucks coming in. Maybe it seemed so different because it was so close. It was a 6.8 magnitude earthquake, and it was centered some 11 miles from the Capitol.

When it hit, Speaker Chopp jumped up and said, "Get out, get out!" There were maybe a half-dozen or more of us in the office. Someone said: "No, you can't leave in an earthquake!" And, Kip Tokuda said "everybody under the table!" Nobody was going to go out in that hallway with all the marble flying. So Frank tried to get under that table, but there was no room for Frank and no one was going to give the Speaker their space, I'll tell you! But Helen, she was totally focused on the statement someone made about cutting the higher ed. budget! That was hilarious. Afterward, we all just laughed! She was such an advocate of higher education; especially the University of Washington.

The one thing I learned about Helen over the years was people would say they were afraid of her when they first met her. Or if you ever brought an idea to her, she'd say "No!" And then she'd just cut you down, and you thought, Oh, no that was bad." But then, I realized that it was almost always her first inclination to say "No!" But then the next day, she'd come back and ask you, "Well, what did you mean by that? How did you think that was going to work?" And then she would go through it with you. And many, many times she'd change her mind. So, I knew she wasn't intractable. She would listen. But she would always approach back and start asking questions. Pretty soon she might go half-way or she might go all the way. I thought that was quite a testimony as a legislator and a person who'd been

there so long to be able to listen to the newcomers coming in, and taking on some of their ideas.

Many times, people would come to me and say Helen had told them "No" on what they wanted to accomplish. I would tell them to just hold on a bit she might change her mind; that Helen would probably talk to them again about it. She's not a "No and Hell No" person, even though that's her usual first reaction. She really knew every aspect of the budget and knew how much money was available. But, if she got a response about the need, she could change her mind. In that position, Appropriations chair, it was good to have a person who was so strong, who certainly had the background and longevity to be able to take your idea and say, "OK that will be fine."

It was with policy as well. A bill could come up and you have some ideas about it; and maybe she had opposite ideas or she would cut it down. That was almost invariably her first reaction, but as she thought about it, she often had a very open mind.

Family planning was a huge issue for Helen. In fact, one year we had an expert, a doctor, come to us and she said, "you know, we can solve the issue of abortion and family planning at the same time because about 45 percent of all pregnancies are unintended." In perhaps most cases, nobody wanted to get pregnant, they didn't try to get pregnant. So that resulted in abortions. So we formed this coalition. Helen was one of the strong leads on this. We went out to get both conservative Republican women and the Democratic women to say, "Look we can do this together. Because, if we can have really good family planning and education, then we have fewer unintended pregnancies which means we have fewer abortions. So we both win."

With Family Planning, women don't have children they don't want, and you don't have to abort a fetus! It was really a good plan and we had the conservative Republican women on board, so we thought we'd finally found this great answer.

Helen was Appropriations chair and we had the hearing but, all of a sudden, from the right-wing conservative religious groups, they came out strongly against it. They think any form of birth control is abortion. But, we're saying, "If you don't

have an egg, you don't have an abortion!" But, the bill failed! I remember Helen putting so much into that and taking the lead. She had all the statistics and how it would work for both sides.

So it was pretty hard for her. Helen had been once married early in her life, but she never had children of her own. She was always so happy to be around children. She just adored Sen. Mark Doumit's children. Mark spent a lot of time with Helen. He was on the Appropriations Committee when he was in the House and served as vice chair in the Senate Ways & Means Committee, so they had a good working relationship. Helen had pictures of the Doumit children in her office. She really enjoyed being around children.

When my first grandson was born, I took care of him every Monday during the interim. He was three months old when I took him to a meeting and Helen was all over him; talking to him and so caring. She was very into reading to kids. She was a real early leader in the issue of baby brain development. She had books, and encouraged reading to newborn babies to help in brain development. She even brought in a professional from the University of Washington to have her testify on early brain development in, of all places, the Appropriations Committee! It seemed pretty weird, but she was so into it and wanted to share the concept.

Another of Helen's great interests was art. She traveled the world to see it, and she had her own very nice art collection. Art was a really big thing to her. She was very involved in the Burke Museum and she would on occasion invite some of us to go to the Burke with her. After the tour, some of the archivists would take us down into the basement of the Burke which is an amazing place, and then she'd hit us up for money! (*laughter*) Travel, art and archeology were three of her greatest interests.

People really didn't know how accomplished Helen is. You couldn't pinpoint her. She wasn't a big salesperson of herself. You should have seen the jaws drop on the day she spoke Spanish on the floor! She'd done it on several occasions, including farm-worker housing once on the floor.

Probably the most difficult election Helen ever had in her 36 year career was in 2004 when she was

challenged in the primary. The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) went after Helen. The union supported Alice Woldt, a more liberal Democrat who challenged Sommers. Woldt spent more than \$275,000, most of which came from SEIU. Helen spent about \$180,000. She worked very hard raising money, doorbelling and she really worked hard for that win. When all was done, and Helen beat Woldt by 52-percent to 48-percent in the primary, instead of going off and resting in some spa, she went to Jordan and some other country rife with danger.

Helen could have gone to the Senate, had she wished, but she was happy in the House, where she was chair of Appropriations. As an economist, she was very interested in budget issues and legislative policy. Helen always had a saying: "The Republicans are the opposition; the Senate is the enemy." I don't know if she could have gone to the Senate! (*laughter*)

When Helen retired after the 2008 session ended, and the 2009 session began, she was one of two people we lost who, I would say, kind of left our caucus a little bit rudderless. One was Helen's departure, which created a contentious replacement bid for the Ways & Means Chair. Whenever you have a contentious race, and somebody wins and somebody loses, there's that anxiety still out there. And, there was no Helen there who could say "Let's move on; let's get over it."

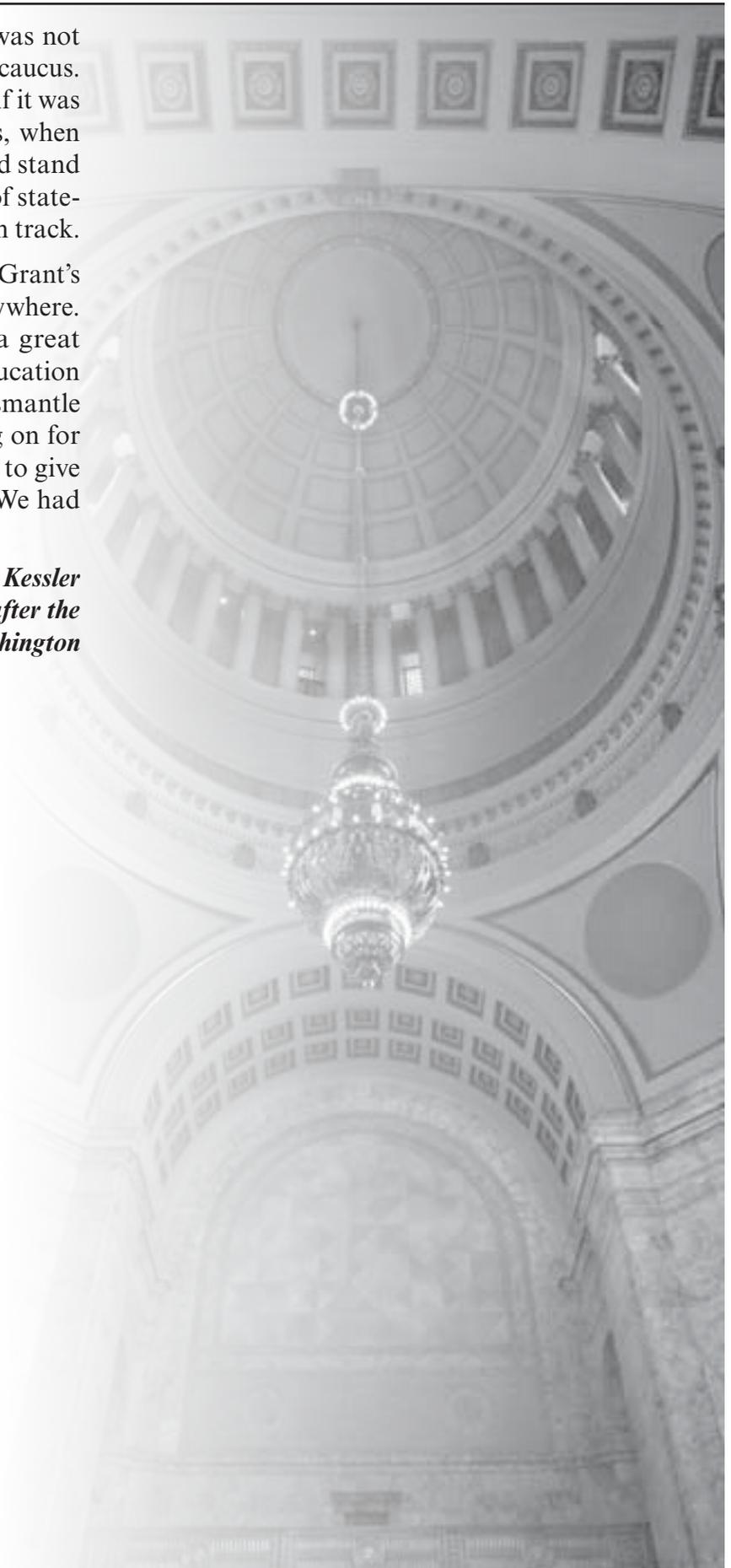
And the other person we lost in the 2008 session was Bill Grant, who also had been a leader here 20 years, and had served as Democratic Caucus chair. Bill's absence was strongly felt. Bill was a wonderful guy who didn't talk a lot – but when he talked, EVERYBODY listened! Kind of like an E.F. Hutton! (*laughter*) I think those two losses for us – sadly Bill Grant's sudden death, and Helen's decision not to run again – those two events really affected us! You could feel that in our caucus, I think, that we definitely lost two very opposite types of leaders, but very definite strong leaders. That coupled with the sort of contentious race for the Ways & Means chair, always brings winners and losers. And you have your followers in each camp; but there's no real voice to kind of bring it all together to say, "we've got to move on!"

Everyone knows that Helen was really a strong

voice for higher education, but her voice was not just for higher ed. It was a solid voice in our caucus. Helen had a way in caucus. It didn't matter if it was budget or just a policy discussion on bills, when things would get kind of goofy, Helen could stand up, cut to the chase, and make some kind of statement that would help everybody get back on track.

So, I think her absence in 2009, and Bill Grant's departure, had a very profound effect everywhere. For Helen, specifically, higher ed. was a great focus to her. But there are other higher education advocates in our caucus. We will never dismantle higher ed! But it certainly was her holding on for dear life; because ultimately, often she had to give up on some of it; she couldn't keep it all. We had good battles!

(Editor's Note: House Majority Leader Lynn Kessler announced she would retire from the House after the 2010 Session after 18 years of service to Washington State; another big loss to the Legislature.)



Representative Eileen Cody Comments on the her friend Helen Sommers



Eileen Cody

Rep. Eileen Cody first came to the House on May 31, 1994 to a seat that was then the 11th District. Eileen was appointed to the seat of Rep. June Leonard, who had died the previous month. Cody has now served 16 years in the House (in 2003 she was redistricted to the 34th District). She lives in West Seattle with her husband, Tom Mitchell. Representative Cody is a registered nurse, specializing in rehabilitation and works as a staff nurse at Group Health.

She is Chair of the House Health Care and Wellness Committee and serves on the Health & Human Services Appropriation and the Ways & Means Committee.

In an interview with Dan Monahan, Rep. Eileen Cody speaks of her long-time friend and colleague, Rep. Helen Sommers:

“I really didn’t know Helen until I was first elected to the House in 1994. Of course, when I was elected, she had already been here for over 20 years, and was a legend! Helen made legislative history during her 36 year career. The year before she was elected to the House (1971), there were just eight women legislators and 90 men! In 1973, when Helen was began her first session, the number of women had grown to 12 women that election. There were no women in the Senate.

In 1995, my first session, there were 37 women in the House of Representatives. The November 1994 election really turned the Legislature around. The House went from a 65-33 Democrat majority in 1993-4, to a 62-36 Republican majority – when

the so-called “Republican Revolution” occurred. Not only did it happen in our state Legislature, but it also happened in Washington D.C. That was the year U.S. Speaker of the House Tom Foley, of Spokane, was defeated by Republican George Nethercutt, as the strongly Democratic U.S. Congress also tumbled from a majority to a minority. It was a bad time for Democrats across the country.

In the 1995 session, my first, Republican Rep. Clyde Ballard was the new Speaker of the House. Helen had just become chair of the House Appropriations Committee in the 1994 session. But the next year, Helen became the ranking Democrat on the committee. Rep. Jean Silver of Spokane was named Appropriations Chair. It was very difficult for our caucus because the Democrats had held the majority since 1983.

One of my favorite stories about Helen probably the first night I really got to know her – occurred the week before the 1995 session was to begin. The Boeing Credit Union always had a big dinner for legislators at the Canlis Restaurant in Seattle. It was a traditionally large, bipartisan group of legislators invited for the gathering. Helen came that night, so my husband, Tom and I sat at the table with Helen. I think there were two Republicans at our table. One of them was Rep. Mike Sherstad, who was newly elected from the 1st District. As the evening went on, Helen played him like ‘a cat with a ball’ because she was trying to find out what the new batch of Republican freshmen were going to be like, and how they would work in the Legislature. He was one of the more conservative members of the freshman class, with a religious-right bent.

Well, Helen kept asking him a lot of questions just trying to find out how he thought, and let him just run it all out there so you could see his right-wing agenda. It was quite entertaining. Tom and I both sat there in awe and watched Helen work. Sherstad didn’t even understand that she was fishing for information and trying to see what lay ahead for us to deal with. She had an agenda, and she really let him play it all out. It was definitely cute, one of those things where you could really see how her mind was working and how she was going with it. Tom was really impressed with that. He really doesn’t go to many political things, but, he always

talks about how Helen dealt with that.

Helen can be intimidating, especially to new members who come in and hear the stories of the legendary Helen Sommers. Helen has the fire, and can be mad, but you don't see it too often. I'd say when I first was elected, new people always asked how you dealt with Helen? Or you get all this advice from more senior members on how to deal with Helen, or how not to deal with Helen, or what she would be wanting!

In my second term (1997) our Democratic Caucus picked up six more seats, but we still had a minority of 56-42. I was appointed to serve on the House Appropriations Committee. Now, you didn't get appointed to the Appropriations Committee unless Helen blessed you! I was very lucky to get on Appropriations, and I've been on that committee ever since. Helen and I became friends in that first two years. I was sitting on the floor fairly close to her; Ruth Fisher sat in front of me. Since we were such a small caucus at that time, we really got to know each other very well when there were only 36 in our caucus!

There's definitely the liberal women that were there: Grace Cole, Ruth Fisher, Georgette Valle, Helen and me. The "older women" took Mary Lou Dickerson and me in pretty quickly, and we became part of the group. All those women were strong and definitely showed leadership. Georgette Valle and Helen sat on the House floor next to each other for 20 years. Georgette always sat next to her. Georgette was elected in 1972, as was Helen. They were 'opposites' in how they did things, Georgette was a little more flamboyant and Helen was always very reserved, but they were very good friends. Georgette left in 1997, and Dow Constantine (now King County Executive) got her seat.

That's one of the things about working with Helen, she was always a women's advocate. When there would be a conflict with a woman specifically, she was very cognizant, making sure she didn't let the men influence a decision that would encourage a fight between women. Or she'd never try to set up a woman for failure. She'd make sure that the woman succeeded. Of course, when she first came to the House, there were few women and none in

positions of power at that time. Helen helped change that after she came to Olympia. Specifically, I can use the example of when we started having these extra subcommittees of Appropriations back in 2005.

Helen didn't want the committee to be split up with subcommittees. She was really opposed to the idea, as I was. We argued against it, but the Speaker wanted it, so it went forward. When Kelli Linville got appointed to be the chair of the Appropriations Subcommittee on General Government and Kathy Haigh was chair of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Education. Helen said to me afterward, "Well I don't like it, but we're not going to let it fail because I'm not going to let those women fail," even though she knew it was undermining her own power. And, I don't know if Kelli and Kathy actually even understood that that's the way she thought about it, but that's the way she handled it. She wasn't going to let that affect how those women were treated.

Another thing about Helen, she was always a big advocate of family planning. And I would say I always knew that, so I'd never have to argue with her about getting enough money into family planning. Helen was always tight with the state's dimes; she wasn't someone who spent money loosely. You always had to justify all the decisions made. But in health care – Helen and I worked on those issues for years – I never had to argue with her about funding for family planning issues. She would actually figure out how to spend money on family planning and women's health issues because she believed that every dollar you spent there, you were saving dollars elsewhere. That was always one of her biggest pushes.

Another very important issue to Helen was to try to promote issues to decrease the rate of teenage pregnancy. Statistics are pretty poor on how well kids who get pregnant as teenagers do, but they are usually raised in poverty and they often will have a second child very quickly. "Recidivism" is what Helen called it. So she would put money in the budget for programs that work to decrease teenage pregnancy. Again, her notion was that spending small amounts there will save big dollars in other social programs. About five or six years ago, a study showed that Washington's health rankings went up with fewer children in poverty because of a lower birth rate. I took that finding and showed

it to Helen. I said “Helen, this was you!” She had helped us make ours a healthier state. And that also saved the state money.

I totally respect Helen, and I believe that she brought so much to the institution of the Legislature. She had that institutional history and would try to impart that on those who are younger, new members when they would come in. She’d try to explain how caucus rules had been developed, and was able to explain all the ins and outs of it. She knew when there were strong Speakers and when there weren’t strong Speakers. She understood the role of the chairs, so I always watched her where she was able to work with both sides and still be a strong committee chair. I always teased Helen that I had graduated from high school the year she came into the Legislature. We developed a friendship – there was a pretty big age difference, but we thought a lot alike. We were kindred spirits in that way. I had a lot of knowledge in health care and she respected that, so part of it was having mutual respect for each other.

I have many good memories of the years Helen and I served together. I remember the Nisqually earthquake (Feb. 28, 2001 @ 10:54 a.m.). Helen, Bill Grant, Phyllis Kenney, Jeff Gombosky, Kip Tokuda and some staff people (It was during the tie) were in Co-Speaker Chopp’s office working on budget cuts. We were going over areas to cut piece by piece. Right after we’d told Helen that she couldn’t hold extra money for higher ed., the earth started to move! It was quite a scene. Everyone dove under the table; Bill Grant just stood there. I jumped under a door frame – with a glass transom, not even aware there was glass above me! The moment the building stopped shaking, the Speaker yelled “Everybody out” and he was the first one out. I said, “Now that’s leadership!” (*laughter*) We were just 11 miles from the epicenter of a 6.8 magnitude earthquake! After we got out of the building, we teased Helen that she didn’t need to cause an earthquake just because we told her she would have to cut the higher ed. budget!

Another good Helen story: I remember, it must have been in 2003, we were locked in the Modular Building one of the final nights of the session. We were under the call of the House negotiating the unemployment bill. Chopp was keeping us there in

anticipation of a final vote. Well, at 4 a.m., Helen said, “This is ridiculous. I’m going home!” And she left! She knew the bill wasn’t going anywhere that morning. So she left, and we were under the call of the House! She got away without House Security noticing, and she was gone. (*laughter*) She was right; the bill didn’t come up for a final vote.

When SEIU (Service Employees International Union) ran Alice Woldt against Helen in 2004, I actually think Helen was thinking of retiring then. She was definitely considering it. It was just crazy that the union ran someone against her, when all of us were raising the same questions about how the money was being spent and what they were doing. Helen was chair of the Appropriations Committee, and she was doing her job. It was ridiculous thing to try to say she was out of step with her district. Mary Lou Dickerson, Ruth Kagi and I were very supportive of Helen. One of her campaign pieces has a picture of the four of us – the strong women of the Legislature. Since I was a SEIU member that was even a bigger brouhaha because the union thought I shouldn’t be supporting Helen – but I was! Helen and I probably got even closer through that experience. She retired on her own terms; 36 years for the 36th District.

When the 2009 session began, Helen wasn’t there. She was definitely missed. This place wasn’t the same without her. But, it was a horrible budget year with the economic crisis across the nation. So there were many times I’d wished Helen was here, instead of being retired. I also missed our camaraderie. When she was here, Helen would have meetings every evening until 7 or 8 p. m, so a lot of times we’d go out for dinner. I really missed that. I don’t have those late night dinners to go to anymore. But she deserved the break. I don’t begrudge her at all. I would have hated to see her deal with the horrible budget situation in 2009.

We are close friends for life. Helen was always a member of Hemlock Society; she believed that when God wants you, it’s time to go. Helen knew that’s how I felt, too. She said “Cody’s going to pull the plug on me,” because she doesn’t want to be a cost to society. She even named me her medical power-of-attorney. She wanted to make sure no one kept her around longer that she was ready to be. I just hope it doesn’t come quickly!

Representative Mary Lou Dickerson Speaks out about her seat-mate Helen Sommers

Rep. Mary Lou Dickerson was elected to the



Mary Lou Dickerson

House from the 36th District in 1994. Her seatmate was Rep. Helen Sommers, who had served from the district since 1973. Representative Dickerson shares her story of her friend, Helen Sommers.

Rep. Mary Lou Dickerson: I think Helen Sommers was a ‘super star’ in the House of Representatives. She came into the House and rather quickly

established a reputation for herself as someone with a great deal of knowledge about economics and budgeting. She had the benefit of working for King County in the budgeting office.

Before I came to the Legislature in 1994, I had met her several times. I first got to know her when I was a citizen lobbyist with the Children’s Alliance, and would come to Olympia every year to lobby on behalf of children’s issues. I would lobby Helen and learned that I needed to make my point quickly and succinctly and then that was about it; Helen needed to move on to other things. As a citizen lobbyist, I felt a little intimidated by Helen. But, when I was elected to the Legislature from the 36th District, I didn’t have that sense at all. Helen was warm and gracious and I learned so much from her. As seatmates we are supposed to work well together and Helen and I certainly did. She taught me a lot.

Helen is a person of great integrity; she was always a strong advocate for higher ed. in the Legislature. She was seen as the go-to-person for higher education issues for many, many years!

Higher education funding is just out there – not like K-12, which is in the Constitution. Helen always did what she could to protect it.

When I was a freshman (1995) and in the minority, Helen and I would confer on the controversial votes. I learned a philosophy Helen had about protecting the state’s money. At that point, the House Republicans were in control and there were many pieces of legislation to give tax breaks to business. So, I learned that even though it might have been politically popular to do that, if we gave those tax breaks for business that meant we wouldn’t have enough money for education, for higher education or for human services. So I became rather conservative just as she did, about the use of state funds, whether it’s tax breaks or funding programs.

Helen served on the Appropriations Committee for many years of her legislative career. For a number of years, she served as chair of the committee, and, yes, she was fiscally conservative when it came to taxpayer’s money. But, sometimes being fiscally conservative does not mean you’re not willing to fund something. It means that you need to have some sort of proof that what you fund is going to be effective, and potentially will have a benefit to the people of the state. Sometimes funding programs that prevent greater cost is the fiscally conservative thing to do. And, that’s what I worked on with Helen.

When I ran for the House in 1994, the Democratic Caucus had a 65-33 majority over the Republicans that year. However, when I was elected and came to Olympia for the 1995 session, the majority switched, as the Republicans gained 29 seats for a 61-37 majority. So, I began my career in the minority. When you’re in the minority, it’s very difficult to pass legislation that you sponsor. The mood of the new Republican Majority in 1995 was: “We haven’t been in the majority for a long time, and we’re going to take this opportunity to roll back the legislation of the Democrats and replace it with a conservative philosophy.” There were some Republicans who treated Democrats very badly. So that was not pleasant, but for the most part, they simply ignored us in terms of legislation and went about passing their bills.

It took our caucus awhile to organize and get a plan in place; a plan that would be effective in reacting to the Republican priorities. I would say that this was quite a shock for the Democrats who had been there during their times of a majority. Democrats controlled the House for the previous 13 years. Most members in our caucus had never been in the minority.

I think Helen gave us an important historical perspective because she had been there in the early 1980s when Republicans last held the majority. She played an important role giving us information on how to be effective in the minority. We were very fortunate to have her there. There were a lot of feelings of shock and bewilderment on the part of some of the Democrats who hadn't anticipated being in the minority. Helen helped us work through that.

1995 was the year the Republicans rolled back many of the health care reforms of the previous decade. It was a very bitter-sweet moment for many of the Democratic legislators. Many had worked hard on health care reform and were very sad to see the progress that had been made evaporate. I think Gov. Mike Lowry did what he could to mitigate the roll-back, but in fact, there were very significant roll-backs of health reform during the next four sessions.

Shortly after 1995, women in both Democratic and Republican caucuses reached out to each other and formed a Women's Caucus. So we did start establishing some ties with women in the new majority, which was helpful. I had female and male friends also in the Republican Caucus, so I wouldn't generalize to say that there was no cordiality or friendship.

In 1999, the state had its second 49-49 tie in the House. Helen Sommers, who was the only current House member who had served in the very first historic tie in the House in 1979-80, was named co-chair of the House Appropriations Committee. Helen's historic perspective, again, was important and she did talk about when she was co-chair of the Revenue Committee with Ellen Craswell in that first tie. All of us were aware of how conservative Ellen Craswell was, so we took some comfort in the fact that if a Democrat could successfully co-chair

a committee with someone so very conservative, then we might be able to do this in many other committees.

I don't think Legislatures are designed to work well in a tie situation. So, we didn't accomplish a lot during the three-year tie, but we did do the work of the Legislature getting the budgets passed despite the tie. However, it's never an ideal situation for a legislature.

The Legislature is all about relationships. I learned this early on in my legislative career, and Helen was a great example of this. Those who reach across the aisle and create good working relationships with people in the opposite party are the legislators who are most successful. You could see on the floor of the House every two years we'd do seating assignments and Helen would often take on a freshman member to sit next to her on the House floor and work with that new member.

There were a number of issues Helen and I worked on as we represented the 36th District. And, Helen was very receptive to issues of protection of children, the rights of women for birth control, and family planning issues. She was also concerned about issues that involved drug-affected babies and we worked on that together. Those are the issues that stand out in my mind.

Helen believed in providing important birth control information both to adolescents and adults. She started the "Teen Aware" program because 52-percent of all welfare recipients in the state had a child as a teen, and the recipe for poverty is an unmarried teen mother with no high school diploma. Helen established some grants to schools to help students understand the importance of family planning.

She also became very aware of the infant brain science related to early childhood development, and was a great spokesperson for the issue of early literacy with children. So, there were appropriations for that. Often appropriations can be as important as legislation. You can do a lot with budget provisos. So Helen and I worked together on many of these issues.

Another issue we worked on together was the

Alaska Way Viaduct and its replacement. We both believed that it was not fiscally sound to replace the Viaduct with the initial tunnel plan. Several years ago the first projections for the replacement were \$11 billion. This was the first projection by the City of Seattle and the state.

I remember attending a hearing in the City Council Chamber where Helen testified and essentially said, "Look, the Emperor has no clothes!" "There's no way we're going to fund \$11 billion to replace the Viaduct, so you need to go back to the drawing board!" That was, I think, a very courageous act on her part. She knew that if we spent \$11 billion on the Viaduct, there wouldn't be money for other very important things. There are statewide needs that also must be met. So, Helen and I worked on the Viaduct over the years.

The 2009 session was the first session Helen missed after 36 years in the House. I think Helen took the right year to retire! 2009 was an extremely brutal session for all of us because of the enormous deficit and the need to cut and, in some cases, eliminate programs that provided a great deal of service to the people of Washington. I'm glad she didn't have to go through that! Helen gave so much of her life to the people of this state through her work in the Legislature, so although I'm glad for her sake she wasn't here for this session, she certainly was missed.

In 2008 at the end of the session when Helen announced she'd be retiring at the end of the year, Eileen Cody and I organized a campaign to buy her a lovely piece of Dale Chihuly art glass. Most House members and House staff, and many members of the Senate as well, pitched in and that, I believe, shows the respect we have held for Helen; that the entire Legislature held for Helen! (We gave it to her privately after the 2008 session ended.)

Helen has traveled the world throughout her legislative career. She, of course, had lived and worked in Venezuela before she came to Washington. I believe that Helen's world view was informed by her travel and that helped her form many of her positions on issues.

Also, Helen and I both love art. She goes to Georgetown every year where they have an art

show, and she got many of her prized art pieces there, and also from around the world.

Let me share one more comment about my friend Helen Sommers. Even though before I came to Olympia as a legislator, I felt intimidated by Helen when I first met her, I soon found her to be very warm and delightful and that she had a very good sense of humor. A lot of people didn't know that about Helen. And, I can also say that when she's away from the office, has dinner and a glass of good wine, she does let her guard down. She's a wonderful person and a great friend.

In 2000, Rep. Mary Lou Dickerson authored the book "Small Victories" about premature births.

Small Victories – Conversations about Prematurity, Disability, Vision Loss, and Success is an amazing collection of the life stories of people who where born prematurely and are now adults.

In this interesting compilation, adult "preemies" relate their experiences growing up - at home, in school and at work - providing insights on how being born prematurely has effected their lives. Compassionate and thoughtful, Mary Lou Dickerson provides interviews with twenty men and women from around the United States, who were born prematurely 30 - 50 years ago.

Last day of the 2008 session of the Legislature

(from Rep. Mary Lou Dickerson's 2008 newsletter to the 36th District)

On the 2008 session's last day, the House and Senate united to pay tribute to a great person and leader. Our own Helen Sommers is retiring in January after 36 years of outstanding service to our 36th District and our state.

Democrats and Republicans rose one by one to honor and say farewell to a leader whose integrity, inner strength and willingness to say "No," when necessary, made her the greatest budget Chair in state history. When faced with complaints for her sharp spending cuts to balance the budget, Helen would shrug it off with the comment, "What's another stripe to a tiger?" (That's why she is holding a tiger in the picture).

Our district and state will sorely miss Helen's smile, poise and personal wisdom. But her legacy will benefit us for generations—in the colleges and investments she championed, in the fiscal responsibility she instilled, and in the hearts of the leaders she inspired.



Rep. Mary Lou Dickerson, Rep. Helen Sommers and Sen. Jeanne Kohl-Welles on the last day of the 2008 session.

Senator Jeanne Kohl-Welles Talks about her longtime seat- mate, Rep. Helen Sommers

Sen. Jeanne Kohl-Welles: I am very pleased to share



Jeanne Kohl-Welles

my thoughts and remembrances of my good friend and 16-year legislative colleague Helen Sommers. When you look back on her 36-year career, it is very memorable and very significant. She was always known for fiscal responsibility and fiscal prudence and was not afraid to stand up to powerful groups on what she believed would

be best for the state.

And, with Helen, it's not so much individual bills she prime-sponsored – and I'm sure there is a very long list of bills she sponsored in her 36 years – but it's more the stature of Helen Sommers.

What had drawn me to Helen right from the start was her strength of character, which was apparent immediately, along with her strong support of women and her being a mentor of women going into public office. Helen had been one of the founders of the Washington State Chapter of the National Organization of Women (NOW) and was one of the first to convince me to run for public office. In 1988, I was involved as a member of the 36th District Democrats when Helen and Becky Bogard, a friend and lobbyist, asked me to run for the open House seat in the 36th District. That was when Rep. Seth Armstrong had been injured in an automobile accident and did not seek re-election. (Rep. Seth Armstrong served four terms in the House as Helen's 36th District seatmate, from 1981-89).

Helen had kept a constant lookout for women who she thought would do well in politics and as public policymakers. So I was really honored when

she asked me to run for the House in 1988. But, unfortunately, I had to decline as the timing didn't work for me then, and that's when Larry Phillips decided to run, and he won.

Although I couldn't run then, it was something I had wanted to do, and having Helen's support and encouragement really did help me to make that decision to go for the appointment in 1991, when Larry Phillips won his race for King County Councilmember and resigned his seat.

I was successful in getting the appointment even though it was one of the toughest campaigns I ever had. I was appointed by the King County Council and sworn in on Jan. 13, 1992, the first day of the 1992 session. Washington State had just gone through the process of redistricting when I was appointed.

When I first began as a legislator, a lot of people were intimidated by Helen. She certainly was intimidating to me for a while. Not so much before I went to the Legislature because our friendship was in a different context. But then, when I got to know Helen as a colleague, I grew to have a very positive professional relationship with her. From my observations, she always treated people fairly and respectfully. Whether she was House Democratic Caucus Chair (1992), Appropriations Chair (1994), Ranking Member (1995-98), co-chair (1999-2001), or again as chair of the Appropriations Committee (2001-2009), she was impartial, focusing on the public policy of the legislation, not the politics behind it. She was extremely smart and knowledgeable.

During the three years of the 49-49 tie, Helen would behave the same way – have the same conduct with Democrats and Republicans alike. As co-chair of the Appropriations Committee, she worked well with two Republican co-chairs: Rep. Tom Huff, and in the final year of the three-year tie with Rep. Barry Sehlin.

I remember back in 1993 when I was still in the House, Helen, Gary Locke and I were sitting in the members' dining room. No one else was around. Gary, who had been Appropriations chair, was leaving the House to become King County Executive. So, I asked Helen the question with Gary's leaving, if she would want to stay on as Caucus Chair or

go for the Appropriations position? “Oh, of course I would go for Appropriations Committee Chair. There’s no comparison!” And she did the next year in the 1994 session. But in the November 1994 election, Republicans won the House majority and held it for four years, before the 1999-2001 three-year tie. Then, for the final seven years of her career, (2002-2008), Helen served as chair of Appropriations – and a particularly formidable one!

There’s so much about Helen that most people don’t know. For example, Helen has an absolutely fabulous sense of humor. I think most legislators, most staff and even most lobbyists don’t know that. When she was working in the Legislature, she was all business. But, when you’d be with her off campus at a dinner or a party, she was always a lot of fun. She has a great sense of humor and at social events would let down her hair, crack jokes and laugh constantly. On the job she was so focused on the business end and wouldn’t seem to get distracted easily. She had that ‘Laser-point Focus’ that was constant, and that’s what most people probably saw in her. It was all business, getting the job done and sticking to the agenda.

Helen had a passion for higher education and research. Of course, funding of higher education isn’t mandated in law; it is totally discretionary. But, fortunately, Helen was a great protector of higher education funding. I had served as chair of the Senate Higher Education Committee or was ‘Ranking Minority Member’ for several years, so had helped write the Senate higher education budget. I’d get very frustrated at times because the Senate higher education budget was never up to what my expectations were.

When budgets come out of the House or Senate, first they are designed, to some extent, to establish leverage over the other chamber. In the Senate, we would include less funding for higher education knowing that Helen would make sure the House would come out with a stronger higher education budget. The Senate budget would include more for human services than Helen’s budget would, so it would come out balanced in the end. I was particularly gratified that Helen shared my passion for funding research which brings so much to our state’s economy and, of course, to advancement

of our knowledge base. She also could always be counted on for funding of the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture on the U.W. Seattle campus.

I know the Legislature and the people of Washington will long feel the loss of Helen Sommers. When people look back on her career, they will undoubtedly view it as exceptionally memorable and significant. It’s not so much the individual bills she prime sponsored, but more the stature of Helen Sommers and what she stood for. She was known for fiscal responsibility, fiscal prudence, and support for higher education. Although she was such a ‘tight steward’ of public funds, she recognized the value of making investments in higher education, for example, and the down-side of not doing so! So, she not only had a breadth of command of issues and the funding area of our state, but also an enormous in-depth understanding of the consequences our funding decisions play in the long-term vitality of the state of Washington.

During the last 10 years or so, Helen became a leader on a new issue for her – the importance of early childhood learning! She talked a lot about the early brain development between birth to age three. She was very focused on providing learning opportunities to the youngest children, and when I observed her, she was unfailingly engaged with children who visited Olympia. So again, she could look beyond just political considerations to what was really important to her. She commanded her own ship really well for a long time as Appropriations Chair, Capital Budget and Higher Education Committees. I think that’s it: the integrity she always maintained, the high regard people throughout the state had for her. Her toughness served her well in the challenges of being chair of the Appropriations Committee, as well as of all the other committees she chaired over her career.

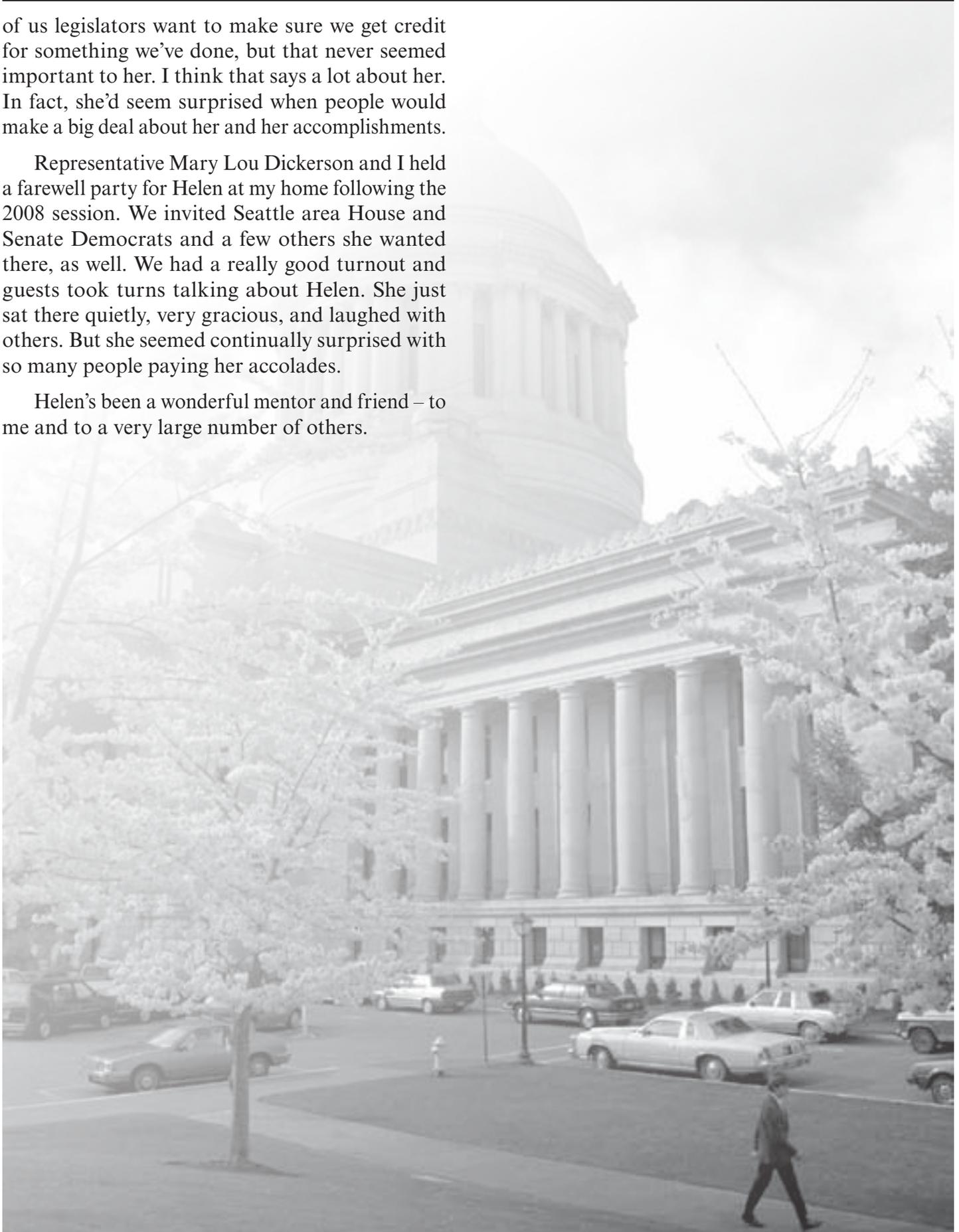
Helen was never afraid to stand up to powerful groups on what she believed would be best for the state – not to do so for political reasons or concern about her own elections, but for her very strong belief in what was best for the state of Washington!

The other thing about Helen – she never seemed to me to try to grab headlines to get praise. Many

of us legislators want to make sure we get credit for something we've done, but that never seemed important to her. I think that says a lot about her. In fact, she'd seem surprised when people would make a big deal about her and her accomplishments.

Representative Mary Lou Dickerson and I held a farewell party for Helen at my home following the 2008 session. We invited Seattle area House and Senate Democrats and a few others she wanted there, as well. We had a really good turnout and guests took turns talking about Helen. She just sat there quietly, very gracious, and laughed with others. But she seemed continually surprised with so many people paying her accolades.

Helen's been a wonderful mentor and friend – to me and to a very large number of others.



Former Representative Barry Sehlin Shares his thoughts about Rep. Helen Sommers for her Oral History



Barry Sehlin

Barry Sehlin spent 26 years in the U.S. Navy as a Captain and as the Base Commander at Whidbey Island Naval Air Station. In 1990, he retired from the Navy, but soon was recruited to run for the House of Representatives by the Republican Party in the 10th Legislative District. Representative Sehlin served in the 10th District for a total of 10 years, including serving as the chairman of the House

Capital Budget Committee and as the co-chair and ranking Republican on the House Appropriations Committee.

During that time, Rep. Sehlin worked closely with Rep. Helen Sommers, a Democrat from Seattle's 36th District. They were friends and they worked together, including their service as co-chairs of the House Appropriations Committee during the final year of the 1999-2001 tie in the House. Representative Sehlin shares his views on his legislative colleague, Rep. Helen Sommers.

Rep. Barry Sehlin: I did spend 26 years in the Navy. I was a Naval Aviator – a pilot. I served in a number of places and of course was deployed pretty much around the world at different times. My last assignment was as the Base Commander at the Naval Air Station on Whidbey Island.

My wife, Susan, and I both grew up in Anacortes which is less than 20 miles from the air station. So we still have family, friends and close connections to the local area. Oak Harbor has been our home

in the northwest for basically all our lives. So, when I retired, we stayed in the local area. After I retired from the Navy in 1990, I worked for a brief time for a newspaper publishing company. Then, I had the opportunity to go to graduate school at Western Washington University.

In 1991, there was a proposal put forward by the Navy to eliminate the Naval Air Station at Whidbey Island. Since I was going to school, and had a less-demanding schedule than others, and since I had some recent experience as the Base Commander, I volunteered to participate with some other members of the community to prevent the effort to shut down the Whidbey Island Naval Air Station. I spent a couple of months working out of the office of Congressman Al Swift in Washington, D.C. Basically I was a lobbyist and part-time staffer for the congressman.

I think that experience with the Whidbey Island station, which got a fair amount of public attention as well as the community involvement I had as Base Commander led someone – I don't know who – to propose my name as a candidate for an open legislative seat in the 1992 election. I was called one day by a recruiter of the House Republican Caucus, that's how I was first approached to run for the office.

So, I ran for election to the House of Representatives in 1992 and won. I must say, I was one of very few new Republicans elected to join the ranks in Olympia that year. In that election, the House Democrats picked up seven more seats, giving them a 65-33 majority! Mike Lowry, a longtime Democrat Congressman, was elected governor.

In my first term, I was appointed to serve on the House Appropriations Committee, a seat I had through all my 10 years in the House. I also was on the Capital Budget Committee. So, on both committees I served with Rep. Helen Sommers.

When I was elected, my entire life-experience was largely in the Navy. So when I came to the Legislature, I was a complete neophyte. If you want to know about flying airplanes, come see me. But, if you want to know about building buildings, or buying real estate that sort of thing that we dealt with largely on the Capital Budget Committee, I

was, as I said, a neophyte. So, I considered myself to be very fortunate – particularly on the Capital Budget Committee, where Helen also served. Just watching the way Helen worked, not only with her caucus and their issues, but with the entire legislative process, was a valuable learning experience. Helen had been a leader in the Legislature for more than 20 years! When I came on, she was Chair of the House Democratic Caucus, but she still was very helpful to me.

Gary Locke was chair of the House Appropriations Committee when I came on for my first session in 1993. I was learning a lot about the process and especially how to run a committee in Appropriations.

Let me tell you my story about Gary Locke. Toward the end of each session, there was always a routine hearing to consider the requests of citizens who have claims against state government. We were moving through the process of hearing people's stories about claims, and then the committee would determine if they were legitimate claims or not.

One lady, who was the widow of a state employee, came to testify before the Appropriations Committee about her claim. She was having a problem with the state getting her late husband's pension. Of course, normally, the person will testify before the committee; we would consider their testimony; and then vote on whether they were entitled or not. This lady, who was a recent widow, started to explain but she completely broke down and couldn't proceed. Locke broke procedure for a moment. He didn't embarrass her, he simply allowed her to not give her testimony. That's the way to treat people. Without her testimony, we on the committee thought it was valid and it was right to vote in her favor. Gary was such a gentleman.

Locke served as the chair of the Appropriations Committee from 1989 to 1993 session. In the November '93 election, Locke was elected King County Executive. He resigned from the House on January 3, 1994, and, Helen Sommers was named chair of Appropriations, but she only held that post for one year, because the 1994 election was a very strong year for Republicans. Our caucus went from a 33-seat minority, with 65 Democrats in 1993, to a 60-member Majority with 38 Democrats in 1994!

Rep. Clyde Ballard (R-12th District) was elected Speaker of the House.

I had only been in the Legislature for two years when we won a big majority. My strongest recollection in the Republican Caucus was the mood was jubilant; a very positive atmosphere. Everyone was expecting to be able to make some changes in policy direction that the Republican caucus was anxious to see happen. It was the first Republican majority in the House since 1983.

A few observations: the 1992 election was clearly a huge sweep of Democrats. The Democrats had a 65-33 majority in the House, Mike Lowry was elected governor. If you had a D after your name in 1992, you were elected. Then in 1994, the reverse happened.

Looking back on those elections, it seems to me that those sweeps were not particularly healthy in a way. There were a few people elected in both of those times who maybe, under normal circumstances, wouldn't have been elected. That did make for some difficult times in the Legislature, I think. Having each caucus – whether it was in the Democratic sweep or the Republican sweep – a few members who really attempted to drive policy in directions that the majority of the caucus didn't agree with. They were very vocal and very argumentative. They made the process a little more difficult at times.

With a 62-member majority, we now had 29 newly elected members in our caucus. Since I had been elected in 1992, I was named the Capital Budget Committee Chair, and I continued to serve on the Appropriations Committee. So, Helen Sommers went from one term as Appropriations Committee Chair in 1994, to ranking Democrat on the committee.

I enjoyed the Capital Budget Committee more than any in my career. And, whether Helen was on the committee or not, she was particularly valuable to me as the chair of the committee, because if I ever needed to know the history of something – a project or a piece of legislation – Helen always knew the history: where it came from; who had originally proposed it and why, and the politics of everything. And she was not reticent to share any information she had with me. I always appreciated that. I thought it was a particularly valuable contribution to the entire Legislature to have her there with her

knowledge and her memory and her willingness to share important information with me as the committee chair.

She was very focused on the process and we had worked very well together. She was known to take under her wing younger new members – be they Democrats or Republicans – that she thought were potentially good legislators, and she would share her thoughts and her ideas and she helped them understand the intricacies of the process, given her 36 year career.

I'll mention a couple of specific examples: Once in my first term in the Legislature – as I mentioned I didn't know anything about the Legislature when I first was elected – I was on the Capital Budget Committee and Rep. Art Wang was chair at the time. We spent many days that summer traveling to various capital projects around the state. And, I could just sit and listen to Helen Sommers and Art Wang talking about the legislative process, about projects, and about every district in the state. They both knew exactly what the legislators from those districts, whether Republican or Democrat, needed to have to help their district. It was a lesson in how to make the House of Representatives function. Being able to listen to them, again and again, really added to my perspective of the process. I could ask whatever questions I wanted – even including my political questions – and they were both willing to share.

Helen was a very kind person. In 1995, Rep. Jean Silver became the chair of Appropriations when the Republicans gained control of the House. Helen went from chair to ranking Democrat. Rep. Silver was dealing with some health issues at the time. As ranking member, Helen sat beside Jean Silver in the Appropriations Committee hearing room, and she really helped Jean to make sure the functioning of the committee worked smoothly. She didn't have to do that. She didn't have to assist Jean in the way that she did. Helen helped her very kindly without denigrating the chair's position. I always respected that. Jean was only chair for just a period of months, but I always respected that period with Helen, perhaps more than any other in my experience.

As I mentioned, the Capital Budget Committee

was my favorite assignment in my 10 year career in the Legislature. In 1995, when I was chair of the Committee, it was a very exciting year. But one very intense political issue with, very heated opinions on both sides, was a proposal to replace the King Dome with a new baseball stadium!

The legislation for the new stadium was proposed with very interested parties on both sides of the issue involved. Early on, I was conducting a Capital Budget Committee meeting, when I spotted in the back of the room both Speaker Clyde Ballard and Majority Leader Barbara Lisk. I knew something serious was up that they were together in the back of the room. They had come to tell me that the Mariners Stadium bill was to be referred to my committee. I wasn't for the bill, but in the end, I actually supported it. Over the course of several months, we put together the best possible deal that was in everybody's interest, whether they support the stadium or not. The result was good, and as it turned out, the process was one of the most positive I've ever experienced.

In 1998, I had six years of serving as a legislator from the 10th District, when a congressional seat in my area opened. Congressman Jack Metcalf (R-2nd District) had been elected to Congress in 1994, served three terms and stepped down in 2000. With some persuasion, I decided to run for the open seat in 1998. I was in the race for awhile, about five or six months, but I left the race. Democrat Rick Larsen defeated the Republican nominee, John Koster.

With that in my mind, I was completely retired. I'd served a career in the U.S. Navy including Commander at Whidbey Island Naval Air Station and six years in the House of Representatives, so my wife, Susan, and I were interested in travel. We were in Bend, Oregon, in 2000, when I got a phone call from my good friend and former House colleague, Barbara Lisk, the Republican Majority Leader. There had been a tie in the House for 1999 and 2000. She and Clyde Ballard, who was Co-Speaker of the House, wanted to know if I'd be willing to run for my old seat. With a little coaxing, I agreed to run for the seat again, and I won. But, when the 2000 election was tabulated, there was another 49-49 tie! So I came back to Olympia for the 2001 session.

I was named co-chair of the House Appropriations Committee and, of course, Helen continued as the other committee co-chair. Rep. Tom Huff (R-26th), who was the Republican Caucus co-chair in the first two years of this tie, did not seek reelection after 2000. That first session (1999) in the tie was confusing. Initially, the two caucuses had to figure out how it would work. From details about office assignments all the way to the more major issues on how to get legislation passed, how do you make the session function?

Now, Helen was the only legislator who experienced both House ties in history; 1979-80 and again 1998-2001. Having the experience of someone like Helen Sommers was incredibly valuable; and of course Helen was willing to share her knowledge of the 1979-80 tie with Speaker Chopp as well as Speaker Ballard. She remembered the procedures and relationships of the previous tie. So, it's not enough just to have the knowledge, but the willingness to share it with both sides.

I wasn't in Olympia during the 1999-2000 sessions of the 49-49 tie. When I came back, it was a great surprise to all that the final election count created yet another tie! For the Appropriations Committee, Helen and I had a good working relationship from our previous service together. We always worked well together, and, our political views weren't all that divergent. As co-chairs, we each had to represent the interest of our caucuses. We were both faced with a situation where, when the session is done, you have to pass the budget. We were determined to do what we needed to do to get the votes from our caucus. Our own political perspectives weren't all that different.

In fact, in some ways, Helen was probably more fiscally conservative than even some of the Republican members. She understood where the dollars were and she would not support even policy issues in which she agreed strongly. If she didn't see where the money was coming from, she would not support it. In my mind, that's what it takes to be an effective chair of the Appropriations Committee. She always focused on what would work for the state and what the revenue would allow. There are a lot of people who have great rhetoric about how conservative they are, but when it comes to

something they want, they're willing to support it regardless of the cost.

We all have some particular interest of our own. Higher education was certainly one of her focuses, as well as some other social issues – dealing with children's health and teen pregnancy were high on her list of concerns. But still, she'd always want to know where the money was coming from and how much it was going to cost. She'd make sure they'd get something in the budget. She always made the case that teen-pregnancy often increased welfare costs.

Helen did not agree with the idea of passing legislation without funding in hopes that just down there in the future, it would be funded. If it was something she supported or not, if it was going to pass, she'd make sure it was going to be properly funded.

Most legislators who have been in the position of a budget committee chair become pretty critical of dedicated funds. It limits flexibility. That certainly was Helen's position. Things will change in the future; so in the end, whether it's a "Rainy Day Fund" or any other sort of dedicated fund, to sequester resources for some purpose that seem important today, in five or 10 years from now, it may not be that important. And, we will need those funds for something else.

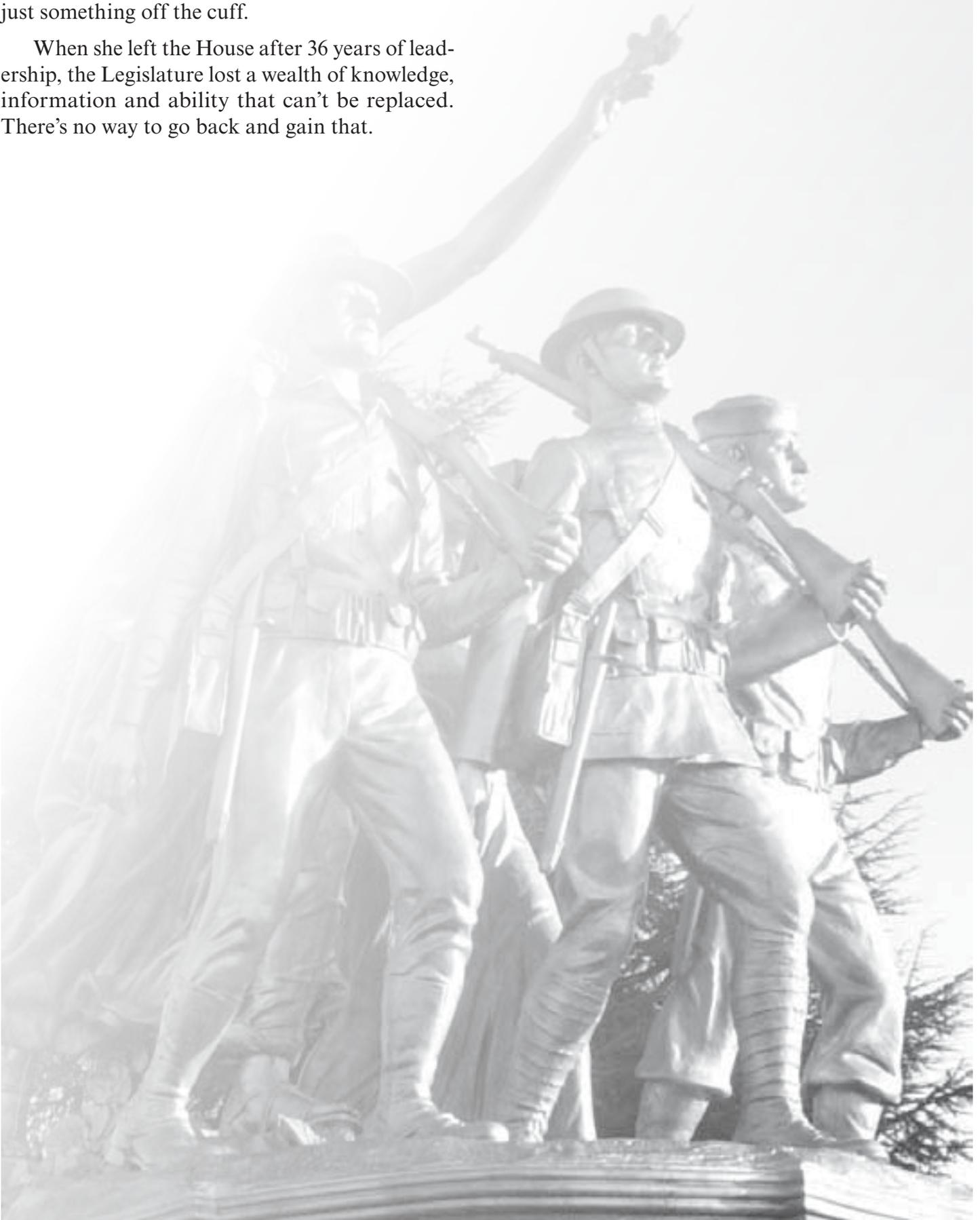
I knew Helen very well and I respected her leadership and I appreciated her knowledge; her corporate memory, if you will. I don't ever remember hearing her say anything critical about anyone. She would make clear her disagreements with people, but she'd never complain, and she'd make it work.

How to phrase her impact: Wherever Helen was and just the fact that she was in the Legislature was a moderating influence. When I would go into my Caucus to talk about an issue, if I could go in and say "Helen Sommers thinks this or that, the members of my caucus would be swayed. I think that's interesting that the Republican Caucus thought that highly of her.

The same applied everywhere in the Legislature. People knew that if Helen Sommers had a strong opinion and made a decision about the question, she only made that decision based on her experi-

ence and her good factual research – that it wasn't just something off the cuff.

When she left the House after 36 years of leadership, the Legislature lost a wealth of knowledge, information and ability that can't be replaced. There's no way to go back and gain that.



Former Chief Clerk Dean Foster Interview for Rep. Helen Sommers Oral History

Dan Monahan: Dean, thank you for agreeing to this interview for the Oral History of Representative Helen Sommers. Helen served 36 years in the House of Representatives from 1973-2009, and you served in the House as Chief Clerk for many years of her term. When did you first come to the House of Representatives?



Dean Foster

Chief Clerk Dean Foster: Well, I first came to work for the Legislature in 1959 when I was still in high school. In these early years, the Legislature was very different than it is today. Members didn't have offices; they often worked from their desk on the floor of the chamber and they had a telephone there. The members did not have administrative assistants and there wasn't a year-round staff then. Sessions were held every other year, and all the work done by members and staff was done in the Legislative Building.

Twenty-seven of the members elected to the House of Representatives in 1959 had no previous legislative experience! So, they showed up here on the Sunday before they're sworn in on Monday; and maybe a week later they were told what committees they would serve on.

There were still forty-nine legislative districts in 1959, but there were 99 members of the House of Representatives! The 49 Districts all had one Senator, but the districts also had either one, two or three House members, depending on the district. That was done to try to balance the district size with population. But, as you know, in 1972 the federal courts would change the number from 99

members, to the current 98 members and redistricting created one Senator and two House members for every district.

Monahan: When you came to the House, Rep. John L. O'Brien was the Speaker of the House. O'Brien served more than 50 years in the House, having first been appointed to the House in 1939. He served in the House until 1993. He was Speaker of the House from 1955 until 1963 and then served as Speaker Pro Tempore from 1973-1993. Talk about what happened in 1963.

Chief Clerk Foster: In the 1961 session, when O'Brien was Speaker, the Democrats had a strong 59-40 majority. But in 1963, Democrats had lost eight seats and only held a 51-48 majority. The plan was to elect John O'Brien to again serve as Speaker. But, because of the consequences of the controversy in the previous legislative session over private power, a number of conservative 'private power' Democrat representatives were approached by the Republicans (whose motive was redistricting) and formed a coalition with the 48 Republicans to elect Spokane Democrat Rep. Bill Day Speaker of the House! It was a very contentious session.

Monahan: In 1973, the Democrats regained control of the House by a 57-41 majority after six years of Republican control. Rep. Leonard Sawyer was elected Speaker of the House and you were elected Chief Clerk. This was the first year that there were 98 House members, two from each of the 49 districts. Talk about the new Democratic majority and the leadership of Speaker Sawyer.

Chief Clerk Foster: Sawyer was really focused on leading the Legislature to make it an equal branch of government. The reality was that the Legislature only had the information that the executive branch would provide them!

I wouldn't suggest it was the wrong thing for Dan Evans' people to do, but they had all the financial data and professionals to work it all out. The Legislature didn't have any financial data, and because they were only in Olympia for a few months, they didn't really have a lot of time or professional staff to study fiscal data.

Sawyer wanted the Legislature to be involved,

so we started putting together our own systems, even working with the executive that let us at least have the same fiscal numbers to start from. Prior to those times, it was ‘by-guess-and-by-gosh’ how much the revenue forecast was going to be and you hoped you didn’t miss it by too much.

1973 was when the House and the Senate started to expand, establishing professional, full-time staff and OPR (Office of Program Research) was set up to have a permanent nonpartisan committee staff. This was an attempt to have year long continuity.

When we added permanent staff, we needed added space for them. So that became convenient to start phasing out the governor’s people from what are now the John L. O’Brien and the John A. Cherberg buildings. We established legislative hearing rooms and legislators and staff offices in those two buildings.

Monahan: In 1975, the House Democrats gained five more seats for a 62-36 Democratic majority. Some people I’ve talked to told me that too big a majority can create problems for leadership. When the 1976 session began a group of ‘dissidents,’ who were not happy with the Speaker, came forward. You were the Chief Clerk of the House; Talk about that.

Chief Clerk Foster: Leonard was an activist Speaker – and some folks may have thought he was too activist a Speaker – but he was involved in many issues. O’Brien loved to preside, and Leonard had other things to do, so it was convenient for him not to be on the rostrum all the time. So, on that day John O’Brien was presiding and Leonard was in his office. I remember (Rep.) Bud Shinpoch came to me and said: “A majority of the caucus wants to have a caucus right now!” I knew something was going on, but I didn’t know what it was!

We really had poor intelligence at the time, so we were completely caught by surprise. So O’Brien put the House at ease, and I went into the Speaker’s office and told Leonard what happened. It was a ‘closed caucus’ with no staff allowed. And essentially, they presented Leonard a letter asking for his resignation signed by more than a half (32) of his caucus. After a while, they came out of caucus and it was pretty clear Leonard had to resign.

Monahan: Helen Sommers was one of the members who had joined the group of ‘dissidents’ or ‘back-benchers’ asking for his resignation as Speaker. She told about how very emotional and tense it was at the time. When they came out of the caucus, TV cameras were set up in the chamber. And at that moment, one of the overhead high-powered television lights exploded and showered glass on the House floor!

Chief Clerk Foster: Yes, it was like a gun went off!

Monahan: Speaker Sawyer stepped down and Majority Leader Bob Charette also stepped down.

Chief Clerk Foster: Yes, but no one could get enough votes to be elected Speaker. So, John O’Brien continued as Speaker Pro Tem for the rest of the session. He continued to do the ceremonial and the functional aspects. As Chief Clerk, the Speaker had to co-sign with me, all the bills, so John O’Brien just took those over. Leonard left and in November he did not run again.

In the 1977 session John Bagnariol was elected Speaker of the House.

Monahan: So, we come to 1979, the point where the House had a 49-49 tie; the first in state history. Camaraderie of Legislators, regardless of political party was pretty cordial at that time, I believe. Democrats and Republicans would go out together, have a few drinks. Is it more partisan now, or does it just appear to be?

Chief Clerk Foster: Oh, it’s more partisan now! I believe there are two events in our history that happened leading to more partisanship. The first was in 1963, when the House Republican minority joined six ‘dissident’ Democrats to elect Bill Day Speaker of the House. John L. O’Brien had been Speaker for four terms and was in position to be elected Speaker again. That caused unbelievable animosity in the Democratic Party where people didn’t speak to each other for years! There were six Democrats who voted with Republicans and they elected Bill Day of Spokane as Speaker.

The second event was the 49-49 tie in the House in 1979. For the first time, there were Co-Speakers and co-chairs of each committee. That was set up so that in order for a bill to pass, it took 50 votes;

and there were 49 members in each caucus. When it happened that way, the discipline in the two Caucuses became that your members 'always' had to vote with your party! So, people had to sit down and learn to work with each other.

Rep. Helen Sommers, the Democratic co-chair of the House Revenue Committee, sat down with her Republican co-chair Ellen Craswell, and they did a pretty good job on revenue issues, for instance. But there was a lot of animosity in the two caucuses.

So those two institutional incidents – the coalition and the tie – forced a lot more partisanship. And it's been that way progressively ever since!

Monahan: Helen did tell me, talking about Ellen Craswell, they were miles apart in a lot of respects – Helen was regarded a 'moderate' and Ellen was one of the most conservative members, but they worked together. She said the responsibility to work together fell on the Co-Speakers and the co-chairs of the committees. She said both caucus 'rank & file' members weren't at all happy with the direction.

Chief Clerk Foster: I think there were some controversial bills that did pass that session because people did sit down with each other because they knew that both parties had to agree. So, they sat down and found some common ground.

Helen, throughout her career, was able to do that with people. Helen wasn't very good at politics but she was very good with policy! So when it was strictly a policy kind of question, Helen always knew how far she could go; she knew where the compromises could be, and could work with people in both caucuses very well.

The reason the tie worked so much better in 1979 than it did in 1999 is because the first two Co-Speakers John Bagnariol and Duane Berentsen were friends. They were both fairly conservative and they both wanted to run for governor in 1980. So they were ambitious and wanted to make it work. They took the realistic approach in setting it up so it was "co-everything." And, it took both parties to make a decision. It was set up to work that way. The Co-Speakers met every day. Sometimes the meetings weren't always good, but at least they

talked to each other. It didn't work that way in the 1999 tie.

Monahan: So after the first tie, we bring ourselves up to 1981 and John Spellman was the new governor. The economy was really in bad shape – perhaps not to the extent it is today – but it was a bad time. The Republicans controlled both the House and the Senate. The Speaker of the House was Rep. Bill Polk. You'd think it would be smooth sailing for Spellman, given his party's majority in both Houses.

Chief Clerk Foster: No, they had major philosophical splits. Speaker Bill Polk was much more conservative than Spellman was! The Republicans had an agenda of things they had campaigned on and, they really tried to ram a lot of those issues through the Legislature, including something that was anathema to Labor. That was three-way insurance! Some in Polk's caucus had problems voting for that. And the other thing, we were a 'one-horse state' in those days! That is, Boeing. 'As Boeing goes, so goes Washington.' Boeing had some problems and they started laying-off people, and things got worse.

The Republicans refused to do anything to raise any kind of revenue! I don't know how many special sessions we had in that period of time. Polk and Spellman did not get along. At one time, Spellman called his Republican legislators "Troglodytes!" And, there was a real internal war between the Spellman/Evans 'moderates' and the Polk-led 'conservatives.'

Finally, the Polk-Majority had no choice but to raise revenue. Democrats came up with the idea of putting the sales tax back on food, so the Democrats did give the Republicans some votes to pass it. That helped the Democrats win the next election and regain control of the House. That's when Wayne Ehlers became Speaker of the House.

Wayne was part of the group that succeeded in deposing Sawyer as Speaker of the House, even though he was from Pierce County, and they were always keeping an eye on Bagnariol. Wayne was just about everybody's good friend. He was an awfully good committee chairman when he had the chance to be a committee chair. He really believed in more openness in government – it's called 'transparency' now. And, he really allowed committee chairs to run

their operation. So he wasn't as much a 'hands-on' – or interfering Speaker! He also was pretty realistic about what he could get, and he counted votes pretty well. He allowed the committee chairs, up to a point, to run their operation. His 2nd District seatmate was Sen. Ted Bottiger, who was Majority Leader by this time in the Senate, so they worked pretty well together. Wayne was, in his way, a very strong Speaker, but he didn't try to run everything!

Monahan: So he maintained a good relationship with his Caucus?

Chief Clerk Foster: The relationship between a caucus and a speaker is always a mixed bag at best. Everybody wants to do 'something,' but the Speaker has to figure what's possible.

So the Speaker has to make some tough decisions. One of the reasons we've never had a Speaker of the House as governor in our state is because ultimately it comes down to the Speaker's decision about whether something happens or not. So you get people who come here with an agenda – they want to raise taxes or they want to cut taxes; or do this or that – but if you can't get the votes; you can't get the votes! It's the Speaker's job to make sure you've got the votes. So you get some tension between a caucus and a speaker. It's always been that way, and it always will be!

Monahan: Joe King followed Wayne Ehlers as Speaker of the House. Helen had a good relationship with both Wayne and Joe. The Appropriations Committee was the area that was most important to her. While 'liberal' on social issues, Helen's probably more 'fiscally conservative.'

Chief Clerk Foster: Oh, yeah, that's it. That's when you start getting tension between a very, very smart, fiscally-tight committee chair and a Speaker. Helen was an outstanding policy person and she started making decisions based on numbers and things like that, but not on politics. And that did result in tension between any one of those speakers and Helen. And it did for the rest of her career. It wasn't necessarily the political thing she'd come up with; but what the Speaker had to do is to come up with 50 votes! At the end of the session you had to pass a budget with 25 Senate and 50 House votes, get it signed by the governor, and have it balanced! Helen

brought to the table a new way of thinking about state budgets. It was very strong, but it clashed with the political realities of what a speaker and legislature had to do.

Monahan: Joe King said Helen had been there for a long time when Joe was elected Speaker. Helen's goal was to chair the Appropriations Committee (it was Ways & Means when Joe was elected).

Joe told me he had this difficult problem. Dan Grimm had chaired the Ways & Means Committee. Grimm became State Treasurer. Joe divided Ways & Means to three committees: Appropriations, Capital Budget and Revenue. Helen wanted Appropriations, but Joe appointed Gary Locke instead. He said it was very difficult because Helen was entitled to it. And it was a very difficult choice for him. Was there any tension with them?

Chief Clerk Foster: Oh, absolutely there's tension all the time. People in the Legislature become ambitious and they learn that certain chairmanships help them with their goal, whether political or policy. So there was infighting for those positions and the Speaker had to make decisions between good people. When they made those decisions over a period of time, they probably made one person happy and a lot of others unhappy.

And, Helen wasn't very good at that in-fighting, but she learned how to do it. So Joe had to make that tough decision, and he did. Gary Locke was much more of a detail person, while Helen was much more into formulating policy.

I think that Helen internally and personally suffered a number of setbacks or defeats over the years. But she was always able to follow that by coming back and working with whoever had won out. She was always good at that because she put setbacks behind her faster than most people would.

Monahan: In the 1994 election, the Republicans gained a majority in the House for the first time since 1982, Clyde Ballard was elected Speaker, and continued in the majority until the 1998 election.

Chief Clerk Foster: The Democrats had been a minority for several years. Sort of what happened in 1979 happened again in 1999. The second 49-49 tie in Washington history! Most of the Democrats

by this time had never been in the majority. Helen had been, but most hadn't. The Democrat's leader was Frank Chopp and he asked me to come back because I had been there previously. I agreed to come back as long as the agreement was to start looking for someone to replace me as soon as possible. So, I was there for one year.

Frank and I had conversations about how to proceed. Because it was most convenient, people were pushing to adopt the same model that was used in the first tie. But the situation was quite a bit different! The players were different; the political atmosphere was different! In the 1999 tie, there just wasn't the cooperation between the two political parties and their leaders that there was in the 1979 tie.

Monahan: You worked for Governor Booth Gardner for eight years (1985-1993). How did Gardner compare to other governors you'd worked with during your career in the House? And, what was your position in his administration.

Chief Clerk Foster: Well, Booth defeated Spellman in 1984. Spellman lost because they got into such fiscal trouble. The Legislature was tied in knots in his first two years. Booth was a sort of a shining light! He added a positive attitude to state government and its employees, whereas the Spellman years were very difficult. When Booth came in things were starting to get better, so the fiscal side didn't have anything to do with Booth being governor; it had to do with time.

But the attitude toward state government got better and that did happen because of Booth. People really liked him and had confidence in him. He brought in new people in his administration that started doing some real positive things for him and for the state. It was a good time for the state.

I started out as Chief of Staff and then we did some reorganization, and I had a variety of other titles: Director of Internal Operations; Deputy Chief of Staff. I was there all eight years, and probably would have stayed with Booth had he run for a third term. At one time there was consideration that Booth might run for U.S. Senate. I think he chatted with Dan Evans about that. Booth got bored when he served in the state Senate, and Booth thought he'd

probably get bored in the U.S. Senate too. Booth served just two years of a four-year term (1971-73) in the state Senate. He really was a CEO type.

Monahan: Did you have any dealings with Helen during the period you were in Gov. Gardner's office.

Chief Clerk Foster: Oh, Helen was heavily involved with budget stuff in the House. She and I'd been friends for years and so there may have been some things. Helen wasn't the kind of legislator who would come into your office and complain about things. She just always was a hard worker and knew where she was going. She was intense most of the time, heavy into policy, and honest as you could get!

She sometimes lacked political acumen to back away a little bit when it was pretty obvious that there had to be some movement toward the center. But, I don't believe she ever did that out of spite, but just simply because she believed in something and thought it was the right thing to do. I think she brought professionalism to the budgeting process and forced people to understand policy choices as opposed to political choices. I think that is what she brought.

Monahan: The one thing that I learned doing interviews with people who worked with Helen, is that higher education was what she really looked out for and responded to. She was the 'protector' of higher ed. for all of her career.

Now, she's gone from the Legislature. And I think the colleges and universities must be looking for someone to follow the lead Helen had set, to fill her shoes for higher ed.

Chief Clerk Foster: I presume they are. What Helen has done over the years is continue her bent toward higher education by involving it in her budget. I don't know that we're ever going to see somebody who has that ability because, while she had the University of Washington in her backyard, it wasn't in her district. Now days most legislators have a university, college or community college in their district, and that's what they look at. They don't have the big higher education policy and money picture that Helen did! I'm sure they're looking for somebody like that, and I doubt they're going to find anybody. Helen always had a long-term vision for higher education.

Co-Chief Clerks Dean Foster and Vito Chiechi 1979-80



Former Chief Clerk Vito Chiechi Talks about Rep. Helen Sommers' Oral History

Chief Clerk Vito Chiechi: I first got to know Helen Sommers when she came to the House of Representatives in 1973.



Vito Chiechi

In the 1972 election, Leonard Sawyer was one of the Democratic leaders who helped 'mastermind' the win that gave the Democrats a 57-41 seat majority. Leonard had been a member of the House since 1955, so he had been there a long time. Leonard was elected Speaker of the House in 1973. And what Leonard did was he brought the Legislature into the 21st Century. That's when you got computers and full-time staff. That's how I became very close to Leonard Sawyer.

Early on, I was working for the Boeing Company in government relations, and I had a friend who was knowledgeable about computers. I had been keeping precinct voting data by hand, so I give him all my hand written data. A few days later, he comes back with a stack of cards. He takes me to the machine and he puts the stack of cards in the computer; and out came this report on voting by precinct. I couldn't believe it!

So with 'redistricting' in the works, Leonard had all this information of voters by precinct he'd done by hand. I showed him what I had learned to create redistricting files by computer. Leonard brought in Senator August "Augie" Mardesich, who had his Senate redistricting plan, to show him the machine. Augie couldn't believe it.

Of course, up to the 1972 election, the House had 99 members and the Senate had 49. But in 1972, the courts ruled that each district had to have

one Senator and two House Representatives, so it established a redistricting plan based on 98 House members and 49 Senators. In 1974, Leonard hired me to be his Administrative Assistant, even though he knew I was a Republican.

So in my role as Administrative Assistant to the Speaker of the House with the Democrat's new majority, I got to know Helen Sommers well. Helen is a straight shooter. She was never playing with anybody; always right straight down the line. She was the person who, if she said "No" to you, she meant "No!" Or, if she said "Yes, I'll do it" you could take it to the bank! There aren't many people like that in politics anymore.

All through Helen's 36 years in the House, politics changed dramatically, but Helen continued to be able to work with both parties. She was a Democrat, but she also worked well with Republicans because she always tried to be friends with the people who were on her committees. She knew that in order to get things done in the legislative process, you had to reach across the aisle at a certain point in time. So she always became friends with people on both sides of the aisle.

Now, she looked a little cold at times; and could stare you in the eye and cut your head off with her look! But she was always the one who was trying to get a consensus. Even though she almost always had a majority on her committees, she was always working to get that consensus between the parties in order to make the Legislature work. Her purpose was knowing full well that she had to make the process work.

In 1975, the Democrats had a super majority of 62 to 36 in the House, the largest majority in about 15 years. It was a difficult session, and there was a group of new members who were "dissidents" toward Sawyer. What they were complaining about was that Leonard didn't have any program on how they were going to pass legislation, and that he wasn't paying attention to them. So, in 1976, the group of dissidents grew to 32 members who called on Leonard to step down as Speaker. They had the votes, so Leonard resigned as Speaker, went on a business trip to New Guinea and didn't run for reelection in November. They finished the session with Speaker

Pro Tempore John L. O'Brien presiding.

Helen would always mentor the new members coming in and she'd create a relationship with them. She'd work with them to help them better understand not only the legislative process but how to be effective. And, that was particularly so on new members who were going to be on a committee she was on. She had a keen sense of the newcomers she could work and she could mentor. And she'd do it with members regardless of whether they were Democrats or Republicans; regardless of what area of the state they were elected. She wanted to make sure they understood what the legislative process was. You stay with your leadership, but you've got to be sure you're making the legislative process work. That was her bottom line, and I always respected that.

In the 1977 session, Rep. John Bagnariol (D-Renton) was elected Speaker of the House. Bagnariol had been chair of the Ways and Means Committee when Sawyer was Speaker. "Baggy" did well as Speaker of the House. He had a very friendly personality and worked pretty well with his caucus. Dixy Lee Ray had been elected governor but she and Bagnariol didn't get along well.

Then, in the 1978 election, for the first time, there was a 49-49 tie in the House. But, you know, a tie was not possible before 1973 because there were 99 members in the House. So it only took six years of a 98-member House to experience the first 49-49 tie. When we changed to 98 members, most people could not imagine there would ever be a 49-49 tie in the House. In 20 years there have been two. It will happen more in the future. Right after redistricting; you're getting more sophisticated with your information with redistricting. The districts have to be balanced really well.

I believe the only reason the 1979-80 tie worked was that "Baggy" (John Bagnariol) and Duane Berentson were friends. There was never precedence for dealing with a 'tie' in Washington. So when it happened in the 1978 election, Dean Foster became the Democrat's co-chief clerk and I was co-chief clerk for the Republican Caucus. So Dean and I worked with Bagnariol and Berentson on how to make it work. One day the Speaker would be the Democrat (Bagnariol) and the next day it was the

Republican (Berentson). But, on the day "Baggy" was Speaker, Berentson was the chairman of the Rules Committee; so any bill coming out had to come out of the Rules Committee. So neither Speaker could pull a fast one on the other. Baggy & Berentson were good friends, but they were also fierce competitors!

I remember one time when Berentson had the gavel on the rostrum and was running a procedural vote. "Baggy" was sitting on the floor, and he got up and debated on a procedural motion. In those days, in debate they used to scream at each other on the floor! There were no decorum rules then. "You lousy Republicans are going to take away the teeth and the eyeglasses from the poor people!" Things like that. (*laughter*)

So Dean Foster told Berentson "shut it down." and Dean and I and the Co-Speakers would go into the Speaker's office. They might take a few drinks and they'd sit there and B.S. about all the other stuff rather than what the issue was. On that particular day, we were in there for over an hour, when Baggy finally came through and said, "OK I won't raise any objections." I told them, "We've got all the members out on the floor; they've been sitting for an hour!" And Baggy said, "Oh well, let them wait!" (*laughter*) We go back on the floor; Berentson hits the gavel, and Baggy stands up and brings up the SAME issue! We were shocked. Berentson said to Baggy "You said you weren't going to do that!" Baggy grins and says "I lied!" (*laughter*) Berentson went to the next order of business and Baggy didn't do any thing about it.

Helen was co-chair of the House Budget Committee in the tie. Her co-chair was Rep. Ellen Craswell. Now, Ellen Craswell was a very conservative Republican, perhaps the most conservative member in her caucus. Helen was a social liberal, but fiscally she was pretty conservative. Helen wasn't wedded to a lot of ideology except for higher education and health care.

But Helen and Ellen, to the surprise of many, worked well together in the first House tie. I don't recall any other woman in there that handled herself as well as Helen did in all of these circumstances.

Helen always really guarded her freshmen. One

new legislator I remember was Maria Cantwell. She was elected to the House in 1987. Maria was very bright, but she was kind of conservative and she was often voting with the Republicans. Helen talked to her and counseled her in the first few years. When you can, you stay with your leadership, and you pick your battles when you can't.

(Editor's note: Maria Cantwell served three terms in the state House -1987-93; U.S. House 1993-95; and the U.S. Senate in 2001, where she's now in her second six-year term).

The second tie (1999-2001) was very different from the first. There wasn't the camaraderie in the Legislature like there was 20 years earlier. Clyde Ballard and Frank Chopp were the Co-Speakers, but they weren't friends like Bagnariol and Berentson. Where "Baggy" and Duane would meet together almost daily, Clyde and Frank would rarely meet together.

Helen was co-chair of the Appropriations Committee in the tie with the Republican's co-chair Rep. Tom Huff. Huff was a Sears executive who had come to the House in 1995 and he wanted to run the Legislature like he did at Sears! Huff tried to push Helen around. But Helen had 22 years of experience as a legislator, and she was as smart as they come.

In the 2000 election, Huff didn't run for reelection, so Helen's co-chair in the third year of the tie was Rep. Barry Sehlin, a retired Base Commander at Whidbey Island. Barry and Helen worked very well together; they were very good friends. When the Democrats regained the House majority in 2002, Barry was the ranking Republican on Appropriations. Barry retired from the House in 2005 and Rep. Gary Alexander was Helen's ranking Republican member of Appropriations when Helen retired in 2009. Gary and Helen also had great respect for each other.

After I left the Legislature, I had formed a lobbying firm, so I was involved with the Legislature during all of Helen's career. So I still had a good relationship with her, and I knew her well. I had gambling as a client in my lobby work for a long time, but Helen wasn't interested in the issue of gambling. But, I also had the Pacific Science Center

as a client, which is in her district. So I could always go talk to Helen about the Science Center which she strongly supported, but not gambling – "We're not going there!"

Helen was always very frank with everyone! If she was against it, she'd tell you 'flat out.' She wouldn't waste her time talking about issues she didn't support. That's why she had a reputation of being such a "hard nut" because she told you straight out what she thought. Most politicians don't do that.

Because of my friendship with Helen, often I would invite members and staff of the Appropriations Committee to my house for pasta and meatballs for dinner. Helen loved that because she had an opportunity to take her staff and the committee members for a casual, enjoyable night out where members and staff could meet together off campus and trade ideas and information. Again, for Helen this was an opportunity to be friends and get to know each other on a personal basis.

Helen always enjoyed a good, congenial evening with her staff. She was always thoughtful of her staff, and these casual dinners would give her the opportunity to share time with them. Helen really worked her staff, but her Legislative Assistants and Committee staff really idolized her. She always tried to get the best people.

Helen really had an impact on the state of Washington. She focused on health care, higher education, women's issues and children issues throughout her career. And she was always fiscally responsible!

Cindy Zehnder

Former House Chief Clerk and Gov. Gregoire's Chief of Staff on Rep. Helen Sommers' Oral History



Cindy Zehnder

Cynthia "Cindy" Zehnder recently was named Vice President of the Government Affairs division of Gordon, Thomas and Honeywell. Cindy had a 30-year career in government in Washington State. She served as Chief of Staff for Governor Chris Gregoire from 2007-2010; President of TVW - Washington's Public Affairs TV network (2003-2007); and was Chief Clerk of the Washington State House of Representatives from 1999 - 2003.

However, in the first three years of her position in the House (1999-2001), there was a tie, with 49 Democrats and 49 Republicans. So she started her career as co-chief clerk of the House, elected by the House Democratic Caucus and Rep. Frank Chopp (D-43rd District) was elected Co-Speaker by his caucus. The Republican Caucus elected Co-Speaker Clyde Ballard (R-12th District). Speaker Ballard had a majority from 1995-1999, Cindy's co-chief clerk during the three year tie was Tim Martin, elected by the Republican Caucus.

Dan Monahan: Your career with the House was probably a fascinating, and certainly a very difficult time, as you came on at the beginning of the state's second historic 49-49 tie in the House of Representatives.

In your caucus was Rep. Helen Sommers (D-36th District), who was the second longest serving Representative in state history. Helen was first elected in 1972, so she had been in the House 27 years when the second tie occurred. Helen had served in the

1979-80 tie in the House, and she was preparing for her second 49-49 tie as the 1999 session began. As the session began, Helen was co-chair of the House Appropriations Committee.

We'd like to talk to you about your thoughts and recollections of Rep. Helen Sommers' career.

Cindy Zehnder: Yes, Helen Sommers had been a member of the House for nearly four decades. I remember she had chaired a number of committees before moving to the House Appropriations Committee. But, of course, the 49-49 tie created a very difficult situation for both parties and all 98 members.

As regards with the tie, Helen became the Democratic Caucus co-chair of Appropriations and Rep. Tom Huff was the Republican Caucus's co-chair. I think Helen had a cordial relationship with Tom Huff. I believe the agreements they reached were agreements that she and Tom were both comfortable with. Helen, who was a longtime liberal on social, health and education issues, was far more conservative in terms of the financing – and I think anyone who had ever worked with her would say that.

Where the disputes generally came in with the tie – and we can say the same for Rep. Barry Sehlin (Helen's Appropriations co-chair in the third and final year of the tie) was with the Democratic Caucus or the caucus leadership, particularly Frank (Chopp) having concerns with the agreements that Helen struck.

Something that was notable about Helen all the way through was, once she struck an agreement, she really lived up to it and would advocate for it.

So I believe she had a cordial working relationship with Tom Huff, and certainly with Barry Sehlin she was a strong advocate and I think she had some genuine affection toward Barry.

Monahan: In the first tie (1979-80), Helen served as Co-Chair of the State Government Committee. So she had the experience going into the second tie, surviving it not once, but twice. I wonder if people maybe looked to her for her unique experience.

Cindy Zehnder: I didn't think about it – and of course you mention her long tenure – that would

make sense, but I don't remember during caucus meetings her standing up and saying "well, we did it this way before, and this is the way you get through this!" So I'm not sure she was looked to for that, but I know that she was more comfortable in her relationships and her role with her two co-chairs.

Monahan: Helen did mention to me that throughout the tie, for her as a chair, it's the responsibility of the chairs to really set the tone because there were many difficult times among the committee members. So the co-chairs had to take the lead and make sure things got done.

Cindy Zehnder: I think she did that; and some of it, I think, was aided by her focus on the numbers and her focus on the details of the budget. And, as I said, she was interested in balancing the budget. I think certainly within the caucus, she would fall on the more fiscally conservative side of her caucus. So she probably had more common ground with her co-chairs than, say, someone else in the caucus would have or some of the other Democrat members on the committee.

Monahan: When Helen was first elected to the House in 1972, the 36th District had previously been a conservative Republican district. At that time she was President of the National Organization of Women (NOW) and involved in the League of Women Voters. At that time, Helen was considered a strong liberal. I don't know that she had softened over the years, but I think maybe the pendulum was swinging back toward the end of her career to a more 'centrist' position. What do you think?

Cindy Zehnder: Well, with Helen it probably depended on the issue. I think on the social issues certainly around women's rights or any such social issues, she was on the liberal side. I'm talking about the fiscal side, where she was more conservative and certainly both as the chair of Appropriations and on the Pension Committee, where she had considerable dispute with the unions on the pensions. There also, she did have a strong conservative bent on fiscal issues.

With the creation of PERS III, she was considered by a number of the unions as an impediment of expanded benefits that they wanted to see in the pension system. That's when PERS III was

not without a lot of angst and opposition from the unions, state employees, and what have you.

Monahan: That does lead me to Helen's 2006 election. She had the Service Employees Union working against her and strongly supporting her opponent, Alice Woldt.

Cindy Zehnder: I don't know if that was because of PERS III. We'd already gone down that road on the issue, so I'm not sure if that was the basis for their opposition or not. I wasn't directly involved with the Legislature at that time (Cindy was President of TVW by that time). It could have been around the pension issue. If you remember, the service employees organized home health care workers and one of the things they were seeking was pension issues, but I believe it was beyond PERS III. And, with her as Chair of Appropriations, there are probably a number of reasons that they would want to go after her at that point.

Monahan: Because she barely had competition in her 17 previous elections (except when she defeated Rep. Ken Eikenberry in a close race in 1976), Helen rarely had a difficult race. In fact, in many of her elections, she was unopposed. She won in 2006, but it was a bit close and costly. In the 2009 election, after 36 years of service in the House, Helen made the decision on her own terms to call it a career and she did.

Cindy Zehnder: Helen was a very interesting lady and she had a great career. I remember an occasion when I walked past her, and I said "Hello, Helen!" She totally and completely ignored me! I think she may have been heading for a meeting in Frank Chopp's office at the time and I thought to myself, my god, what have I done? She didn't look at me, just like I wasn't there and she walked past me.

I'd mentioned it to someone, and they smiled and told me, "That's Helen!" When she is really focused on something; that's all she's focused on! She will walk right passed you like you're not even there. Then the next time she sees you, it's "Hello! How are you?"

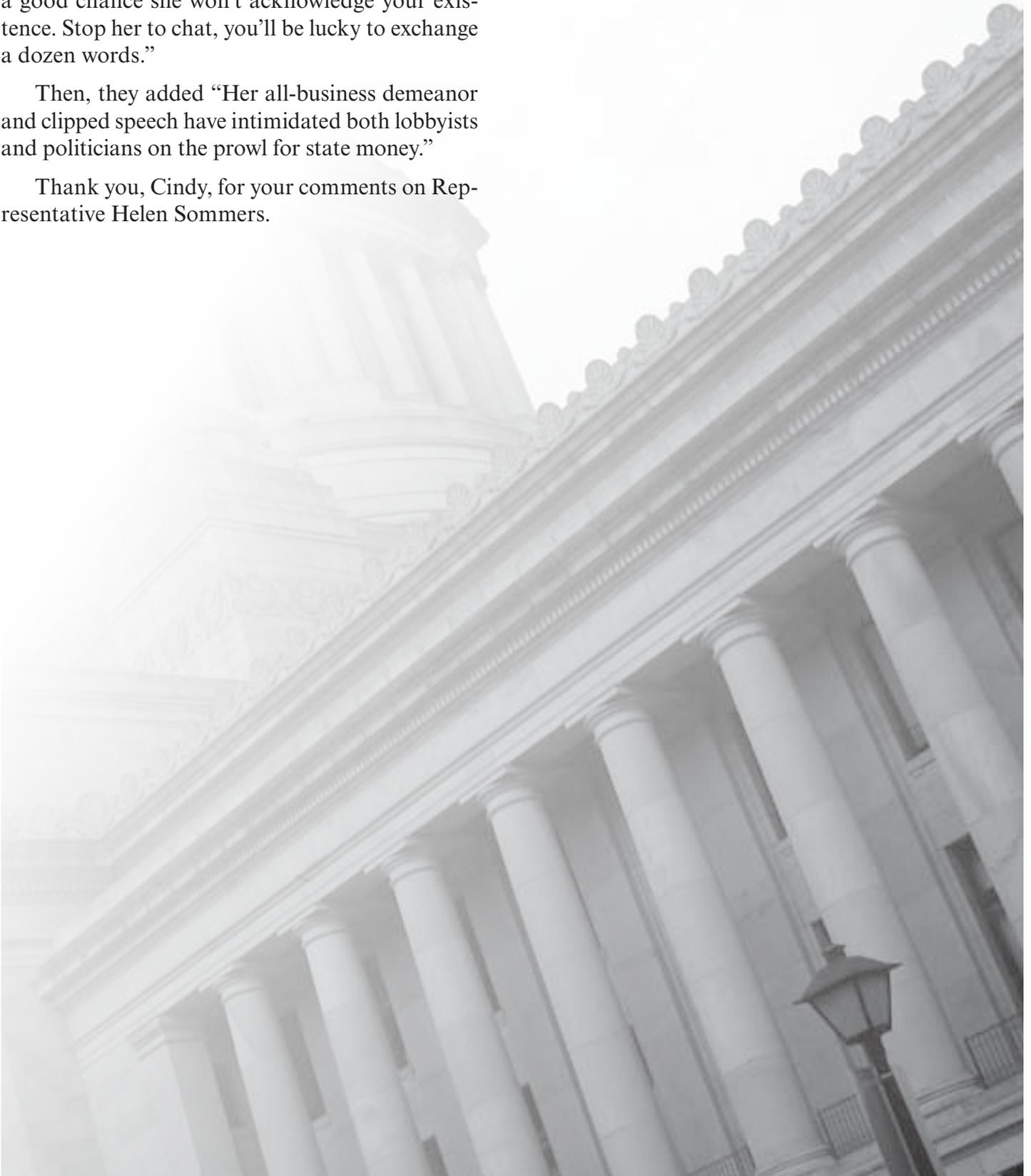
And, that's absolutely the case. It surprised me because I'd never experienced that. She was so focused on what she was doing, that people or

anything else, she didn't even notice.

Monahan: I read in a Seattle Times article when Helen announced she would retire at the end of 2008, they wrote "Pass her in a hallway and there's a good chance she won't acknowledge your existence. Stop her to chat, you'll be lucky to exchange a dozen words."

Then, they added "Her all-business demeanor and clipped speech have intimidated both lobbyists and politicians on the prowl for state money."

Thank you, Cindy, for your comments on Representative Helen Sommers.



CHIEF CLERK
BARBARA BAKER

State of
Washington
House of
Representatives



When I first met Helen, I was doing the same thing many others have done when first making her acquaintance - asking for something. The year was 1986 and I was a newly minted Legal Services lawyer, full of righteousness and resolve and absolutely clear in the correctness of my position on an issue on which Helen's vote would be key. I walked into our meeting confident that after our discussion Helen would see the error of her ways and agree with me. In retrospect, my bravado was laughable. At the time, it was not. Members who find themselves in similar situations many times per day often say something like, "thank you for your information" or "well, I appreciate your coming in" so as not to show their cards as they usher you to the door. Not Helen. Her comment was, "I don't agree with you." Becoming flustered, I rifled through papers, cited data and showed her charts while she sat attentive, but serene. Finally I asked her if there was anything I could say or do to encourage her to change her mind. She said "no." So I left and that was that. During the entire meeting, she said six words. But those words changed the landscape of the provision of social services in this state in a way that endures to this day. I was devastated.

Over the next 20 years, our relationship changed, but the power differential did not. Eventually, I became partisan staff of the House and in that role was responsible for developing legislative options for the Human Services and Judiciary committees. Partisan staffing is a tricky business. Often one finds oneself working on both sides of an issue, especially when big policy changes are under consideration. In 1996 Congress passed federal welfare reform, which was a sea change in entitlement law both nationally and in our state. Gary Locke was governor and both Houses were Republican, a situation which amplified the split in the Democratic caucus about how the new law should be implemented here in Washington. To her credit, Helen sought me out and we had many long discussions about time limits and mothers working and where incentives were appropriate and the fate of children if support was withdrawn. But Helen was *very clear* on our respective roles in those conversations. My job was to flesh out the issues for her, but it was not to suggest conclusions. She simply wanted to be sure that her positions were well grounded and supported by objective fact. In all that time, she never offered a personal detail about herself and I didn't presume to inquire. With staff - at least with me - she was always the epitome of professionalism. She reserved camaraderie and friendship for others.

All that changed during the last five years of Helen's legislative career. As others have noted, Helen loved to go out to nice dinners. I don't remember when my name was added to her invitee list, but the first time she asked me, I was intrigued and happy to accept. The change in her demeanor away from these marble walls was astounding. She was a warm and gracious hostess, interested in all facets of the lives of those around her and more than willing to talk about herself. She loved to laugh and always appreciated a good joke coupled with a good bottle of wine. She was most interested in travel, regaling us with stories of her latest adventures and asking about ours. Any discussion of work, no matter how benign, was out of the question and simply not acceptable. Once in awhile, however, a topic would come up that in some minor way would accentuate her life orderly lived. For instance, one time we were at dinner and neither one of us

was particularly hungry. I suggested that we split a dinner. She first looked shocked then asked, "would that be *sanitary*?" I laughed and told her that the restaurant would split the dinner for us back in the kitchen. She was astonished that they would do that as the thought had never occurred to her before.

In short, I believe that Helen's incredible ability to compartmentalize has been key to her success. When working, she was tough, had always done her homework and was as cutthroat and strategic as any member I've ever met. She knew how this place worked and how to get her way. But off campus, she was a gracious hostess - warm and affable. I often wondered which was the real Helen. Not sure it matters anymore. She was a force of nature and the House of Representatives is not the same without her. But by all accounts, she is loving retirement and has found happiness and contentment in the life she has built outside of this place - a suitable end to a professional life well lived. Congratulations, Helen, and thanks.

Barbara
Baker



Bernard Dean Interview on Oral History of Rep. Helen Sommers



Bernard Dean

Bernard Dean is the Deputy Chief Clerk of the House of Representatives. He has served in that post since 2007. Prior to that appointment (from 2000 to 2007), Bernard served as a Senior Fiscal Analyst for the House Office of Program Research (OPR), where he staffed the Appropriations Committee and worked on human services issues.

During his career at OPR, Rep. Helen Sommers had served as co-chair and then chair of the House Appropriations Committee. Bernard reflects on his time working with Helen Sommers:

Bernard Dean: I began my career with the House in October 2000 as Senior Fiscal Analyst for the Appropriations Committee dealing with human service issues. Mostly, I worked on corrections, health care and long-term care issues. I held that role for seven years, as staff working with Helen on the Appropriations Committee. On October 22, 2007, I became Deputy Chief Clerk of the House.

When I first came to the House it was during the '49-49 tie', which had been in place for the previous two years. Everyone was awaiting the outcome of the November 2000 election in anticipation of a break of the tie. Helen Sommers and Tom Huff were co-chairs of the House Appropriations Committee for the 1999 and 2000 sessions, but Huff did not run for reelection. Managing the tie and having co-chairs during the 1999-2000 term had been really difficult on the staff. They actually went through a process where they essentially created two budgets – a Republican budget for Rep. Huff and his caucus, and then a Democratic budget for Rep. Sommers

and her caucus. Then, they had to reconcile those differences before they could get to the point that they could actually send the budget to the House floor and then over to the Senate.

So, several of the staff were looking forward to the election in November because they thought the tie would be broken. Initially, it looked as though the tie would be broken, but the tie was maintained. (*laughter*)

Going into the 2001 session, again with a 49-49 tie, there were some challenges in developing the budget. There were some reductions that had been proposed. Helen's new co-chair of Appropriations, with Huff's departure, was Rep. Barry Sehlin. Sehlin and Helen Sommers had worked on the Capital Budget Committee in previous sessions, so I think they worked well together. Fortunately, that year we didn't have to develop two simultaneous, separate budgets. However, with a new tie, it did require that both of the co-chairs agree on the items that were funded in the budget proposals that year. But Helen and Barry tended to work pretty well together. Ultimately, the tie just lasted for three years, when the Democrats gained control after a 2001 special election. So, Helen assumed her role as sole chair of the Appropriations Committee in 2002, which she went on to hold through the 2008 session when she retired.

Working with Helen as chair of the Appropriations Committee was very interesting because there were many issues where she would want quite a bit of detail. She was particularly interested in higher education, and any sort of area where there were a lot of health care expenditures. So when I was staffing the committee at that time, I was working on long-term care – which was a fairly substantial chunk of the DSHS budget, with over \$1 billion spent on nursing homes alone each biennium. So Helen had an intense interest in health care and health care cost containment. Antime we touched on those types of issues, she'd like to really get into the details, whereas in some of the other areas, she'd only want sort of a high level summary of the essence of the funding question for the budget decision.

What was kind of amazing throughout my years of working with her was her stamina. On those

weekends during cutoff, we would have the “Saturday Marathon” as we’d call it. We’d begin meeting around 9 a.m., and frequently wouldn’t finish until midnight. Throughout those all-day-hearings and executive sessions, Helen was chairing the committee continuously, and hardly would ever hand the gavel over to her vice-chair. I believe she was in her early-70s at that time, but she’d never tire; she’d be able to just work right through it. It was amazing to see her keep up with all those issues, and be so focused. I think a lot of us were “punch drunk” by the end of the night. But, not Helen! (*laughter*)

With the budget process we had in place, she’d frequently spend evenings in her office working with her vice-chair, the majority leader, other staff, and me. We’d sit around and kind of go through the budget line-by-line. Sometimes Helen would want us to go into more detail for larger issue areas. The meeting often wouldn’t start until after the conclusion of the Appropriations Committee meeting; so, often we wouldn’t meet until 6 o’clock, and those meetings would stretch late into the evening – 9 or 10 o’clock. Sometimes, this wouldn’t leave us much time for a dinner break. It was funny, though, Helen was a big lover of the Trader Joe’s snacks, which she’d frequently bring down from Seattle. She’d pass them around the table as we were working.

She definitely had an eye toward detail. It was interesting when staff would prepare briefing documents, it was always conveyed to us: “Make sure to number your pages!” (*laughter*) Helen would frequently flip back and forth between different parts of presentation materials. So it was very important to know what page she was on.

It was also interesting to see how she managed those late night committee meetings. I think she definitely recognized how important it was to be able to have everyone who wanted to testify, to be able speak. So she typically placed time constraints on how long folks could speak.

One of the things that was always funny to explain to our policy counterparts on the committee staff during the cut-off period briefings with Helen as chair, was when the staff was finished making their presentations to the committee, to always finish with “That concludes my remarks.” as opposed to “I’d

be happy to entertain any questions!” (*laughter*) We always got a kick out of that. However, it helped move the committee meeting along.

Helen is incredibly focused. I think sometimes people would misinterpret that focus as coldness. But as you really got to know her, you realize that it’s just the intense focus that she has. Sometimes, you would catch her walking down the hallway and she would be deep in thought about some funding issue. There’s not a smile on her face and, as you approach, you might say “Hello.” Maybe a smile would appear and she would greet you but sometimes not. I’ve heard a lot of stories of people being intimidated by her. But when you know Helen, you know that she’s a wonderful person but she is very focused, and very intense when she’s doing her job. Helen was also a very big supporter of higher education. She believed that higher education was a key component to drive the state’s economy. I think she definitely felt that higher ed. was a way to encourage economic development, both in terms of research that is undertaken at the institutions and in terms of educating the state’s work force.

Now that Helen has retired, there are those who are concerned about her leaving the role she played for so long supporting higher education. I believe Helen’s concern always was that over time, the portion of the higher ed. budget that was supported through the ‘general fund’ – as opposed to from tuition and grants – would diminish over the years. So I think she was very leery of further reducing general fund support to higher education in the budget.

One of the other things I recall of Helen, too, is she liked to be able to share her knowledge with the committee. She really wanted the members to appreciate and understand some of the details behind the budget. In essence, the budget supports three basic functions: to educate, medicate and incarcerate, as they say. (*laughter*) So Helen took an intense interest in getting members to think about the long-term consequences of the decisions they make here in Olympia. A lot of times, when you have a fiscal note attached to a bill – particularly if you’re in the second half of a biennium – you would see in the upcoming fiscal year, there is a very minimal impact. But three or four years

down the road, suddenly you start talking about a substantial fiscal cost. So, frequently you'd see in committee hearings that if there was legislation that was relatively inexpensive in the short term, she was always cognizant and aware of what the impacts were down the road. And, she wanted legislators to understand the long-term costs.

Helen would frequently point that out in committee, asking staff to discuss or reiterate the longer-term impact of legislation on the budget. Some members would focus on the short term, but not Helen. Maybe it was because she had been here for 36 years, but Helen always took a long-term view of the budget. She was always leery of setting up either entirely new programs or passing legislation that somehow binds the hands of a future Legislature. She wanted to protect future legislatures so members would have flexibility to make changes. She frequently opposed legislation that made it more difficult for future legislators to make reductions in the budget later on down the road. For instance, she was opposed to the "Rainy Day" fund that passed in 2007.

I think in terms of state government and the services that are provided by the state, Helen Sommers definitely had a large impact in the area of higher education and supporting high demand academic areas; growth industries, and technology for example. She very much had an interest in early learning. I recall there was one year where she brought in some research professors from University of Washington who talked about early childhood brain development.

This wasn't my issue area, but committee staff typically had on their squawk boxes to listen in on committee hearings just in case something may come up that would be pertinent to their area of focus. I remember hearing on the squawk box these baby voices, and people speaking in Mandarin! And they were discussing some research that talked about early childhood brain development. Now, this was kind of an off the wall topic for the Appropriations Committee hearing, but Helen had an intense interest in this area. So she wanted to share the information with others.

Another great interest she had was legislation to contain the costs of health care because for many

years our state had basically double-digit inflation in health care. So the per-capita costs were going up substantially. I think she was very careful to try to contain those costs because it was consuming a larger and larger piece of the budget.

Each biennium, there is less and less discretionary spending in the budget. Around 40 percent of the budget is K-12, another 10 percent, or so, is higher ed. So much of what's left is health services. Then, you have very little left for things like natural resources and general government. So I think Helen wanted to insure that the portion of spending on health care didn't end up growing so much that it would affect some of the other spending priorities of state government. That was her fiscally conservative side.

One last great story I'd like to share. Helen had spent 14 years in Venezuela before she moved to Seattle. She was fluent in Spanish, but not many people around here knew that. But, one day – I think it was 2002 – during a floor debate one member injected some Spanish into his floor speech. Well, Helen stood up and grabbed the microphone and proceeded to give her floor speech entirely in Spanish, I think one or two members followed her lead. It was a kind of surreal moment! She was engaging in a floor speech in Spanish! She probably hadn't intended to even speak on the bill, but she wanted to respond. It was just great!

Helen Sommers had an amazing career in the House of Representatives for 36 years. I admired and respected her all the years I worked with her. And her legacy will continue on for a long, long time.

Victor Moore Reflects on the career of Representative Helen Sommers



Victor Moore

Victor Moore worked as Staff Coordinator for the House Appropriations Committee from 1991-2000; and from 2002-2005. Through that time, Victor worked closely with the chairs of the committee, including: Reps. Gary Locke, Helen Sommers, Jean Silver, Tom Huff, and Barry Sehlin.

Helen served as chair in 1994; Ranking Minority Member from 1995-99; co-chair during the three-year tie from 1999-2000 with Rep. Tom Huff, and in 2001 with Rep. Barry Sehlin. From 2002-2009, Helen was again Appropriations Committee chair for eight years - Victor served a long time with Rep. Helen Sommers and got to know her very well. He has great respect for Representative Sommers, and worked with her for nearly 20 years.

In a Sept. 1, 2009 interview for Rep. Helen Sommers' Oral History, he talked about her career, their friendship and his appreciation of Helen. Here are his comments on her career:

Victor Moore: When I came to the House Appropriations Committee as Staff Coordinator, Gary Locke was chairman of the committee. In 1994, Locke was elected King County Executive, and Helen Sommers became chair of the Appropriations Committee. It was a goal she wanted to achieve for most of her House career, which was, at this point 21 years. I was Staff Coordinator of the committee for both Gary Locke and Helen Sommers.

Helen was named chair in the supplemental session of 1994. Locke had been chairman in the

1993 budget year session. I can't remember any big issues in 1994. In fact, the supplemental budget got wrapped up about three or four days early. We did go into special session that year over, I think, some workers' compensation issues. But I don't remember her first session being anything tough to deal with. She had Sen. Nita Rinehart on the Senate side, and they got along fine. One of Helen's great focus and concerns through her career was higher education, but, there was no bone of contention on that issue her first year.

In the 1994 election, the Republican Party won the majority and after 1995, when Jean Silver from Spokane served as chair, Rep. Tom Huff became Appropriations chair with Helen as ranking minority member of Appropriations. So she only had one year as the Appropriations Committee chair. I really enjoyed working for Tom. He was very good to work for and he was very appreciative. He was a Sears executive, and he was a hard charger. He had only been in the Legislature one year, and he was pretty much all business. And so was Helen! But, I'd say, Helen had miles of experience on Tom, given her long career in the House and her many years on Appropriations. It must've been hard for her to lose the chairmanship after only one year.

In the 1999 session, the House was tied, 49-49, which meant Tom and Helen were co-chairs of Appropriations. In that '99 session, the first year of the tie, we were planning the budget and the set-up we had was, we'd try to write a budget with Helen and Tom in the room. They agreed to a rule that if either co-chair said no, it wouldn't go into the budget. Well, that was a rule that works a lot better for the Republican philosophy of the role of government. If it involved adding more money to the budget, Tom might say 'no' and the money was out!

You could now question if they ever should have had those kinds of ground rules. We just started negotiations with Tom and Helen and they're making decisions. I pulled Helen aside and asked her, "Where do you want to end up? Because, we're going through this single-file, and it would help us if you tell us where you want to land, so I can let you know if you're on course." That required a larger view of where the caucus was and where she wanted the budget to land. "How much money do you want

to leave in the ending-fund balance and what's your spending level?"

That really wasn't Helen's style. She wanted to talk through each issue in single file and then decide. But, with this process, she was landing in a spot that was too low for her caucus. I showed her where she would be landing, and she rightly figured that it wasn't going to work for her caucus. This was early in the era of Initiative-601 spending limits and she was significantly under the spending limit based on her decisions with Tom.

Helen was more fiscally conservative than her caucus, but she really understood what we had to do to get the votes from her caucus. At a certain point, Sen. Loveland and "co-speaker" Chopp were brought into the conversation to help shape the Democrats' strategy. That 1999 budget was ultimately resolved when Rep. Don Carlson voted with the Democrats to pass the budget.

In 2000, when we had to do a supplemental budget, we decided not to do the joint meeting. The process changed where the House Democrats and the House Republicans would each write a budget, and then they'd have a conference, and do it that way. The way we decided to staff it was, I'd go in with Helen and work on her proposal for the Democratic Caucus and Beth Redfield, my second-in-command, would go in to work on Tom's Republican proposal. That way, each caucus had a chance to lay out their full position.

It was difficult for Helen. She found herself having to share the 'chair' with Tom Huff, and she also had to answer to Speaker Frank Chopp on a lot of issues. She had to negotiate with Tom, and then she had to check in with Frank on a regular basis – that was hard for her.

In 2000, Tom Huff didn't seek reelection, so in the 2001 session, her new co-chair was Rep. Barry Sehlin. There really was a contrast there from Huff to Sehlin. Barry was more moderate politically and much more conciliatory. I think he was much more of a conversationalist too, whereas Tom was kind of a 'black-and-white' kind of guy. Helen and Barry worked very well together.

In November, 2001, there was a special election and a Democrat beat the appointed Republican giving the Democrats a two-vote majority. Helen

alone held the gavel, and she continued to chair the Appropriations Committee for the remainder of her career.

After the tie was broken and she held the gavel, she felt institutionally that she was chair of the Appropriations Committee and that she should be given the reins, at least to the extent that she could to run her committee. She probably saw that it was a different model than some of her predecessors had. Gary Locke probably had a lot more leeway with Joe King and I'm sure Dan Grimm had a lot more leeway with Wayne Ehlers. Frank was much more of a 'hands-on' leader, and for Helen it was a struggle.

As staff director, I would be the person to help translate to the staff what Helen wanted, so we were providing her the information she wanted to help her make decisions. Helen loved detail on issues she was really interested in. So if it was something like higher education or early childhood development, the growth in health care expenditures – something she was really interested in – she couldn't get enough detail. It was hard to figure out what level that we wanted staff to present the information in committee. She was really intellectually curious about so many things. On those issues, she would drill staff deep into the heart of an issue just because she was curious. At a certain point, you'd pass beyond where the detail was helping make a decision. Some times you may have felt you were just satisfying Helen's curiosity about an issue. Well, you should be able to do that if you're the Chair.

But, sometimes in committee, they would be talking about issues that Helen really didn't have a lot of interest in. She didn't want to take the time to hear much at all. And she wanted to, you know, cut to the chase. So that was always kind of a balance. Helen was always pretty direct. When you were getting too detailed, she would stop you and say, "This is too detailed; this is of no use to me." So, I remember, my challenge was to make sure staff were doing just the appropriate amount of work for Helen so we could get a decision, and not bog it down in too much detail – or having to come back for more detail.

Helen is a wonderful person and she's also a very private person. But you had to take the time to figure that out. She loved to travel every year,

and she'd always have some fantastic itinerary for a trip and she'd traveled all over the world.

She loved archeological digs and was very interested in history and art. She also loved gardening, cooking and fine wines. Often, before we got into budget issues I'd say, "Tell me about your trip – or your garden." She loved to talk about stuff like that. You all of a sudden saw a different person. She immediately softened and you could hear the enthusiasm of her travel and all the things she observed. She was a very keen observer when she traveled overseas.

Helen had a good relationship with Governor Chris Gregoire, and the governor certainly shares Helen's commitment to higher education. But I do remember, after I left the House to become Gregoire's director of the Office of Financial Management, the governor proposed a "Rainy Day Fund" in the Constitution. We worked it hard in committee and the governor worked it hard in the wings. Helen probably wouldn't have let it out of committee unless the governor really insisted on it, and it was a big ask from Governor Gregoire.

Helen personally was very much opposed to the "Rainy Day Fund," but she did let it out of committee. But when it came to the floor of the House in final passage, she said, that is the worst bill she had ever seen in the history of the Legislature. It did pass – and we have a constitutional "Rainy Day Fund", but Helen thought it was the worst bill she'd ever seen.

For someone who dedicates that amount of her life to public service, she believed passionately in the institution and in the process. I think that's one of the reasons she was so opposed to the "Rainy Day Fund", because it put something in the Constitution limiting the discretion of the legislative body and, that really offended her. She believed very much in the institution and the discretion that the body should be able to exercise.

When it was clear that Helen was getting ready to retire, and that she would not seek reelection in the 2008 election, there were a lot of people who felt more comfortable giving her the credit she deserved, and expressing their respect and admiration for her. And watching her surprise at the outpouring of respect and admiration for her, it was very refreshing

to see – very genuine on her part.

Victor Moore Biography

Victor is a 1979 graduate of California State University, Sacramento. He began state service in 1980 at The Evergreen State College. He then worked for the Senate Ways and Means Committee in 1983, and in 1984, moved to the Commission for Vocational Education.

From 1986 to 1990, Victor served as a Senior Budget Assistant to the governor at the Office of Financial Management. In 1991, he accepted the position of Staff Coordinator for the House Appropriations Committee; he remained in this position until 2000. From 2000 through 2002, he served as Director of Administration and Government Relations at the Administrative Office of the Courts. He returned to the House Appropriations Committee in 2002 and served in this capacity until January 2005.

In January 2005, Victor was appointed Director of the Office of Financial Management by Governor Chris Gregoire. In April of 2010, he moved to the Washington State Investment Board as its Chief Operating Officer.

COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR
MELINDA McCRADY
HOUSE DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS

State of
Washington
House of
Representatives



In 1998, I was the state-wide Field Director for the House Democratic Campaign Committee. At that time, Helen Sommers was the treasurer of the HDCC, and also helped with a lot of the candidate recruiting. So even though I had met her during the 1998 session while working as a temporary Public Information Officer, I got to know her much better on the campaign side.

A couple little stories stand out in my mind from that time. The first one involves – what else? – money. As the treasurer of the campaign committee, Helen had to approve my expense reimbursements. I may not have known much about her, yet, but even then I had heard about her tight hand on the budget.

So as I travelled all over the state that summer and fall, I generally stayed in very cheap motels or camped-out in candidates' basements. When it came time for the state convention, however, I knew the accommodations were going to cost quite a bit more than usual.

A little nervous about that, I mentioned to Helen in a meeting that I was trying to find somebody with whom to share a room. She looked at me for a minute with that expression many readers would recognize, and then she said, "Melinda, adults certainly should not have to share hotel rooms!"

Everybody at the table was quiet for a minute and then we all burst out laughing. After a moment, Helen laughed, too. "That wasn't exactly the way I meant that," she said.

The other campaign story happened after the election. The Democrats had done somewhat better than expected that year, picking up seven seats and moving into a 49-49 tie in the House. Needless to say, Helen was very pleased. She and Speaker Frank Chopp took the campaign staff out for dinner at Gardner's Restaurant in Olympia. We had a lovely meal, but we only briefly talked about the campaign or the election. That was all in the past. Helen instead wanted to discuss the book she was reading at the time – *Undaunted Courage*, about the Lewis and Clark expedition. She was animated, informed, and fascinating, and we all had a wonderful time.

I joined the House Democratic Caucus staff that December on a permanent basis, and soon was assigned to work with Helen as her PIO and as the caucus "translator" for the operating budget. It was only after I started that job that I began hearing stories about Helen – how afraid other legislators, lobbyists, and staff were of her, how intimidating she was, and how difficult it was to get on her good side. None of those things jived at all with the Helen I knew! To me, she was brilliant, funny, and interesting.

It was my pleasure to work with her from 1998 until her retirement. Sometimes we worked very closely together and sometimes not as much. But she was unfailingly kind to me and to all her staff, bringing us snacks when we worked late into the night and making sure we were included in whatever meetings we needed in order to do our jobs. Certainly, I saw tensions between her and other members from time to time, but this is the absolute truth – in all the years I worked with her I never once heard her say a negative thing about another Representative or Senator. She disagreed with them, sometimes vehemently, but she was always respectful and courteous of their positions.

When Dan Monahan met with Helen about this Oral History the first time, I went with him. Helen's reaction was typical of her. "Really?" she said. "Who would be interested in reading that!!?"

A lot of us, Helen. A whole lot of us.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melinda McCrady".

Yona Makowski Interview on Oral History of Rep. Helen Sommers



Yona Makowski

Yona Makowski has served as Sr. Fiscal Analyst/Coordinator for the House Democratic Caucus for nine years to the day of this interview about her work with Rep. Helen Sommers. She came to work for the caucus on Jan. 8, 2001. At the time she was interviewed for the House job, she was working for the Department of Social and Health Services on a project to integrate Medicare and Medicaid. Yona was a Project Manager for about three years at DSHS and before that was a Senior Budget Assistant for Human Services at OFM for eight years.

Yona was recruited by Barbara Baker, who was Democratic Caucus Policy Director at the time (she now serves as Chief Clerk of the House, the top administrative position in the House). Barbara was looking to fill a vacancy because Senior Fiscal Analyst Gary Benson left the House to work with the Higher Education Coordinating Board. He is now working part-time with JLARC on reviewing tax expenditures.

Makowski earned her Masters Degree in Public Administration from the University of Washington (what is now the Dan Evans School of Public Affairs) in 1984. She worked as an intern for the House of Representatives in the 1984 session. After the '84 session ended is when Yona went to work for DSHS. But, with Gary Benson's departure from the House there was an opening, and Baker thought Yona would be a good fit. The position required someone who would work with Rep. Helen Sommers (D-Seattle), who was co-chair of the Appropriations Committee

in 2001, which turned out to be the final year of a three-year 49-49 tie in the House. So Yona Makowski met with Rep. Helen Sommers for the interview to fill the Senior Fiscal Analyst position in the Caucus.

Dan Monahan: Yona, you spent nine years with the House Democratic Caucus and your work with Appropriations Chair Helen Sommers. Please talk about that. But, let me begin by relaying a great story Barbara Baker told me about your first interview with Representative Sommers when you were applying for a position in the House. Barbara told me that you interviewed with Helen. After the interview, Barbara asked Helen what she thought about you? Helen responded: "Well, Yona's flamboyant; she's loud; she's very bright; she might even be smarter than me." And, Barbara said Helen started to laugh and she said, "I think she's perfect!" (*laughter*)

Yona Makowski: It was interesting because, generally as a practice, members don't even interview staff people that the caucus hires. It's normally done within the caucus, with minimal member input. But, because Helen had so much seniority and the job required a different level of fiscal experience, in this case they wanted Helen to participate in the interview process. Helen's personality was obviously different than mine.

Helen was much more reserved than I tend to be. But we had a lovely conversation. There were certain things that I explained to her that were important to me in how I did my work. And Helen seemed to agree, so I think she thought we could work well together. One thing I remember when Helen interviewed me, I'd mentioned my pet peeve: on anything you prepare, 'you always have to number the pages!' When I said that, Helen's face lit up and she smiled. I'd later learn that Helen was really was a stickler for pages being numbered.

So I got the job with the House Democratic Caucus as Senior Fiscal Analyst for the House Appropriations Committee and went on to serve with Helen until she retired at the end of 2008.

Of course, when you're working for the House Democratic Caucus for a committee, it's a whole different approach than those who work for the Office of Program Research committee staff. OPR has a large number of very professional, very quali-

fied staff who are non-partisan. They have great expertise in their particular area of committee work, and they work for all members regardless of the member's political affiliation.

The Caucus staff take a different approach than OPR staff in job responsibilities. It requires really trying to understand where the caucus leadership and where members of the caucus are coming from. In my case, I was working with Helen, (Chair of Appropriations) and helping the chair navigate that; and always trying to look at issues through the eyes of the Democrats as a group. Of course, we're state employees and we're very careful to not be involved in the campaign side of things, but it's our job to make our members successful. So there's just a very different way of looking at things as partisan staff.

I worked really well with Helen in trying to get other members of our caucus to understand what was going on in the budget, and being able to communicate that to other members in the caucus, who maybe weren't on the Appropriations Committee. When, for example, we'd put together a presentation, Helen would look at you and say "It needs to communicate." She wanted the presentation to speak for itself. She wanted people to understand the issue right away. So I'd often spend a lot of time working with Helen to make sure that she knew where proposals stood – not only in our caucus, but how the House Republicans; the Senate; and the governor's office would view it. I was there to help Helen and the committee Democrats navigate the political waters.

I was only there for one year of the three-year tie in the House. I'd say with the tie, it was really very interesting working then because Helen and Barry Sehlin were the co-chairs of Appropriations. We actually spent a lot of time working together with Helen and Barry and with me and my Republican Caucus counterpart, Jack Archer. Although on many issues we viewed a lot of things very differently, it was actually a very, very good working relationship which, in retrospect may seem surprising, but Helen and Barry, and Jack and I worked very well together.

In 2002, the tie was broken and the Democrats had a 50-48 majority. It was very interesting to watch how Helen ran a committee because she had

the greatest respect for her fellow members; but she also had some expectations from them. She was a really strong believer in a sense of decorum. When members were up on the dais, she really expected them to be paying attention. I know one of her pet-peeves at the time was that so many members would bring their lap-tops to committee and were busy doing e-mail or other things. Helen was running the committee and she was always focused and very fascinated by what people had to say. When she saw too many lap-tops, the message would get out that you need to pay more attention to what's happening in committee.

Sometimes, we often had these meetings where both Republicans and Democrats would get together for informal briefings. We'd have a large table set up where members sit around the table and, in a more casual setting, be able to discuss issues and bring in other agency representatives or other staff to make presentations. I remember one time where there was a Republican member who was new to the committee. And in this informal meeting setting, he was really a lot more boisterous about his views. I wouldn't say he necessarily attacked anybody, but he acted in a way that was a little bit different and more aggressive than the way everybody else behaved. Interestingly enough, one of the other Republicans on the committee immediately went to him and said, "This is not the way we operate in House Appropriations." So that new member went to Helen and apologized on the floor! After that, he was just fine. Helen treated people with respect, and she expected other people to bring that same respect to the meetings.

People who know Helen best, know that she has two sides. On the job, Helen had this sort of gruff exterior to some people. She was always focused on the job. That was one side of Helen Sommers. But the other side is this person with a fabulous sense of humor. You can get her to giggle. She was incredibly fun, and that was the side of Helen that a lot of people here in Olympia didn't see.

When she's not on the job, she is great fun, and doesn't want to talk legislative business.

Right after the first session I'd worked for the House (2001), Helen invited me to her house in

Seattle so we could go out for lunch. I don't recall the name of the restaurant, but it was wonderful. It sits very close to the Fremont Bridge and it was a great place. She just loved to take people around and show them the ins and the outs of her district.



The Troll statue beneath the Aurora Bridge

After lunch, she took me to see something very unique. There's a colossal Troll statue that sits under the Aurora Bridge. It is clutching an actual Volkswagen Beetle, as if it had just swiped it from the roadway above! The vehicle has a California license plate. Pretty hysterical! The Troll statue is located on N. 36th Street at Troll Avenue N., under the north end of the Aurora Bridge. (Aurora Avenue North was renamed "Troll Avenue" in its honor in 2005).

When we were in Olympia, Helen, Barbara Baker and I would often go to dinner. She loved to go out to Xinh's Clam & Oyster House in Shelton. Xinh just loved Helen. So right before Helen retired from the House, we had a special gathering out there. The food is phenomenal, and Xinh really gave us special treatment when she knew Helen was coming.

I think many people were sad Helen was gone when the 2009 session opened. She had been here for 36 years, so some things were just a little bit different with Helen's absence. For example, when Helen was chair and we had a pension bill in the House, most people in the caucus didn't really want to get deep into the details of what was in the pension bill. Basically, all they wanted to know was: "Is Helen Sommers in favor of it? And, is Steve Conway in favor of it?" Conway would always take

more the labor view of the world and Helen would always take the more fiduciary view of it. So, if everybody in caucus knew that both Sommers and Conway were in favor of this pension issue, then it must be okay!

Helen really cared a lot about bills. She actually read them all; and she really wanted them to be well-written. Maybe policy was okay; but the bill was poorly drafted. She couldn't stand the idea that a poorly written bill could become law, even if she agreed with the goal.

Sometimes Helen took a very strong stand on an issue. One good example was the Constitutional amendment for a "Rainy Day Fund," which requires one-percent of the general state budget to go to a budget stabilization account that can't be touched without a 60-percent vote of the Legislature. Helen was strongly opposed to it and she voted against it. She gave one of the most passionate speeches she ever gave on the floor against the bill. In fact, she wrote the statement against the "Rainy Day Fund" in the Voter's Pamphlet. It passed, but she was not afraid to go against the tide.

Helen had a love for this institution and she had a deep understanding of state government and the way it worked. She wasn't prone to taking stands on things because it was expedient. In her way, she always tried to do the right thing. For example, when it came to state employees, she recognized the need for people to actually do the work, and she tried to defend state employees.

She once made an amazing statement during debate in the House Appropriations Committee when some members were trying to cut large numbers of state employees. She said "They're not faceless." She sees the Child Protective Services worker, the prison guard, the teacher, the state trooper and state employee as a valuable service to the state. I remember it gave me goosebumps when she spoke that evening.

SECTION III

HELEN SOMMERS HAS SEEN THE WORLD

Helen Sommers has seen the World!

Helen's visit to China – 2000

By Dan Monahan



*Rep. Helen Sommers pictured in her 2000 visit
to the Forbidden City in Beijing, China*

From the day Helen Sommers boarded an airplane in 1954 for the first time, and traveled from New York to Caracas, Venezuela, her love of traveling never waned. She lived and worked for 14 years in Caracas. A friend at Mobil Oil encouraged Helen to take correspondence courses from the University of Washington, long before she ever visited Seattle. Helen's studies brought her to the Evergreen State as a summer school student for two years; and that led to her moving to Seattle in 1968 to earn her Masters Degree in Economics and begin a career.

When she graduated from the University of Washington (class of 1970) Helen's focus was divided between her job with the King County Office of Finance and her considerable interest in issues of gender equality facing women. Helen was Seattle's second President of the National Organization of Women (NOW) and she was also immersed in the League of Women Voters. That started her career

in politics; and she went on to be a leader in the Washington State House of Representatives for 36 years representing the 36th District.

Helen has had a major impact on Washington State government for nearly four decades; and every step of the way, she changed for the better the role of women in government, in education, inequality in the workforce; and she became the Champion of Higher Education.

But, in addition to leadership in government, Helen Sommers had an overwhelming interest in exploring the world. She was known to work probably harder than anyone when the Legislature was in session for all 36 years. But, when session was over and the work of legislators was done, Helen's focus shifted to seeing the world; and sharing her leadership to advance education, higher education, health care and the cause of women worldwide.



Helen visits with children in Beijing, China

The 14 years (1954-68) Helen lived and worked in Caracas, Venezuela, was an eye-opener for her, and expanded her interest in other locations around the world from the 'Berlin Wall' that divided West and East Germany; to the 'Great Wall of China.' She'd seen it all! And each trip had an impact on her vision of a better world.



Caracas, Venezuela - Helen Sommers worked for Mobil Oil in Caracas for 14 years before the University of Washington drew her to Seattle.

The information, below, is just a summary of some of the many places Helen Sommers traveled, countries she visited and the impact of history, art and archaeology she experienced.

Helen’s visit to Germany – 1975

One of Helen’s early ‘worldly travels’ (other than her 14 years in Caracas) was a visit to Germany in 1975. She had only been in the Legislature for two years when she was invited to participate as a guest of the German government in a program “Women in Public Life.”

“The trip to Germany in 1975 was to cement relationships. It was an invitation for a group of women from around the world. I was one of just six women from America invited to participate in the conference. Germany is a wonderful place; they’ve come a long way since the war,” Sommers said. “In a two week period we visited Bonn, Cologne, Berlin, Wiesbaden, Frankfurt, Heidelberg and Munich.



*Bonn, Germany on the Rhine River
This 1961 photo shows The Berlin Wall separating East and West*

(Note: At the end of this article, you’ll find the full text of a speech Rep. Helen Sommers delivered in 1976, after she returned to Seattle. Read her take of Germany back in 1975 during the ‘Cold War’ years and the differences in the way of life between the people of West and East Germany.)



The Reichstag Building in Berlin was built in 1894 and housed the Reichstag (Parliament) until 1933, when it was severely damaged in a fire. After the Second World War the Reichstag building fell into disuse as the parliament met in the Palace of the Republic in East Berlin and the Parliament of the Federal Republic of Germany met in Bonn. The building was made safe against the elements and partially refurbished in the 1960s, but no attempt at full restoration was made until after the reunification of Germany on October 3, 1990, when it underwent reconstruction. After its completion in 1999, it became the meeting place of the Bundestag, the modern German parliament.

Helen travels to Denmark – 2003

Helen Sommers traveled to Copenhagen, Denmark in 2003. Copenhagen is the largest metropolis in Scandinavia and is considered a center for culture and art. The Greater Copenhagen area has a population of nearly 2 million people. It is the seat of the National Parliament (Folketinget), and the Royal Residence and Supreme High Court.



Tivoli Gardens, the old entertainment park with its many flowers, lights and oriental buildings, which opened in August 1843 to provide recreational facilities for the citizens of a then very crowded Copenhagen, Denmark.

Jordan one stop on Helen's Middle East tour – 2004



School kids visiting Jerash, Jordan. Photo by Helen Sommers

In 2004, Helen Sommers had completed 32 years in the House. After an intense primary, which Helen won with 52 percent of the vote even though she was outspent two-to-one, she decided to take a trip to the Middle East. In October, she spent two weeks visiting Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. Helen was particularly fascinated by Jerash and Petra in Jordan and the amazing living quarters carved in the rock-way, high in the cliffs above Israel 2,000 years ago.

This is in Petra, Jordan in the Middle East high



Petra is now a UNESCO world heritage site and one of "The New 7 Wonders of the World." Helen's great interest in archeology made Petra one of the many highlights of her Middle East visit.



Helen & tour guide, Hisham, at Castle near Jerash, Jordan.

up in the cliffs above Israel. The Nabataean Arabs, ancient masters of the desert, settled in southern Jordan more than 2000 years ago. They carved breathtaking temples and monuments, 800 in all including buildings, arched gateways, colonnaded streets, tombs, baths, funerary halls, temples, arched gateways, and colonnaded streets. The buildings were

mostly carved from the kaleidoscopic multi-colored sandstone by the technical and artistic genius of its inhabitants.

Taiwan Goodwill Trade Mission – 2004



Vice President Annette Lu

In April 2004, Representative Helen Sommers joined Lt. Governor Brad Owen and a delegation of 25 Washingtonians including legislators, representatives of Washington ports and local governments, higher education officials, international trade organizations and the private sector. The ‘goodwill and trade mission’

to Taiwan and Thailand was organized to expand upon our state’s ties with the two countries.

While in Taipei, the delegates met with then Taiwan Vice President Annette Lu, who served as Vice President from 2000-2008. She had established herself as a prominent ‘feminist advocate’ in Taiwan. In the 1970s, Lu had served five years in prison on a charge of sedition – stirring up a rebellion against the government then in power. She went on to be Vice president of Taiwan.



Reps. Velma Veloria, Bruce Chandler and Helen Sommers hear about the final plans for Taipei 101, the world’s tallest building (pictured at left) at the time.



Helen Sommers, known to work both sides of the aisle in Olympia; shares bananas with elephants in Taiwan.

Photo by Beth Willis-Willis Communications

Bangkok, Thailand – 2004

The second stop on the 2004 Goodwill Trade



Helen Sommers visit a Thai Temple

Mission was Thailand. Bangkok is the Capital and the primary city of Thailand. Bangkok has a population of approximately 6.5 million residents while the greater Bangkok area has a population of 12 million.

“Traveling with Helen Sommers was a wonderful experience” said Sen. Paull

Shin “I spent two years in the House in 1993-94, but the first time I got to know her very well was when we both traveled to Taiwan and Thailand. I watched her. She was so intensely interested in what she saw and the people she met. She asked questions that really touched me. She’s interested in the national history, culture and trade as well. It was a wonderful time.” (Shin’s comments on Senate floor as the Washington State Senate honored Rep. Helen Sommers for her 36 years of service – March 13, 2008)



Sydney Opera House in Australia

Helen heads ‘Down Under’ - Australia – 2006



Storey Bridge and Brisbane Skyline

Helen Sommers traveled to Australia in the spring of 2006. She visited the major cities of Sydney, Canberra and Brisbane. “The population is focused along the coast of Australia, so you can really only see a very small part of the nation. A good amount of the country is desert and areas of the Aboriginal tribes,” she said. “I went in May, which is our spring and their fall, since they’re below the Equator. It was a wonderful country to see.”

Helen tours Japan – 2007

Helen Sommers took two wonderful trips in 2007. She traveled to Japan in May and visited South Africa in the fall.



Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building

The overhead view of the ‘megapolis’ of Tokyo is amazing! Tokyo, and the surrounding areas of Yokohama, Kawasaki and Chiba, comprises the largest metropolitan region in the world. The population of greater-Tokyo is 28 million people; and it extends over 43 miles.

“Japan is a very interesting place to visit. It is quite a different culture. It’s very technologically advanced. People there are very hard working,” Helen said about her 2007 visit.

Helen visits South Africa ‘The cradle of Humankind’ – 2007



Maropeng is the name of the official visitor center for the Cradle of Humankind world heritage site

“In 2007 in the fall, I had an opportunity to visit South Africa on a trip sponsored through the University of Washington (not sponsored by the University). South Africa has some of the most ancient sites of human kind, and by some accounts was the cradle of humanity,” Helen Sommers said.



*One example of the many dolomite caves in Gauteng Province
photo courtesy of Photosfan.com*

“South Africa is the location of the very first human bones. The very earliest!! We came out of Africa, so to speak,” she added about her trip to see archeological sites. “It’s not very much discussed or recognized, but South Africa was the location of Archaeologists first findings of human bones.”

‘The Cradle of Humankind’ lies mainly in the Gauteng Province. The site comprises a strip of a dozen dolomitic limestone caves containing the

fossilized remains of ancient forms of animals, plants and hominids. The dolomite in which the caves formed started out as coral reefs growing in a warm, shallow sea about 2.3 billion years ago. Helen explored a number of the archeological sites on her visit to Africa.

Helen travels to Helsinki, Finland – 2008



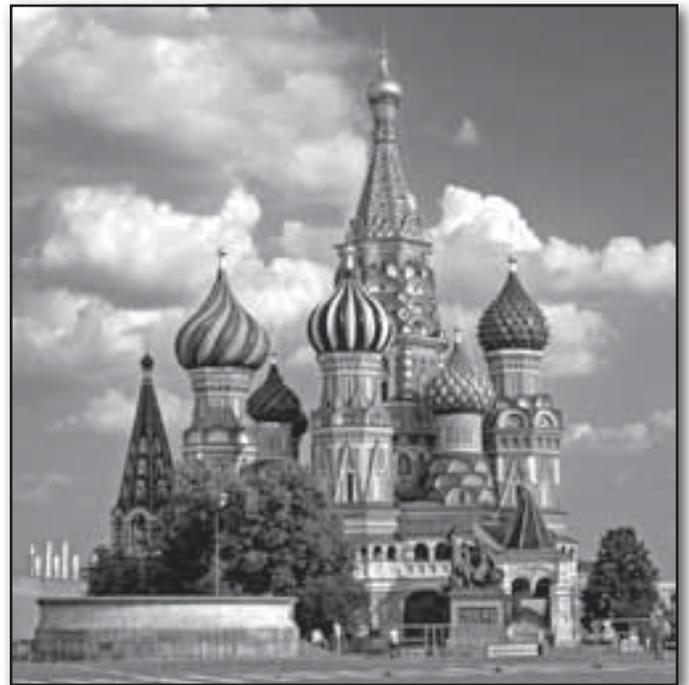
*The Students of the Traveling University
(Rep. Helen Sommers - front row, right side)*

In 2008, Rep. Helen Sommers and other leaders in our state were invited by the Trade Development Alliance of Greater Seattle and the Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce to Helsinki, Finland, to attend the 2008 International Study Mission. The group of Washington leaders included Rep. Sommers; Aaron Reardon, the Snohomish County Executive (who served in the House from 1999-2003 and 2003 in the Senate); Rep. Fred Jarrett (currently King County Deputy Executive; former Senator 2009 and House member 2001-2009); University of Washington President Emeritus Lee Huntsman, and many other business and government leaders, including representatives of the Ports of Seattle & Tacoma.



Old Town Tallinn – Tallinn, Estonia

After the “Traveling University” event – Helsinki, Finland, and Tallinn, Estonia– Helen traveled to St. Petersburg, Russia, just a short boat trip across the Baltic Sea from Helsinki.



*The traveling University took a one-day trip to
St. Basil's Cathedral-St. Petersburg, Russia*

St. Petersburg is located in the Northwest region of Russia in the Neva River delta on the Eastern coast of the Gulf of Finland. St. Petersburg is situ-

ated on 44 islands formed by the Neva River and 90 more rivers and canals. Neighboring countries in the Baltic Sea Region are: Sweden, Norway, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Germany and Denmark.

Now that Helen Sommers is retired after 36 years in the House of Representatives she'll, no doubt, have more trips to take.



Text of a speech Helen Sommers delivered in January, 1976 about her 1975 visit to Germany

Last fall I was the surprised but fortunate recipient of an invitation to visit West Germany on an informational tour as a guest of the German government. I learned that the German Foreign Office hosts many such trips each year on a wide range of subjects. Our topic was "Women in Public Life."

Our group was made up of six women. Besides myself, it included the Dean of the Law Center from the University of Southern California; the Secretary of State of Wyoming; the Director of the Dept. of Cultural Resources from North Carolina; a Director of the Office of Public Instruction in Indiana, and a cattle rancher and member of the National Endowment for the Arts from Santa Fe, New Mexico.

In a busy two-week period we visited Bonn, Cologne, Berlin, Wiesbaden, Frankfurt, Heidelberg and Munich.

Learning about government and politics was especially interesting for me. Three political parties are represented in the Parliament at Bonn. I was very impressed by the strength of the parties. The German government subsidized party organizations. After the parliamentary elections (held every four years) which take place next year, each party will receive \$1.40 from general tax money for every vote cast for that party. And, about 90-percent of the electorate turned out to vote! The money is used to finance the running of the party and to help in political campaigns.

The parties are also strengthened by the German method of electing the 518 representatives to Parliament. One-half are elected directly. The other 259 members are drawn from names placed on party lists according to the proportion of total votes received by each party. The names are recommended by political leaders and approved at a party convention.

Belonging to a party in Germany requires commitment. Members pay dues based on income level. The amount can range from \$1 to \$100 per month.

I was also impressed with the number of people who live downtown in large cities. In Bonn, for example, there were living quarters over all the shops. Many of the cities have closed off their older winding streets for pedestrian use only – making downtown a more quiet and pleasant place to live. This downtown living kept the streets busy in the evening and gave the inner-city great vitality. What a sharp contrast to our own practice! (Can you imagine living over the Sea-First Building?)

The women in Germany are struggling for the same opportunities we are here. I was delighted to meet representatives of a league of 26 women's organizations and learn of their unanimous plan for 1976 – to increase the number of women in elective office at all levels of government.

One of the most moving experiences occurred during our visit to Berlin. West Berlin is a beautiful and bustling city. We also visited East Berlin and were struck by its comparative austerity – and especially the few people on its streets compared to the throngs window shopping, and visiting coffee houses and beer parlors in the West. Looking at the wall and its wire, sentinels and tank traps, we were reminded that Berlin still lives a 'Cold War' every day!

SECTION IV
CLASS PHOTOS

State of Washington



19

73

House of Representatives

Top row (L - R):

E. G Patterson - Adams, Asotin, Garfield, Columbia, Grant, Whitman; Otto Amen - Adams, Asotin, Garfield, Columbia, Grant, Whitman; Bob Curtis - Chelan, Douglas, Grant, Okanogan; Earl F. Tilly - Chelan, Douglas, Grant, Okanogan; Charles R. Savage - Clallam, Jefferson, Mason, Thurston; Paul H. Conner - Clallam, Jefferson, Mason, Thurston; Albert Bauer - Clark; Dick Smythe - Clark; William Paris - Cowlitz, Clark; Alan Thompson - Cowlitz, Clark; William Schumaker - Ferry, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Stevens, Okanogan, Spokane; Joe D. Hausser - Ferry, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Stevens, Okanogan, Spokane; Jeannette Hayner - Franklin, Walla Walla, Columbia; Charles D. Kilbury - Franklin, Walla Walla, Columbia; Robert L. Charette - Grays Harbor, Pacific; Eric O. Anderson - Grays Harbor, Pacific

2nd row (L - R):

Simeon Wilson - Island, Snohomish; Eleanor A. Fortson - Island, Snohomish; John Bagnariol - King; A. N. Shinpoch - King; Robert Gaines - King; Frank J. Warnke - King; King Lysen - King; Georgette Valle - King; Robert A. Perry - King; Al Williams - King; Paul Barden - King; John Cunningham - King; Dave Ceccarelli - King; William S. Leckenby - King; John L. O'Brien - King; William Chatalas - King

3rd row (L - R):

Kenneth O. Eikenberry - King; Helen Sommers - King; John Eng - King; Peggy Joan Maxie - King; Axel Julin - King; William Polk - King; Jeff Douthwaite - King; John Rabel - King; Donn Charnley - King; Lois North - King; Alan Bluechel - King; Gary Lee Matthews - King; Scott Blair - King; Paul Kraabel - King

4th row (L - R):

Frances North - King; Kent E. Pullen - King; Kemper Freeman Jr. - King; James E. Gilleland - King; Rick S. Bender - King; Snohomish; Arthur C. Brown - King, Snohomish; Art Clemente - King, Snohomish; Charles Moon - King, Snohomish; Robert Randall - Kitsap; Rick Smith - Kitsap; S. E. Flanagan - Kittitas, Grant, Yakima; Frank Hansen - Kittitas, Grant, Yakima; Eugene L. Laughlin - Klickitat, Skamania, Clark; Hal Zimmerman - Klickitat, Skamania, Clark

5th row (L - R):

Elmer Jastad - Lewis, Wahkiakum, Cowlitz, Pacific, Thurston; Hugh Kalich - Lewis, Wahkiakum, Cowlitz, Pacific, Thurston; A. A. Adams - Pierce; Lorraine Wojahn - Pierce; Helmut Jueling - Pierce; Richard J. Kelley - Pierce; P. J. Gallagher - Pierce; Mike Parker - Pierce; Marcus Gaspard - Pierce, King; C. W. Beck - Pierce, Kitsap; Thomas A. Swayze - Pierce, Kitsap; Wayne Ehlers - Pierce, Thurston; Phyllis K. Erickson - Pierce, Thurston; Duane Berentson - San Juan, Skagit, Whatcom; Don Hansey - San Juan, Skagit, Whatcom; Richard King - Snohomish

6th row (L - R):

John Martinis - Snohomish; Dale Hoggins - Snohomish; Gary A. Nelson - Snohomish; Margaret Hurley - Spokane; William J. S. May - Spokane; Edward T. Luders - Spokane; Geraldine McCormick - Spokane; Jerry C. Kopet - Spokane; A. J. Pardini - Spokane; Walt O. Knowles - Spokane, Whitman; James P. Kuehne - Spokane, Whitman; Del Bausch - Thurston; John Hendricks - Thurston; H. A. Goltz - Whatcom; Dan Van Dyk - Whatcom; Irving Newhouse - Yakima

7th row (L - R):

Sid W. Morrison - Yakima; Edward G. Ellis - Yakima; Donald G. Garrett - Yakima; Max Benitz - Yakima, Benton; Doris J. Johnson - Yakima, Benton; Dean R. Foster - Chief Clerk; Donald R. Wilson - Assistant Chief Clerk; Ray Olsen - Sergeant-at-Arms

Center: Speaker of the House; Leonard A. Sawyer - Pierce, King

State of Washington



JERRY A. SANDERS, 8
SPEAKER

77

House of Representatives

19

Top row (L - R):

Frank J. Warmke - King; Alan Thompson - Cowlitz, Clark; A. N. Shinpoch - King; A. A. Adams - Pierce; Scott Blair - King; Art Clemente - King; Snohomish; Duane L. Berentson - San Juan, Skagit, Whatcom; John Eng - King; P. J. Gallagher - Pierce; Frank Hansen - Kittitas, Grant, Yakima; Richard A King - Snohomish; John Martinis - Snohomish; Gary A. Nelson - Snohomish; E. G. Patterson - Adams, Asotin, Garfield, Columbia, Grant, Whitman; Georgette Valle - King; Harold Zimmerman - Klickitat, Skamania, Clark

2nd row (L - R):

Otto Amen - Adams, Asotin, Garfield, Columbia, Grant, Whitman; Jim Boldt - Benton, Yakima; Harold R. Clayton - Yakima; Helen Sommers - King; Robert E. Gaines - King; Ron Hanna - Kitsap, Pierce; Charles D. Kilbury - Franklin, Walla Walla, Columbia; John L. O'Brien - King; Albert Bauer - Clark; Geraldine McCormick - Spokane; Irving Newhouse - Yakima; William M. Polk - King; Marion Kyle Sherman - King; Earl F. Tilly - Chelan, Douglas, Grant, Okanogan; Brad Owen - Clallam, Mason, Jefferson, Thurston; Ron Dunlap - King

3rd row (L - R):

Phyllis K. Erickson - Pierce, Thurston; S. E. Flanagan - Kittitas, Grant, Yakima; Irv Greengo - King; George S. Hurley - King; William S. Leckenby - King; Art Moreau - Whatcom; A. J. Pardini - Spokane; James E. Salatino - Pierce; Jim Whiteside - Yakima; Al Williams - King; Jeff Douthwaite - King; Dan Grimm - King, Pierce

4th row (L - R):

Eugene V. Lux - King; John S. McKibbin - Clark; Ellen Craswell - Kitsap; Paul Sanders - King; Joe. A. Taller - King; Mary Kay Becker - Whatcom; Richard O. Barnes - King; Donn Charnley - King; Wayne Ehlers - Pierce, Thurston; Eleanor A. Fortson - Island, Snohomish; Ron Keller - Thurston; King Lysen - King

5th row (L - R):

Frances North - King; Rolland A. Schmitten - Chelan, Douglas, Grant, Okanogan; George W. Walk - Pierce, King; Scott Barr - Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Stevens, Ferry, Okanogan, Spokane; Rod Chandler - King; Alex A. Deccio - Yakima; Rick S. Bender - King, Snohomish; Robert L. Charette - Grays Harbor, Pacific; Margaret Hurley - Spokane; William J. S. May - Spokane; Claude L. Oliver - Benton, Yakima; Paul Pruitt - King; Cathy Pearsall - Pierce; Gene Struthers - Walla Walla, Franklin, Columbia; Simeon R. Wilson - Island, Snohomish; Paul H. Conner - Clallam, Mason, Jefferson, Thurston

6th row (L - R):

R. M. Bond - Spokane; Helen I. Fancher - Ferry, Stevens, Pend Oreille, Lincoln, Spokane, Okanogan; Jerry L. Vrooman - San Juan, Skagit, Whatcom; John R. Hawkins - Pierce, Kitsap; Will Knedlik - King; Peggy Joan Maxie - King; R. P. Nelson - King; William N. Paris - Cowlitz, Clark; Rick Smith - Kitsap; Bill Burns - King; John M. Fischer - Snohomish; Audrey Lindgren Gruger - King, Snohomish; Ted Haley - Pierce; Walt O. Knowles - Spokane, Whitman; Paul Y. Shinoda Jr. - King, Snohomish; Joseph P. Enbody - Lewis, Thurston, Wahkiakum, Pacific, Cowlitz

7th row (L - R):

James E. Grilleland - King; Shirley J. Winsley - Pierce; William H. Fuller - Lewis, Wahkiakum, Cowlitz, Thurston, Pacific; Jack W. Grier - Spokane, Whitman; Dennis L. Heck - Skamania, Klickitat, Clark; Eleanor Lee - King; Myron Kreidler - Thurston; John Erak - Grays Harbor, Pacific; Jerry M. Hughes - Spokane; Dean R. Foster - Chief Clerk; Ross Young - Sergeant-at-Arms

Center: Speaker of the House; John A. Bagnariol - King

State of Washington



James A. Blaine, Speaker
 and
 Charles L. Johnson, Member
 of the House of Representatives

79

House of Representatives

19

Top row (L - R):

Frank J. Warnke - King; A. A. Adams - Pierce; Donn Charnley - King; Phyllis K. Erickson - Pierce; John Eng - King; Myron Kreidler - Thurston; William J. S. May - Spokane; Wayne Ehlers - Pierce, Thurston; R. M. Bond - Spokane; S. E. Flanagan - Kittitas, Grant, Yakima; Shirley J. Winsley - Pierce; Dan Dawson - Pierce, Kitsap; Irving Newhouse - Yakima; Richard O. Barnes - King; Claude L. Oliver - Benton, Yakima; Bob Eberle - King

2nd row (L - R):

P. J. Gallagher - Pierce; Alan Thompson - Cowlitz, Clark; Helen Sommers - King; R. P. Nelson - King; Eugene V. Lux - King; Marion Kyle Sherman - King; John L. O'Brien - King; Albert Bauer - Clark; William M. Polk - King; Otto Amen - Adams, Asotin, Garfield, Columbia, Grant, Whitman; Earl F. Tilly - Chelan, Douglas, Grant, Okanogan; Dan McDonald - King; Curtis P. Smith - Kittitas, Grant, Yakima; Delores E. Teutsch - King; Simeon R. Wilson - Island, Snohomish; Rod Chandler - King

3rd row (L - R):

Joanne J. Brekke - King; Jeff Douthwaite - King; Ron Keller - Thurston; Shirley A. Galloway - Clark; John Martinis - Snohomish; Richard A. King - Snohomish; Ron Dunlap - King; Helen I. Fancher - Ferry, Stevens, Pend Oreille, Lincoln, Spokane, Okanogan; Ted Haley - Pierce; Roger Van Dyken - Whatcom; Raymond E. Isaacson - Benton; Walter W. Sprague - Snohomish

4th row (L - R):

Brad Owen - Clallam, Mason, Jefferson, Thurston; Georgette Valle - King; George W. Walk - Pierce, King; Rick Smith - Kitsap; Audrey Lindgren Gruger - King, Snohomish; James E. Salatino - Pierce; Alex Deccio - Yakima; Michael R. McGinnis - Spokane; Andrew Nisbet - Clallam, Jefferson, Mason, Thurston; Eric J. Rohrbach - King; Ren Taylor - Spokane, Whitman; Jim Whiteside - Yakima

5th row (L - R):

Frances North - King; Walt O. Knowles - Spokane, Whitman; Jerry M. Hughes - Spokane; Margaret Hurley - Spokane; Dan Grimm - King, Pierce; John Erak - Grays Harbor, Pacific; Geraldine McCormick - Spokane; Rick S. Bender - King, Snohomish; E. G. Patterson - Adams, Asotin, Garfield, Columbia, Grant; Gary A. Nelson - Snohomish; Harold S. Zimmerman - Klickitat, Skamania, Clark; Bob Williams - Cowlitz, Clark; Bruce Addison - King; Joan Houghen - Island, Snohomish; William H. Fuller - Lewis, Wahkiakum, Cowlitz, Thurston, Pacific; Irv Greengo - King

6th row (L - R):

Avery Garrett - King; Mary Kay Becker - Whatcom; Wendell B. Brown - Pierce; Paul Pruitt - King; Barbara Granlund - Pierce, Kitsap; Dennis L. Heck - Skamania, Klickitat, Clark; Jerry L. Vrooman - San Juan, Skagit, Whatcom; Peggy Joan Maxie - King; Joe A. Taller - King; Rolland A. Schmitten - Chelan, Douglas, Grant, Okanogan; James B. Mitchell - Snohomish, King; Ellen Craswell - Kitsap; Steve Tupper - King; Paul Sanders - King; Scott Barr - Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Stevens, Ferry, Okanogan, Spokane; Harold R. Clayton - Yakima

7th row (L - R):

Dean R. Foster - Democratic Chief Clerk; Ross Young - Democratic Sergeant-at-Arms; Bill Burns - King; Carol Monohon - Grays Harbor, Pacific; John Jovanovich - King; Gary H. Scott - Snohomish, King; Gene Struthers - Walla Walla, Franklin, Columbia; Wilma Rosbach - Lewis, Wahkiakum, Cowlitz, Thurston, Pacific; Richard Hastings - Walla Walla, Franklin, Columbia; Scott Blair - King; Harry H. Lapham - Republican Sergeant-at-Arms; Vito T. Chiechi - Republican Chief Clerk

Center: Co-Speakers of the House; John A. Bagnariol - King; Duane L. Berentson - San Juan, Skagit, Whatcom

State of Washington



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House of Representatives

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Top row (L - R):

Bruce Addison - King; Otto Amen - Adams, Asotin, Garfield, Columbia, Grant, Whitman; Richard O. Barnes - King; Scott Barr - Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Stevens, Ferry, Okanogan, Spokane; Richard H. Barrett - Spokane; Mary Kay Becker - Whatcom; Rick S. Bender - King, Snohomish; Jeanette Berleen - King; Noel Bickham - Yakima; R. M. Bond - Spokane; Joanne J. Brekke - King; Wendell B. Brown - Pierce; Bill Burns - King; Emilio Cantu - ; Robert L. Chamberlain - Rod Chandler - King

2nd row (L - R):

Harold R. Clayton - Yakima; Dan Dawson - Pierce, Kitsap; Lyle J. Dickie - Yakima; Bob Eberle - King, Pierce; Wayne Ehlers - Pierce, Thurston; William H. Ellis - King; John Eng - King; John Erak - Grays Harbor, Pacific; Phyllis K. Erickson - Pierce, Thurston; Helen Fancher - Ferry, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Stevens, Okanogan, Spokane; Pat Fiske - San Juan, Skagit, Whatcom; S. E. Flanagan - Adams, Grant, Kittitas, Yakima; P. J. Gallagher - Pierce; Shirley A. Galloway - Clark; Avery Garrett - King; W. H. Garson Jr. - Thurston

3rd row (L - R):

Barbara Granlund - Kitsap, Pierce; Irv Greengo - King; Daniel K. Grimm - King, Pierce; Audrey Gruger - King, Snohomish; Shirley Williams Hankins - Yakima, Benton; Richard Hastings - Franklin, Walla Walla Columbia; Dennis L. Heck - Klickitat, Skamania, Clark; Lorraine A. Hine - King; Joan Houchen - Island, Skagit, Snohomish; Ray Isaacson - Benton; Harry James - Kitsap; Stanley C. Johnson - Pierce

4th row (L - R):

Joseph E. King - Clark; Richard King - Snohomish; Mike Kreidler - Thurston; Jay Lane - King; Margaret J. Leonard - Spokane; Jim Lewis - Yakima; Homer Lundquist - San Juan, Skagit, Whatcom; Eugene V. Lux - King; John Martinis - Snohomish; Peggy Joan Maxie - King; Geraldine McCormick - Spokane; Dan McDonald - King

5th row (L - R):

Michael R. McGinnis - Spokane; James B. Mitchell - King, Snohomish; Carol Monohon - Grays Harbor, Pacific; Dick Nelson - King; Gary A. Nelson - Snohomish; C. R. Nickell - Chelan, Douglas, Grant, Okanogan; Andrew Nisbet - Clallam, Jefferson, Mason, Thurston; Frances C. North - King; John L. O'Brien - King; Brad Owen - Clallam, Jefferson, Mason, Thurston; Mike Padden - Spokane, Whitman; Michael E. Patrick - King; Eugene A. Prince - Adams, Asotin, Garfield, Columbia, Grant, Whitman; Paul Pruitt - King; Nita Rinehart - King; Wilma Rosbach - Lewis, Wahkiakum, Cowlitz, Pacific, Thurston

6th row (L - R):

Nancy Rust - King; James E. Salatino - Pierce; Paul Sanders - King; Karen Schmidt - Kitsap; Gary H. Scott - King, Snohomish; Marion Kyle Sherman - King; Curtis P. Smith - Kittitas, Grant, Yakima; Helen Sommers - King; Walt Sprague - Snohomish; Lois Stratton - Spokane; Gene Struthers - Franklin, Walla Walla, Columbia; Ren Taylor - Spokane, Whitman; Delores E. Teutsch - King; Alan Thompson - Cowlitz, Clark; Earl F. Tilly - Chelan, Douglas, Grant, Okanogan; Steve Tupper - King

7th row (L - R):

Georgette Valle - King; Roger Van Dyken - Whatcom; J. VanderStoep - Lewis, Wahkiakum, Cowlitz Pacific, Thurston; George Walk - King, Pierce; Art Wang - Pierce; Frank J. Warnke - King; Bob Williams - Cowlitz, Clark; Simeon R. Wilson - Island, Snohomish; Shirley J. Winsley - Pierce; Vito T. Chiechi - Chief Clerk; George Temir - Sergeant-at-Arms

Center: Speaker of the House; William M. Polk - King

State of Washington



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House of Representatives

61

Top row (L - R):

Bruce Addison - King; Katherine Allen - Snohomish; Marlin Appelwick - King; Seth Armstrong - King; Clyde Ballard - Chelan, Douglas, Grant, Kittitas, Okanogan; Richard O. Barnes - King; Richard H. Barrett - Spokane; Jennifer Belcher - Thurston; John W. Betzoff - King; R. M. Bond - Spokane; Dennis Braddock - Whatcom; Joan Brekke - King; Art Broback - Pierce; Jean Marie Brough - King; Bill Burns - King; Emilio Cantu - King

2nd row (L - R):

Glyn Chandler - Adams, Grant, Kittitas, Yakima; Donn Charnley - King, Snohomish; Harold Clayton - Benton, Yakima; Ernest F. Crane - King, Pierce; Dennis A. Dellwo - Spokane; Lyle J. Dickie - Benton, Yakima; Brian Ebersole - Pierce; Louis M. Egger - Ferry, Lincoln, Okanogan, Pend Oreille, Spokane, Stevens; Jerry Ellis - Yakima; Richard E. Fisch - Clallam, Grays Harbor, Jefferson; Ruth Fisher - Pierce; Pat Fiske - San Juan, Skagit, Whatcom; Steve Fuhrman - Ferry, Lincoln, Okanogan, Pend Oreille, Spokane, Stevens; P. J. Gallagher - Pierce; Shirley A. Galloway - Clark; Avery Garrett - King

3rd row (L - R):

Dan Grimm - Pierce; Stuart A. Halsan - Lewis, Thurston; Shirley Williams Hankins - Benton; Doc Hastings - Benton, Franklin, Walla Walla; Mary Margaret Haugen - Island, Skagit, Snohomish; Dennis L. Heck - Clark, Klickitat, Skamania; Lorraine A. Hine - King; Bruce Holland - King; Ray Isaacson - Benton; Ken Jacobsen - King; Stanley C. Johnson - Pierce; Duane L. Kaiser - Pierce, Thurston

4th row (L - R):

Joseph E. King - Clark; Paul H. King - King, Snohomish; Richard King - Snohomish; Mike Kreidler - Thurston; Jim Lewis - Yakima; Gary F. Locke - King; Jeanine - H. Long - King, Snohomish; Eugene V. Lux - King; John Martinis - Snohomish; Barney McClure - Clallam, Grays Harbor, Jefferson; Dan McDonald - King; Patrick R. McMullen - San Juan, Skagit, Whatcom

5th row (L - R):

Louise Miller - King; James B. Mitchell - Snohomish; Carol Monohon - Grays Harbor, Pacific, Wahkiakum; Charles Moon - Snohomish; Darwin R. Nealey - Adams, Asotin, Columbia, Garfield, Franklin, Whitman; Dick Nelson - King; Gary A. Nelson - Snohomish; Janice Niemi - King; John L. O'Brien - King; Mike Padden - Spokane; Michael E. Patrick - King; Carolyn Powers - Kitsap, Pierce; Eugene A. Prince - Adams, Asotin, Columbia, Garfield, Franklin, Whitman; Paul Pruitt - King; Oliver Ristuben - Clark, Cowlitz; Nancy Rust - King, Snohomish

6th row (L - R):

Paul Sanders - King; Doug Sayan - Grays Harbor, Kitsap, Mason, Thurston; Karen Schmidt - Kitsap; Dick Schoon - King, Pierce; B. Jean Silver - Spokane; Curtis P. Smith - Adams, Grant, Kittitas, Yakima; Bill Smitherman - Kitsap, Pierce; Helen Sommers - King; Lois Stratton - Spokane; Gene Struthers - Benton, Franklin, Walla Walla; Dean A. Sutherland - Clark, Klickitat, Skamania; Joe Tanner - Clark, Cowlitz; Ren Taylor - Spokane; Earl F. Tilly - Chelan, Douglas, Grant, Kittitas, Okanogan; Mike Todd - King, Pierce; Roger Van Dyken - Whatcom

7th row (L - R):

J. VanderStroep - Lewis, Thurston; Max Vekich Jr. - Grays Harbor, Kitsap, Mason, Thurston; George W. Walk - Pierce; Art Wang - Pierce; James West - Spokane; Bob Williams - Cowlitz, Wahkiakum; Joseph L. Williams - King; Simeon R. Wilson - Island, Skagit, Snohomish; Paul Zellinsky Sr. - Kitsap; Dean R. Foster - Chief Clerk; Sharon L. Case - Assistant Chief Clerk; Ross Young - Sergeant-at-Arms

Center: Speaker of the House; Wayne H. Ehlers - Pierce, Thurston

State of Washington



Joseph E. King, D-TREASURY

House of Representatives

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Top row (L - R):

Katherine Allen - Snohomish; Neil Amondson - Lewis, Thurston; Marlin J. Appelwick - King; Seth Armstrong - King; Clyde Ballard - Chelan, Douglas, Okanogan, Kittitas, Grant; Richard O. Barnes - King; Bob Basich - Pacific, Grays Harbor, Wahkiakum; Forrest Baugher - Yakima, Benton; John B. Beck - Snohomish; Jennifer Belcher - Thurston; John W. Betrozoff - King; R. M. Bond - Spokane; Dennis Braddock - Whatcom; Joanne Brekke - King; Tom Bristow - Ferry, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Stevens, Okanogan, Spokane; Peter T. Brooks - Walla Walla, Benton, Franklin; Jean Marie Brough - King, Pierce

2nd row (L - R):

Gary D. Bumgarner - Spokane; Maria Cantwell - King, Snohomish; Glyn Chandler - Adams, Grant, Kittitas, Yakima; Grace Cole - King; David Cooper - Clark, Cowlitz; Ernest F. Crane - King, Pierce; Bill Day - Spokane; Dennis A. Dellwo - Spokane; Shirley L. Doty - Yakima; Brian Ebersole - Pierce; Roy A. Ferguson - King; Richard E. Fisch - Clallam, Jefferson, Grays Harbor; Ruth Fisher - Pierce; Steve Fuhrman - Ferry, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Okanogan, Stevens, Spokane; P. J. Gallagher - Pierce; William A. Grant - Walla Walla, Benton, Franklin

3rd row (L - R):

Daniel K. Grimm - Pierce; Shirley Hankins - Benton; James F. Hargrove - Clallam, Jefferson, Grays Harbor; Mary M. Haugen - Island, Snohomish, Skagit; Michael Heavey - King; Lorraine A. Hine - King; J. Bruce Holland - King; Barbara J. Holm - Lewis, Thurston; Ken Jacobsen - King; Jim Jesernig - Benton; Paul H. King - King; Richard King - Snohomish

4th row (L - R):

Pete Kremen - Whatcom; June Leonard - King; Jim Lewis - Yakima; Gary F. Locke - King; Eugene V. Lux - King; Ken Madsen - Pierce, Thurston; Fred O. May - King; Alex W. McLean - Chelan, Douglas, Grant, Kittitas, Okanogan; Patrick R. McMullen - Skagit, Whatcom, San Juan; Ron Meyers - Kitsap, Pierce; Louise Miller - King; John A. Moyer - Spokane

5th row (L - R):

Darwin R. Nealey - Asotin, Columbia, Garfield, Whitman, Adams, Franklin; Dick Nelson - King; Janice Niemi - King; Busse Nutley - Clark; John L. O'Brien - King; Mike Padden - Spokane; Michael E. Patrick - King; W. Kim Peery - Skamania, Klickitat, Clark; Eugene A. Prince - Asotin, Garfield, Columbia, Whitman, Adams, Franklin; Wes Pruitt - Kitsap, Pierce; Marilyn Rasmussen - Pierce, Thurston; Margaret Rayburn - Yakima, Benton; Nancy S. Rust - King; Paul Sanders - King; Doug Sayan - Mason, Grays Harbor, Kitsap, Thurston; Karen Schmidt - Kitsap

6th row (L - R):

Dick Schoon - Pierce, King; Pat Scott - Snohomish; Jean Silver - Spokane; Curtis P. Smith - Grant, Kittitas, Adams, Yakima; Linda A. Smith - Clark, Cowlitz; Duane Sommers - Spokane; Helen Sommers - King; Harriet Spanel - San Juan, Skagit, Whatcom; Arthur C. Sprengle - Snohomish; Dean Sutherland - Skamania, Klickitat, Clark; Ren Taylor - Spokane; Mike Todd - Pierce, King; Jolene Unsoeld - Thurston; Georgette Valle - King; Dick Van Dyke - Snohomish; Steve Van Luven - King; J. VanderStoep - Lewis, Thurston; Max Vekich - Mason, Grays Harbor, Kitsap, Thurston; George Walk - Pierce

7th row (L - R):

Sally W. Walker - Pierce; Art Wang - Pierce; Bob Williams - Cowlitz, Wahkiakum; Joseph L. Williams - King; Karla Wilson - Snohomish; Simeon R. Wilson - Island, Skagit, Snohomish; Jesse Wineberry - King; Shirley J. Winsley - Pierce; Paul Zellinsky - Kitsap; Alan Thompson - Chief Clerk; Sharon Case - Assistant Chief Clerk; Ross Young - Sergeant-at-Arms

Center: Speaker of the House; Joseph E. King - Clark

State of Washington



Byron Ekersold - D
 SPEAKER
 PITTSBURGH

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House of Representatives

Top row (L - R):

Cal Anderson - King; Marlin Appelwick - King; Clyde Ballard - Chelan, Douglas, Okanogan, Kittitas, Grant; Ida Ballasiotes - King; Bob Basich - Pacific, Grays Harbor, Wahkiakum; Lane Bray - Benton; Jean Marie Brough - King, Pierce; Lisa J. Brown - Spokane; Bill Brumstickle - Lewis, Thurston; Tom Campbell - Pierce; Don Carlson - Clark; Sarah Casada - Pierce; Gary Chandler - Adams, Grant, Kittitas, Yakima; David J. Chappell - Lewis, Pierce, Thurston; Grace Cole - King; Steve Conway - Pierce

2nd row (L - R):

Suzette Cooke - King; Barbara S. Cothem - King, Snohomish; Dennis A. Dellwo - Spokane; Randy Dorn - Pierce, Thurston; Hans Dunshee - King, Snohomish; Philip E. Dyer - King; Betty L. Edmondson - Yakima; Tracey J. Eide - King, Pierce; Bill Finkbeiner - King; Greg Fisher - King; Ruth Fisher - Pierce; Stan Flemming - Pierce; Dale Foreman - Chelan, Okanogan, Douglas, Grant; Elmira Forner - King; Steve Fuhrman - Ferry, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Okanogan, Stevens, Spokane; William A. Grant - Walla Walla, Benton, Franklin

3rd row (L - R):

Mick Hansen - Kittitas, Benton, Grant, Yakima; Michael Heavey - King; Barbara J. Holm - Mason, Grays Harbor, Kitsap, Thurston; Jim Horn - King; Ken Jacobsen - King; Jim Johanson - Snohomish; Linda Johnson - King, Snohomish; Rob Johnson - San Juan, Skagit, Whatcom; Evan Jones - Clallam, Jefferson, Grays Harbor; Sue Karahalios - Island, Skagit, Snohomish; Lynn Kessler - Clallam, Jefferson, Grays Harbor; Richard King - Snohomish

4th row (L - R):

Jeanne Kohl - King; Pete Kremen - Whatcom; Dave Lemmon - Yakima; June Leonard - King; Kelli Linville - Whatcom; Barbara Lisk - Benton, Yakima; Gary F. Locke - King; Jeanine H. Long - Snohomish; Curtis Ludwig - Benton; Dave Mastin - Franklin, Garfield, Columbia, Walla Walla, Asotin; Ron Meyers - Kitsap, Pierce; Todd Mielke - Spokane

5th row (L - R):

Louise Miller - King; Betty Sue Morris - Clark, Cowlitz; Bob Morton - Ferry, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Stevens, Okanogan, Spokane; Holly Myers - Skamania, Klickitat, Clark; Val Ogden - Clark; George Orr - Spokane; Mike Padden - Spokane; Julia Patterson - King; W. Kim Peery - Skamania, Klickitat, Clark; Wes Pruitt - Kitsap, Pierce; Dave Quall - San Juan, Skagit, Whatcom; Margaret S. Rayburn - Yakima, Benton; Bill H. Reams - King; Mike Riley - Cowlitz, Wahkiakum; Judi Roland - King, Pierce; Sandra Singery Romero - Thurston

6th row (L - R):

Nancy S. Rust - King; Karen Schmidt - Kitsap; Mark G. Schoesler - Adams, Spokane, Whitman, Asotin; Pat Scott - Snohomish; Barry Sehlin - Island, Skagit, Snohomish; Larry Sheahan - Adams, Spokane, Whitman, Asotin; Timothy Sheldon - Grays Harbor, Mason, Kitsap, Thurston; Paull Shin - Snohomish; Jean Silver - Spokane; Helen Sommers - King; Jim Springer - Clark, Lewis, Cowlitz; Val Stevens - King, Snohomish; Grgi Talcott - Pierce; Randy Tate - Pierce; Pat Thibaudeau - King; Brian C. Thomas - King

7th row (L - R):

Georgette Valle - King; Steve Van Luven - King; Christopher Vance - King, Pierce; Velma Veloria - King; Art Wang - Pierce; Jesse Wineberry - King; Cathy Wolfe - Thurston; Jeannette Wood - Snohomish; Paul Zellinsky - Kitsap; Alan Thompson - Chief Clerk

Center: Speaker of the House; Brian Ebersole - Pierce

State of Washington



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House of Representatives

Top row (L - R):

Marlin Appelwick - King; Bill Backlund - King; Ida Ballasiotes - King; Bob Basich - Pacific; Grays Harbor, Wahkiakum; Barney Beeksma - Island, Skagit, Snohomish; Don Benton - Clark, Skamania; Jerry Blanton - Snohomish; Marc Boldt - Clark, Skamania; Lisa J. Brown - Spokane; Bill Brumsickle - Lewis, Thurston; Jim Buck - Clallam, Jefferson, Grays Harbor; Jack Cairnes - King; Tom Campbell - Pierce; Don Carlson - Clark; Michael Carrell - Pierce; Sarah Casada - Pierce

2nd row (L - R):

Gary Chandler - Adams, Grant, Kittitas, Yakima; David J. Chappell - Lewis, Pierce, Thurston; Frank Chopp - King; Jim Clements - Yakima; Eileen L. Cody - King; Grace Cole - King; Steve Conway - Pierce; Suzette Cooke - King; Jeralita Costa - Snohomish; Larry Crouse - Spokane; Dennis A. Dellwo - Spokane; Jerome Delvin - Benton; Mary Lou Dickerson - King; Philip E. Dyer - King; Brian Ebersole - Pierce; Ian Elliot - King, Snohomish

3rd row (L - R):

Greg Fisher - King; Ruth Fisher - Pierce; Dale Foreman - Chelan, Okanogan, Douglas, Grant; Steve Fuhrman - Ferry, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Okanogan, Stevens, Spokane; Gene Goldsmith - Whatcom; William A. Grant - Walla Walla, Benton, Franklin; Shirley Hankins - Benton; Steve Hargrove - Kitsap; Brian Hatfield - Pacific, Grays Harbor, Wahkiakum, Cowlitz; Timothy T. Hikkel - King, Pierce; Jim Honeyford - Klickitat, Skamania, Benton, Yakima; Jim Horn - King

4th row (L - R):

Tom G. Huff - Kitsap, Pierce; Cheryl Hymes - San Juan, Skagit, Whatcom; Ken Jacobsen - King; Peggy Johnson - Mason, Grays Harbor, Kitsap, Thurston; Lynn Kessler - Clallam, Jefferson, Grays Harbor; John Koster - King, Snohomish; Pete Kremen - Whatcom; Kathy Lambert - King; Barbara Lisk - Benton, Yakima; Dawn Mason - King; Dave Mastin - Franklin, Garfield, Columbia, Walla Walla, Asotin; Lois McMahan - Kitsap, Pierce

5th row (L - R):

Cathy McMorris - Ferry, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Stevens, Okanogan, Spokane; Todd Mielke - Spokane; Maryann Mitchell - King, Pierce; Betty Sue Morris - Clark, Cowlitz; Joyce Mulliken - Benton, Kittitas, Grant, Yakima; Val Ogden - Clark; Mike Padden - Spokane; Julia Patterson - King; Grant Pelesky - King, Pierce; John Pennington - Clark, Lewis, Cowlitz; Erik Poulsen - King; Dave Quall - San Juan, Skagit, Whatcom; Renee Radcliff - Snohomish; Bill H. Reams - King; Debbie Regala - Pierce; Eric Robertson - King, Pierce

6th row (L - R):

Sandra Romero - Thurston; Nancy S. Rust - King; Dave Schmidt - Snohomish; Karen Schmidt - Kitsap; Mark G. Schoesler - Adams, Spokane, Whitman, Asotin; Patricia Scott - Snohomish; Barry Sehlin - Island, Skagit, Snohomish; Larry Sheahan - Adams, Spokane, Whitman, Asotin; Timothy Sheldon - Grays Harbor, Mason, Kitsap, Thurston; Mike Sherstad - King, Snohomish; Jean Silver - Spokane; Mary Skinner - Yakima; Scott Smith - Pierce; Helen Sommers - King; Val Stevens - King, Snohomish; Gigi Talcott - Pierce

7th row (L - R):

Pat Thibaudeau - King; Brian Thomas - King; Les Thomas - King, Pierce; Bill Thompson - Snohomish; Kip Tokuda - King; Georgette Valle - King; Steve Van Luven - King; Velma Voloria - King; Cathy Wolfe - Thurston; Timothy A. Martin - Chief Clerk; Sharon Hayward - Deputy Chief Clerk

Center: Speaker of the House; Clyde Ballard - Chelan, Douglas, Okanogan, Kittitas, Grant

State of Washington



Frank Chopp
DEMOCRATIC SPEAKER
1999-2001

Clyde Balfanz
REPUBLICAN SPEAKER
1997-1999

99

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House of Representatives

Top row (L - R):

Gary Alexander - Lewis, Pierce, Thurston; David Anderson - Island, Skagit, Snohomish; Ida Ballasiotes - King; Kelly Barlean - Island, Skagit, Snohomish; Brad Benson - Spokane; Marc Boldt - Clark, Skamania; Jim Buck - Clallam, Jefferson, Grays Harbor; Roger Bush - Pierce; Jack Cairnes - King; Tom Campbell - Pierce; Don Carlson - Clark; Mike Carrell - Pierce; Bruce Chandler - Klickitat, Skamania, Yakima, Benton; Gary Chandler - Adams, Grant, Kittitas, Yakima; Jim Clements - Yakima; Eileen L. Cody - King

2nd row (L - R):

Dow Constantine - King; Steve Conway - Pierce; Mike Cooper - Snohomish; Don Cox - Adams, Spokane, Whitman, Asotin; Larry Crouse - Spokane; Richard DeBolt - Lewis, Pierce, Thurston; Jerome Delvin - Benton; Mary Lou Dickerson - King; Mark Doumit - Pacific, Grays Harbor, Wahkiakum, Cowlitz; Jim Dunn - Clark, Skamania; Hans Dunshee - King, Snohomish; Carolyn Edmonds - King; Jeanne Edwards - King, Snohomish; William Eickmeyer - Mason, Grays Harbor, Kitsap, Thurston; Doug Eriksen - Whatcom; Luke Esser - King

3rd row (L - R):

Ruth Fisher - Pierce; Phil Fortunato - King; Jeff Gombosky - Spokane; Bill Grant - Walla Walla, Benton, Franklin; Kathy Haigh - Mason, Grays Harbor, Kitsap, Thurston; Shirley Hankins - Benton; Brian Hatfield - Pacific, Grays Harbor, Wahkiakum, Cowlitz; Tom Huff - Pierce, Kitsap; Christopher Hurst - King, Pierce; Ruth Kagi - King; Jim Kastama - King, Pierce; Karen Kaiser - King

4th row (L - R):

Plyllis Gutierrez Kenney - King; Lynn Kessler - Clallam, Jefferson, Grays Harbor; John Koster - King, Snohomish; Kathy Lambert - King; Patricia Lantz - Pierce, Kitsap; Kelli Linville - Whatcom; Barbara Lisk - Benton, Yakima; John Lovick - Snohomish; Dave Mastin - Franklin, Garfield, Columbia, Walla Walla, Asotin; Joyce McDonald - King, Pierce; Jim McIntire - King; Cathy McMorris - Ferry, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Stevens, Okanogan, Spokane

5th row (L - R):

Tom Mielke - Clark, Lewis, Cowlitz; Mark Miloscia - King, Pierce; Jeff Morris - San Juan, Skagit, Whatcom; Joyce Mulliken - Benton, Kittitas, Grant, Yakima; Ed Murray - King; Al O'Brien - King, Snohomish; Val Ogden - Clark; Linda Evans Parlette - Chelan, Okanogan, Douglas, Grant; John Pennington - Clark, Lewis, Cowlitz; Cheryl Pflug - King; Erik Poulsen - King; Dave Quall - San Juan, Skagit, Whatcom; Renee Radcliff - Snohomish; Aaron Reardon - Snohomish; Debbie Regala - Pierce

6th row (L - R):

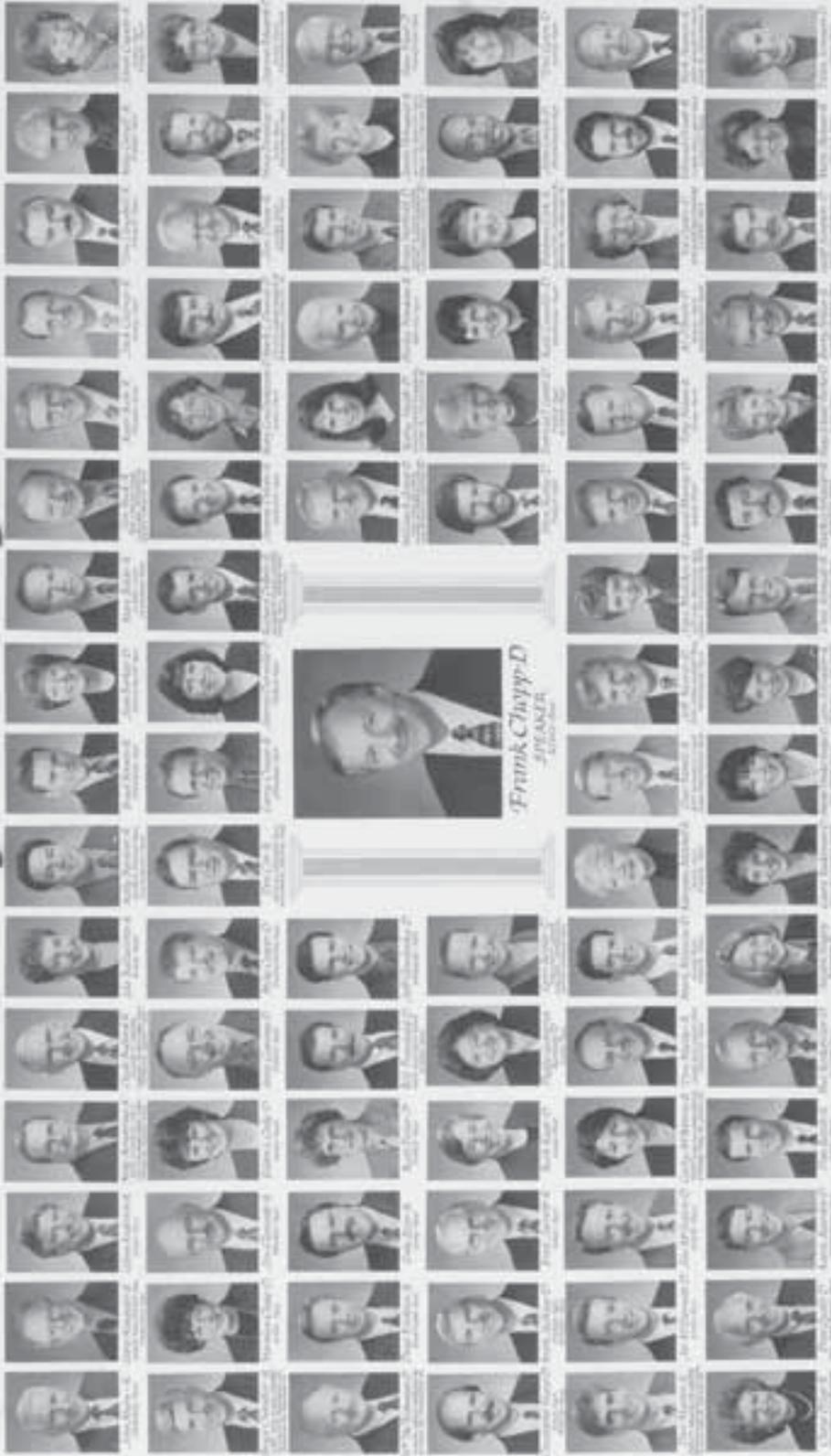
Phil Rockefeller - Kitsap; Sandra Romero - Thurston; Laura Ruderman - King; Sharon Tomiko Santos - King; Lynn Schindler - Spokane; Dave Schmidt - Snohomish; Karen Schmidt - Kitsap; Mark G. Schoesler - Adams, Spokane, Whitman, Asotin; Shay Schual-Berke - King; Pat Scott - Snohomish; Mary Skinner - Yakima; Duane Sommers - Spokane; Helen Sommers - King; Michael Stensen - King, Pierce; Brian Sullivan - Pierce; Bob Sump - Ferry, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Stevens, Spokane, Okanogan

7th row (L - R):

Gigi Talcott - Pierce; Brian Thomas - King; Kip Tokuda - King; Steve Van Luven - King; Velma Veloria - King; Mike Wensman - King; Cathy Wolfe - Thurston; Alex Wood - Spokane; Dean R. Foster - Co-Chief Clerk; Timothy A. Martin - Co-Chief Clerk; Sharon Hayward - Deputy Chief Clerk; Cindy Zehnder - Deputy Chief Clerk

Center: Co-Speakers of the House; Clyde Ballard - Chelan, Douglas, Okanogan, Kittitas, Grant; Frank Chopp - King

State of Washington



02

House of Representatives

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Top row (L - R):

John Ahern - Spokane; Gary Alexander - Lewis, Pierce, Thurston; Glenn Anderson - King; Mike Armstrong - Chelan, Okanogan, Douglas, Grant; Clyde Ballard - Chelan, Okanogan, Douglas, Grant; Ida Ballasiotes - King; Kelly Barlean - Island, Skagit, Snohomish; Brad Benson - Spokane; Jean Berkey - Snohomish; Marc Boldt - Clark, Skamania; Jim Buck - Clallam, Jefferson, Grays Harbor; Roger Bush - Pierce; Jack Cairnes - King; Tom Campbell - Pierce; Mike Carrell - Pierce; Sarah Casada - King, Pierce

2nd row (L - R):

Bruce Chandler - Klickitat, Skamania, Yakima, Benton; Maralyn Chase - King; Jim Clements - Yakima; Eileen L. Cody - King; Steve Conway - Pierce; Mike Cooper - Snohomish; Don Cox - Adams, Spokane, Whitman, Asotin; Larry Crouse - Spokane; Jeannie Darnelle - Pierce; Richard DeBolt - Lewis, Pierce, Thurston; Jerome Delvin - Benton; Mary Lou Dickerson - King; Mark L. Doumit - Pacific, Grays Harbor, Wahkiakum, Cowlitz; Jim Dunn - Clark, Skamania; Hans Dunshee - King, Snohomish; Jeanne Edwards - King, Snohomish

3rd row (L - R):

William Eickmeyer - Mason, Grays Harbor, Kitsap, Thurston; Doug Ericksen - Whatcom; Luke Esser - King; Ruth Fisher - Pierce; Bill Fromhold - Clark; Jeff Gombosky - Spokane; William A. Grant - Walla Walla, Benton, Franklin; Kathy Haigh - Mason, Grays Harbor, Kitsap, Thurston; Shirley Hankins - Benton; Brian Hatfield - Pacific, Grays Harbor, Wahkiakum, Cowlitz; Janéa Holmquist - Kittitas, Benton, Grant, Yakima; Sam Hunt - Thurston

4th row (L - R):

Christopher Hurst - King, Pierce; Brock Jackley - Pierce, Kitsap; Fred Jarrett - King; Ruth Kagi - King; Phyllis Gutierrez Kenney - King; Lynn Kessler - Clallam, Jefferson, Grays Harbor; Steve Kirby - Pierce; Patricia T. Lantz - Pierce, Kitsap; Kelli Linville - Whatcom; Barbara Lisk - Benton, Yakima; John Lovick - Snohomish; Toni Lysen - King

5th row (L - R):

Dave Mastin - Franklin, Garfield, Columbia, Walla Walla, Asotin; Joe McDermott - King; Jim McIntire - King; Cathy McMorris - Ferry, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Stevens, Okanogan, Spokane; Tom Mielke - Clark, Lewis, Cowlitz; Mark Miloscia - King, Pierce; Maryann Mitchell - King, Pierce; Dave Morell - King, Pierce; Jeff Morris - San Juan, Skagit, Whatcom; Joyce Mulliken - Benton, Kittitas, Grant, Yakima; Ed Murray - King; Toby Nixon - King; Al O'Brien - King, Snohomish; Val Ogden - Clark; Edmund Orcutt - Clark, Lewis, Cowlitz; Kirk Pearson - King, Snohomish

6th row (L - R):

Cheryl Pflug - King; Dave Quall - San Juan, Skagit, Whatcom; Aaron Reardon - Snohomish; Dan Roach - King, Pierce; Phil Rockefeller - Kitsap; Sandra Singery Romero - Thurston; Laura Ruderman - King; Sharon Tomiko Santos - King; Lynn Schindler - Spokane; Dave Schmidt - Snohomish; Mark G. Schoesler - Adams, Spokane, Whitman, Asotin; Shay Schual-Berke - King; Barry Sehlin - Island, Skagit, Snohomish; Geoff Simpson - King; Mary Skinner - Yakima; Helen Sommers - King

7th row (L - R):

Brian Sullivan - Snohomish; Bob Sump - Ferry, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Stevens, Spokane, Okanogan; Gigi Talcott - Pierce; Kip Tokuda - King; Dave Uptegrove - King; Steve Van Luven - King; Velma Veloria - King; Alex Wood - Spokane; Beverly Woods - Kitsap; Cynthia Zehnder - Chief Clerk; Bill Wegeleben - Deputy Chief Clerk

Center: Speaker of the House; Frank Chopp - King

State of Washington



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20

House of Representatives



Top row (L - R):

John Ahern - Spokane; Gary Alexander - Lewis, Pierce, Thurston; Glenn Anderson - King; Sherry Appleton - Kitsap; Mike Armstrong - Chelan, Okanogan, Douglas, Grant; Barbara Bailey - Island, Skagit, Snohomish; Don Barlow - Spokane; Brian Blake - Pacific, Grays Harbor, Wahkiakum, Cowlitz; David Buri - Adams, Garfield, Spokane, Asotin, Whitman, Franklin; Tom Campbell - Pierce, Thurston; Bruce Chandler - Klickitat, Skamania, Yakima, Benton; Maralyn Chase - King; Judy Clibborn - King; Eileen Cody - King; Cary Condotta - Chelan, Okanogan, Douglas, Grant; Steve Conway - Pierce

2nd row (L - R):

Larry Crouse - Spokane; Richard Curtis - Clark, Cowlitz; Jeannie Darneille - Pierce; Richard DeBolt - Lewis, Pierce, Thurston; Mary Lou Dickerson - King; Jim Dunn - Clark, Skamania; Hans Dunshee - King, Snohomish; Deborah Eddy - King; William Eickmeyer - Mason, Grays Harbor, Kitsap, Thurston; Mark Ericks - King, Snohomish; Doug Eriksen - Whatcom; Dennis Flannigan - Pierce; Bill Fromhold - Clark; Roger Goodman - King; William A. Grant - Columbia, Walla Walla, Benton, Franklin; Tami Green - Pierce

3rd row (L - R):

Kathy Haigh - Mason, Grays Harbor, Kitsap, Thurston; Steve Hailey - ; Larry Haler - Benton; Shirley Hankins - Benton; Bob Hasegawa - King; Bill Hinkle - Kittitas, Grant, Yakima; Zack Hudgins - King; Sam Hunt - Thurston; Ross Hunter - King; Christopher Hurst - King, Pierce; Fred Jarrett - King; Ruth Kagi - King, Snohomish

4th row (L - R):

Troy Kelley - Pierce; Phyllis Gutierrez Kenney - King; Lynn Kessler - Clallam, Jefferson, Grays Harbor; Steve Kirby - Pierce; Joel Kretz - Ferry, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Stevens, Spokane, Okanogan; Dan Kristiansen - King, Snohomish, Skagit, Whatcom; Patricia T. Lantz - Pierce, Kitsap; Kelli Linville - Whatcom; John Lovick - Snohomish; John McCoy - Snohomish; Jim McCune - Pierce, Thurston; Joe McDermott - King

5th row (L - R):

Joyce McDonald - Pierce; Jim McIntire - King; Mark Miloscia - King, Pierce; Jim Moeller - Clark; Dawn Morrell - Pierce; Jeff Morris - San Juan, Skagit, Whatcom; Dan Newhouse - Klickitat, Yakima, Skamania, Clark; Al O'Brien - King, Snohomish; Edmund Orcutt - Clark, Lewis, Cowlitz; Timm Ormsby - Spokane; Kirk Pearson - King Snohomish, Skagit, Whatcom; Jamie Petersen - King; Eric Pettigrew - King; Skip Priest - King; Dave Quall - San Juan, Skagit, Whatcom; Dan Roach - King, Pierce

6th row (L - R):

Mary Helen Roberts - Snohomish; Jay Rodne - King; Christine Rolfes - Kitsap; Charles Ross - Yakima; Sharon Tomiko Santos - King; Lynn Schindler - Spokane; Shay Schual-Berke - King; Larry Seaquist - Pierce, Kitsap; Mike Sells - Snohomish; Geoff Simpson - King; Mary Skinner - Yakima; Helen Sommers - King; Larry Springer - King; Chris Strow - Island, Skagit, Snohomish; Brian Sullivan - Snohomish; Pat Sullivan - King

7th row (L - R):

Bob Sump - Ferry, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Stevens, Spokane, Okanogan; Dean Takko - Pacific, Grays Harbor, Wahkiakum, Cowlitz; Dave Upthegrove - King; Kevin Van De Wege - Clallum, Jefferson, Grays Harbor; Deb Wallace - Clark; Mareen Walsh - Columbia, Franklin, Walla Walla, Benton; Judy Warnick - Kittitas, Grant, Yakima; Brendan Williams - Thurston; Alex Wood - Spokane; Rich Nafziger - Chief Clerk; Bill Wegeleben - Deputy Chief Clerk

Center: Speaker of the House; Frank Chopp - King

SECTION V

**BIOGRAPHY, FINAL NEWSLETTER, 36 YEARS OF ELECTION RESULTS,
36TH DISTRICT LEGISLATORS (1903-2010)**



UW honors Rep. Helen Sommers with Regents Medal

The University of Washington - Board of Regents, by unanimous vote last month, presented Rep. Helen Sommers with the first Regents Medal ever bestowed by the university, for exceptional accomplishments over her 36 years in the state legislature.

Sommers, who is retiring from office after a 36-year career in the House, is an alumna of the UW with bachelor's and master's degrees in Economics.

The Regent's resolution said Sommers' "leadership in the House of Representatives has been of immense benefit to the citizens of the state, particularly the impact her leadership has had over many years in expanding higher educational opportunities and ensuring the well-being of the state's public higher education institutions."

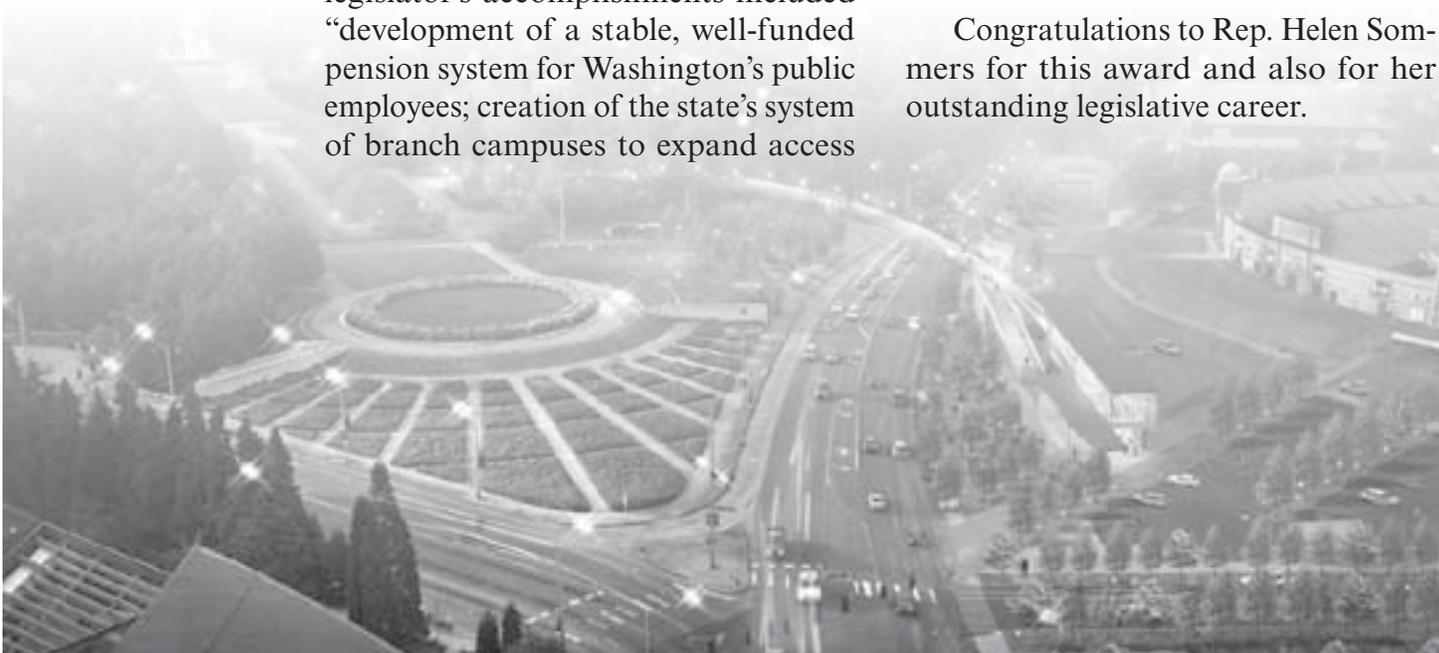
The resolution noted the 36th District legislator's accomplishments included "development of a stable, well-funded pension system for Washington's public employees; creation of the state's system of branch campuses to expand access

to higher education opportunities; and, support for state funding of university research, particularly the University of Washington's advanced technology initiatives."

The resolution also stated, "The University of Washington is indebted to her for her vision, leadership, wise counsel and steadfast commitment to excellence in all the University does in providing high quality educational and research programs to benefit the State of Washington."

The Regents Medal is an award that will be given from time to time by the Regents of the University of Washington to recognize outstanding and exceptional accomplishment by an individual or organization, particularly in service to humanity, a community, or to the UW itself.

Congratulations to Rep. Helen Sommers for this award and also for her outstanding legislative career.



LEGISLATIVE BIOGRAPHY (1973-2009 – 36 years of Service)



Representative Helen Sommers 36th Legislative District House of Representatives State

Education:

K-12 Woodbury Heights, New Jersey

University of Washington – Seattle: B.A. and M.A. in Economics

Central Washington University Honorary Degree – Master of Human Letters – 2009

Service in the Washington State House of Representatives (1973-2009)

- First elected to the House in November, 1972;
- Elected 18 times (36 years);
- Retired at the end of the 2008 session; term ended in January 2009.

Leadership positions in the House throughout her 36-year career:

- Chair of House Appropriations Committee – 1994 and 2002–2008;
- Co-Chair of Appropriations Committee (second 49-49 tie) – 1999–2001;
- Ranking Democrat (Minority) of Appropriations – 1995–1998;
- Democratic Caucus Chair – 1993;
- Capital Budget Chair – 1989–1992;
- Higher Education Chair – 1986;
- Revenue Chair – 1977–1978; Co-Chair (first 49-49 tie) 1979-1980;
- State Government Chair – 1975–1976; again 1987–1988;
- Co-Chair Revenue Committee – 1973-74.

Other Committees Helen served on:

- Joint Committee on Pension Policy – Chair
- Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee – Chair;
- Pension Funding Council
- Institute for Public Policy – Board

Former Employment:

- King County Office of Finance – 1984-1995;
- King County Council, Analyst – 1972-1984;

- Edmonds Community College – Instructor in Economics – 1971;
- Mobil Oil Company de Venezuela – Caracas, Venezuela – 1954-1968.

HONORS AND AWARDS:

- Central Washington University Masters of Humane Letters – Honorary Degree – 2009;
- Robert G. Waldo Award for outstanding service to Higher Education – 2009;
- University of Washington Regents Medal for exceptional accomplishments over her 36 years in the state legislature – 2008;
- Warren G. Magnuson Award – Municipal League of King County – 2008;
- State Skills Center Super Star – 2007
- Leadership Award – Cascade Land Conservancy – 2006
- Food Lifeline Ending Hunger Award – 2006
- Seattle Times “Best of Puget Sound” recognition – 2006
- Reading Foundation Literacy Leadership Award – 2006
- Washington State Skills Center Super Star – 2005
- Citizens for Parks and Recreation Award – 2004
- Warren G. Magnuson Award – Municipal League of King County – 2002
- Elected Official of the year – Port of Seattle Propeller Club – 2002
- Washington Software Alliance Tech Connector Award – 2002
- Legislator of the Year – Home Care Association of Washington – 2001
- Wash. Law & Politics Survey – Sommers Heads Top Legislators List – 2000
- Leadership Award – Washington Public Education Association – 2000
- Legislative Excellence Award – Wash. State Retired Teachers Association – 1998
- Sentinel Award – Washington Law Enforcement Association – 1996
- Distinguished Alumna Award – Univ. of Washington Dept. of Economics – 1995
- Women of Achievement – Matrix Table, Women in Communications – 1995
- Rated No. 1 Legislator – Seattle Times survey – 1994
- Legislator of the Year-SeaTac Occupational Skills Center Advisory Council – 1994
- Teen Health Leadership Award – SeaTac Occupational Skills Advisory Cncl. – 1994
- 1st Honorary Associate of Arts Degree – North Seattle Community College – 1993
- Warren G. Magnuson Contribution to Government Award-Municipal League-1985
- Pacific Science Center Award of Leadership in Science Education – 1985
- “Mentor Award” Seattle Women’s Network – 1981
- “1978 Woman of Achievement” by the Quota Club of Seattle – 1981

COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES (present and former)

- **Judicial Selection Task Force**
- **Ruckelshaus Consensus Center Board**
- **City Club**
- **Nordic Heritage Museum – Honorary Trustee**
- **Bio 21 Steering Committee**
- **Burke Museum Association**
- **Rainier Institute, Board Member**
- **Seattle Art Museum**
- **Friends of Stonerose Fossils, Republic, Washington**
- **Ice Age Floods Institute**
- **Washington Environmental Council**
- **League of Women Voters**
- **Pacific Science Center Foundation, Associate**
- **Chronic Public Inebriation Systems Solution Committee**
- **Pharmacists Emergency Contraception Project, Advisory Committee**
- **Technology Alliance Smart Tools Academy, Steering Committee**
- **Women’s Political Caucus**
- **National Organization for Women (N.O.W) Seattle/King County, Past President**



Helen Sommers (front middle) receives her Honorary Degree from Central Washington University 2009.

State Representative
HELEN SOMMERS

2008 Session Report



Spring, 2008

Dear Friends,

I have had the privilege of representing you in the legislature for the past 36 years, and I sincerely thank you for that opportunity. I am not seeking re-election this fall.

It is amazing to think about the changes that have occurred in those 36 years. We've gone from hand-written letters to e-mails, from multiple carbon copies to color copy machines, from room-sized computers to microchip technology. Our state economy is no longer rooted in timber and fishing; instead, we have become world leaders in computer technology and biosciences.

Serving in the House has allowed me to meet and work with many talented people, become involved in many state issues and, I hope, help move our state toward a healthy and prosperous future. Again, thank you for this opportunity.

Sincerely,

Helen Sommers



HELEN SOMMERS
 STATE REPRESENTATIVE—36th Legislative District

House Office Building
 Room 305
 Olympia, Washington 98504
 Phone: 733-7942
 Toll-free hot-line: 1-800-532-6000

COMMITTEES
 Local Government
 Judiciary
 Revenues, Vice-chairman

February, 1974

IMPRESSIONS OF THE SECOND YEAR

The procedures and rituals are familiar, though some of the subtle intricacies of parliamentary procedure escape me still. The elaborate partisan bickering and floor fights which disputed me so much last year are mostly just bothersome. Superficial hero speeches before the TV cameras are a drag. Members and experienced observers will know the difference between the sincere and the artificial. They also know that the real work of the legislature is accomplished in the quiet drudgery of endless committee meetings and consultation with research staff.

I have learned to cope a little better with that uncomfortable feeling when I know I am going to have to vote "yes" or "no" (no "maybe") on a controversial subject, one on which I have had little or no time to research and about which I am not yet sure of my choice.

LEGISLATIVE ACTION

Some of the more significant bills passed were:

PROBATE REFORM. Washington's probate law has been streamlined and simplified. The changes will result in lower costs, especially for small estates.

GEOTHERMAL RESOURCES. The new law encourages exploration and orderly development of geothermal resources in our state. This procedure would top the power of earthquakes.

TRUTH IN SPENDING ACT. This bill requires each state agency to report its expenditures on a per capita basis. Yearly comparisons will pinpoint and clarify just how and where increases in expenditures are occurring.

INTEREST RATE ON PUBLIC DEPOSITS. A bill was passed which lifted the ceiling on interest rates which banks must pay on public deposits. It is estimated that this ceiling costs the taxpayer between \$2 and \$5 million per year.

STEER VETO. A measure will be placed on the November ballot to limit the Governor's ability to veto single words and phrases from bills passed by the legislature. This still allows veto of an entire bill or section within a bill and individual appropriations items.

LOTTERY. A state lottery was established as approved by the electorate a year ago.

FOREST PRACTICES. The new Forest Practices Act is aimed at protecting the environment, while encouraging timber growth.

State Representative **Helen Sommers**

Focus on K-12 improvements

We made record investments in education in the 2007-09 biennium:



- Online Math Curriculum – to ensure students have access to a curriculum aligned with statewide math standards.
- Improving the statewide Washington Assessment of Student Learning. The Superintendent of Public Instruction will redesign student tests to focus on skills needed in today’s world.
- Arts in Education – the arts make an important impact on the development of every child. The arts will be part of a core curriculum.

Higher Education: *Prepares Our Students for the Future*

The 2007-09 operating budget provided record enrollment for our state’s public universities and colleges. This supplemental budget makes a number of investments to further strengthen our higher education system, including:

- Funding for “Entrepreneurial Stars” – leaders in advanced research.
- e-Science Institute at UW – capable of storing and analyzing huge amounts of data, such as the Neptune research project studying the floor of the Pacific Ocean.
- Funding for training students to do the high-tech jobs that are so important to our new economy.

Graduate and Professional Student Senate

The GPSS is the official government for these students at the University of Washington, providing representation on campus and to the Legislature. Two student lobbyists attend committee meetings (Higher Education and Appropriations) and frequently testify on higher ed issues. Their platform supports an increase in funding for graduate and professional enrollments, stable and predictable tuition, more research opportunities, and a greater state commitment to capital projects.



Proposals to Protect Our State’s Health

The cost of health care continues to challenge our resources. A citizens’ work group was established to consider health care reform proposals.

Other steps taken to improve health include:



- A prohibition on toxic toys
- A program to provide farm-fresh produce for school lunches
- Increased adult dental access
- Additional support for family planning
- Authority for the Insurance Commissioner to deny excessive price increases of health insurance policies for individuals

2008 SESSION REPORT

Consumer Protection and Privacy

Identity theft is the fastest-growing crime in Washington. These measures will help protect consumers:

- Requiring your consent before your cell-phone number can be disclosed.
- Prohibiting unauthorized use of information gathered from the new “enhanced” driver’s license.
- Restricting “data skimming” – using information garnered from a new technology called radio-frequency identification (RFID) chips found in many household items.
- Creating a consumer web site so all resources are available in one place.



“My seatmates, Representative Mary Lou Dickerson and Senator Jeanne Kohl-Welles join me on my last day of legislative session.”

Creating the “Smart Homeownership Choices Program”

Foreclosure rates have been increasing as families commit to mortgages beyond their financial means.

In recognition of the recent reports of Washington families facing foreclosure, the Housing Commission will provide advice and assistance to those homeowners, as well as to those contemplating home purchases beyond their financial capacity.

Protecting Washington’s environment

Oil spill prevention

Funding was continued for the Neah Bay Rescue Tug to prevent oil spills from tankers in the rough water off our coast.

Climate Change

The forecast for climate change and the impacts on our land and water raised concerns. The Office of Washington State Climatologist was created within the University of Washington. The state Department of Ecology will evaluate the possible impacts of climate change on the potential for drought, floods, and the impacts on agriculture, forestry, and our coast. The DOE will analyze the effects on humans, animals, and fish and make recommendations to mitigate negative impacts.

“Green” legislation

New legislation on “urban forestry” calls for an inventory of urban trees and provides financial incentives for cities that promote laws to preserve and replant trees.



State Representative **Helen Sommers**

Other items of interest



Viaduct Tour

The Viaduct was closed recently for periodic inspection. This closure provided an opportunity to walk on the roadway with Dept. of Transportation personnel. The Viaduct is heavily used--something like 110,000 cars daily. There are plans for improvements to strengthen the pillars for the raised portion.



Wine Tasting

The Legislature approved a pilot project to allow limited tasting of wine in grocery stores. Specialty shops may provide up to two-ounce samples. A license from the Liquor Control Board would be required.



Student Bill of Rights

This "Student Bill of Rights" will make it easier and more efficient to transfer courses from one college in the state to another.



Lucy's Legacy

Funding was provided to host Lucy's Legacy - The Treasures of Ethiopia, at the Pacific Science Center. This rare and important exhibit explores what is referred to as the Cradle of Mankind. The Lucy remains are estimated at over three million years old.

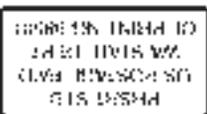


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Higher Education

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Helen Sommers
PO BOX 40600
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2008 Session Report





Elections & Voting

November 2006 General Election

In the 2006 election, Helen Sommers ran unopposed, being elected to her 18th term – 36 years as Representative of the 36th District. **She retired in 2009**, having announced her retirement after the 2008 session.

November 2004 General Election - Helen Sommers (D) defeated Floyd Loomis (R) 78.7% to 17%;

September 2004 Primary Election - Helen Sommers (D) 51.6% vs. Alice Woldt (D) 48.4%

November 2002 General			
District #36 Representative #1			
Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Helen Sommers	D	35663	78.34%
Angela Brink	R	9863	21.66%

September 2002 Primary			
District #36 Representative #1			
Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Helen Sommers	D	17586	77.60%
Angela Brink	R	5076	22.40%

November 2000 General			
District #36 Representative #1			
Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Helen Sommers	D	42196	77.41%
Leslie Klein	R	8831	16.20%
Andrew Rogers	L	2067	3.79%
Jeanne "Magic" Black-Ferguson	NL	1415	2.60%

September 2000 Primary			
District #36 Representative #1			
Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Helen Sommers	D	19450	77.13%
Leslie R. Klein	R	4070	16.14%
Andrew Rogers	L	1025	4.06%
Jeanne "Magic" Black-Ferguson	NL	673	2.67%

November 1998 General			
District #36 Representative #1			
Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Helen Sommers	D	37103	100%

September 1998 Primary			
District #36 Representative #1			
Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Helen Sommers	D	15991	100%

November 1996 General			
District #36 Representative #1			
Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Helen Sommers	D	42326	78.46%
Eric Berger	R	11621	21.54%

September 1996 Primary			
District #36 Representative #1			
Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Helen Sommers	D	22039	77.27%
Eric Berger	R	6484	22.73%

November 1994 General			
District #36 Representative #1			
Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Helen E. Sommers	D	33313	100%

September 1994 Primary			
District #36 Representative #1			
Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Helen E. Sommers	D	14504	100%

November 1992 General			
District #36 Representative #1			
Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Helen Sommers	D	45719	79.18%
Robert Wallace Blake	R	12022	20.82%

September 1992 Primary			
District #36 Representative #1			
Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Helen Sommers	D	22618	77.71%
Robert Wallace Blake	R	6488	22.29%

November 1990 General			
District #36 Representative #1			
Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Helen Sommers	D	21991	70.64%
James Dunham	R	9138	29.36%

September 1990 Primary			
District #36 Representative #1			
Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Helen Sommers	D	10827	70.95%
James Dunham	R	4433	29.05%

November 1988 General			
District #36 Representative #1			
Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Helen Sommers	D	31012	72.14%
Clint Kahler	R	11036	25.67%
Sean Garrett	NA	942	2.19%

September 1988 Primary			
District #36 Representative #1			
Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Helen Sommers	D	15866	68.29%
Clint Kahler	R	5265	22.66%
Lester Aldridge	D	1600	6.89%
Sean Garrett	NA	503	2.16%

November 1986 General			
District #36 Representative #1			
Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Helen Sommers	D	24620	100%

September 1986 Primary			
District #36 Representative #1			
Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Helen Sommers	D	13778	100%

November 1984 General			
District #36 Representative #1			
Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Helen Sommers	D	29812	70.73%
Johnny Lynch	R	12339	29.27%

November 1982 General			
District #36 Representative #1			
Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Helen Sommers	D	21650	65.25%
Dick Aspen	R	10625	32.02%
Elizabeth Tross-Rarig	L	903	2.72%

September 1984 Primary			
District #36 Representative #1			
Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Helen Sommers	D	15288	68.21%
Johnny Lynch	R	7126	31.79%

September 1982 Primary			
District #36 Representative #1			
Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Helen Sommers	D	10441	64.21%
Dick Aspen	R	5228	32.15%
Elizabeth Tross-Rarig	L	592	3.64%

November 1980 General			
District #36 Representative #1			
Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Helen Sommers	D	18069	54.25%
Jay Lane	R	15239	45.75%

September 1980 Primary			
District #36 Representative #1			
Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Helen Sommers	D	12247	62.08%
Jay Lane	R	7481	37.92%

November 1978 General			
District #36 Representative #1			
Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Helen Sommers	D	14742	62.91%
Richard Dollarhide	R	8693	37.09%

September 1978 Primary			
District #36 Representative #1			
Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Helen Sommers	D	5660	64.22%
Richard Dollarhide	R	3153	35.78%

November 1976 General			
District #36 Representative #1			
Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Helen Sommers	D	17728	52.73%
Ken Eikenberry	R	15625	46.48%
Ken Arnoldi	USL	267	0.79%

September 1976 Primary			
District #36 Representative #1			
Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Ken Eikenberry	R	10576	52.06%
Helen Sommers	D	9740	47.94%

November 1974 General			
District #36 Representative #1			
Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Helen Sommers	D	14015	64.61%
Edward "Ed" Lubin	R	6980	32.18%
Richard R. Dymont	L	697	3.21%

September 1974 Primary			
District #36 Representative #1			
Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Helen Sommers	D	6070	59.76%
Edward "Ed" Lubin	R	2930	28.84%
Henry Stern	D	1158	11.40%

November 1972 General			
District #36 Representative #1			
Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Helen Sommers	D	15925	52.90%
Kirk Gladys	R	13781	45.78%
Glenn P. Young	P	242	0.80%
David Odden	L	154	0.51%

September 1972 Primary			
District #36 Representative #1			
Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Gladys Kirk	R	6789	40.54%
David J. Rohrbaugh	R	5296	31.62%
Helen Sommers	D	4663	27.84%

November 1970 General			
District #36 Representative #1			
Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Gladys Kirk	R	9765	59.64%
James A. Rafferty	D	6607	40.36%

September 1970 Primary			
District #36 Representative #1			
Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Gladys Kirk	R	6464	67.42%
James A. Rafferty	D	3123	32.58%

District No. 36 Members of the Legislature by District – 1891-2010

Year	Member	Party
DISTRICT NO. 36		
House of Representative (two-year terms)		
1891 - Pierce, part		
1933 - King, part		
1891	Byron Barlow	R
	L. J. Pearson	R
1893	W. D. E. Anderson	D
	John Leo	D
1895	Fred T. Taylor	R
	T. P. McAuley	Pop.
1897	Sterling W. Baker	Pop.
	John Forbes	D
1899	M. H. Corey	R
	J. C. Dickson	R
1901	N. B. McNicol	R
	M. H. Corey	R
1903	Everett R. York	R
	Mark White	R
1905	David Levin	R
	Lee Van Slyke	R
1907	James W. Slayden	R
	George T. Reid	R
1909	James W. Slayden	R
	Peter David	R
1911	Govnor Teats	R
	R. W. Jamieson	R
1913	Dix H. Rowland	Prog.
	Eli P. Norton	Prog.
1915	Guy E. Kelly	R
	W. G. Heinly	R
1917	Guy E. Kelly (Speaker)	R
	Torger Peterson	R
1919	Fred G. Remann	R
	William C. Elliott	R
1921	Fred G. Remann	R
	James W. Slayden	R
1923	Fred G. Remann	R
	Anton Ohlson	R
1925	George C. Barlow	R
	Lloyd R. Crosby	R

(bold years revised apportionment / redistricting plan)

Year	Member	Party
1927	George C. Barlow	R
	Rex S. Roudebush	R
1929	George C. Barlow	R
	Rex S. Roudebush	R
1931	George C. Barlow	R
	Rex S. Roudebush	R
1933	B. Roy Anderson	R
	Donald A. McDonald	D
1935	Bert Lynch	D
	Donald A. McDonald	D
1937	Bert Lynch	D
	J. Howard Payne	D
1939	George C. Kinnear	R
	J. Howard Payne	D
1941	John M. Custer	R
	George C. Kinnear	R
1943	B. Roy Anderson	R
	John M. Custer (Resigned 1944)	R
	Paul DeLaney (Appointed 1944)	D
1945	B. Roy Anderson	R
	Jack D. Schwartz	R
1947	B. Roy Anderson	R
	George C. Kinnear	R
1949	B. Roy Anderson	R
	George C. Kinnear (Resigned 1950)	R
	Charles A. Gerold (Appointed 1950)	R
1951	B. Roy Anderson	R
	Douglas G. Kirk	R
1953	B. Roy Anderson	R
	Douglas G. Kirk	R
1955	Henry Heckendorn	R
	Douglas G. Kirk	R
1957	Gladys (Mrs. Douglas G.) Kirk	R
	Charles P. Moriarty, Jr.	R
1959	Charles P. Moriarty, Jr. (Resigned 1959; Appointed to the Senate)	R
	Gladys (Mrs. Douglas G.) Kirk	R
	(Appointed to serve unexpired term)	
	Joel M. Pritchard	R
1961	Gladys (Mrs. Douglas G.) Kirk	R
	Joel M. Pritchard	R
1963	Gladys (Mrs. Douglas G.) Kirk	R

(bold years revised apportionment / redistricting plan)

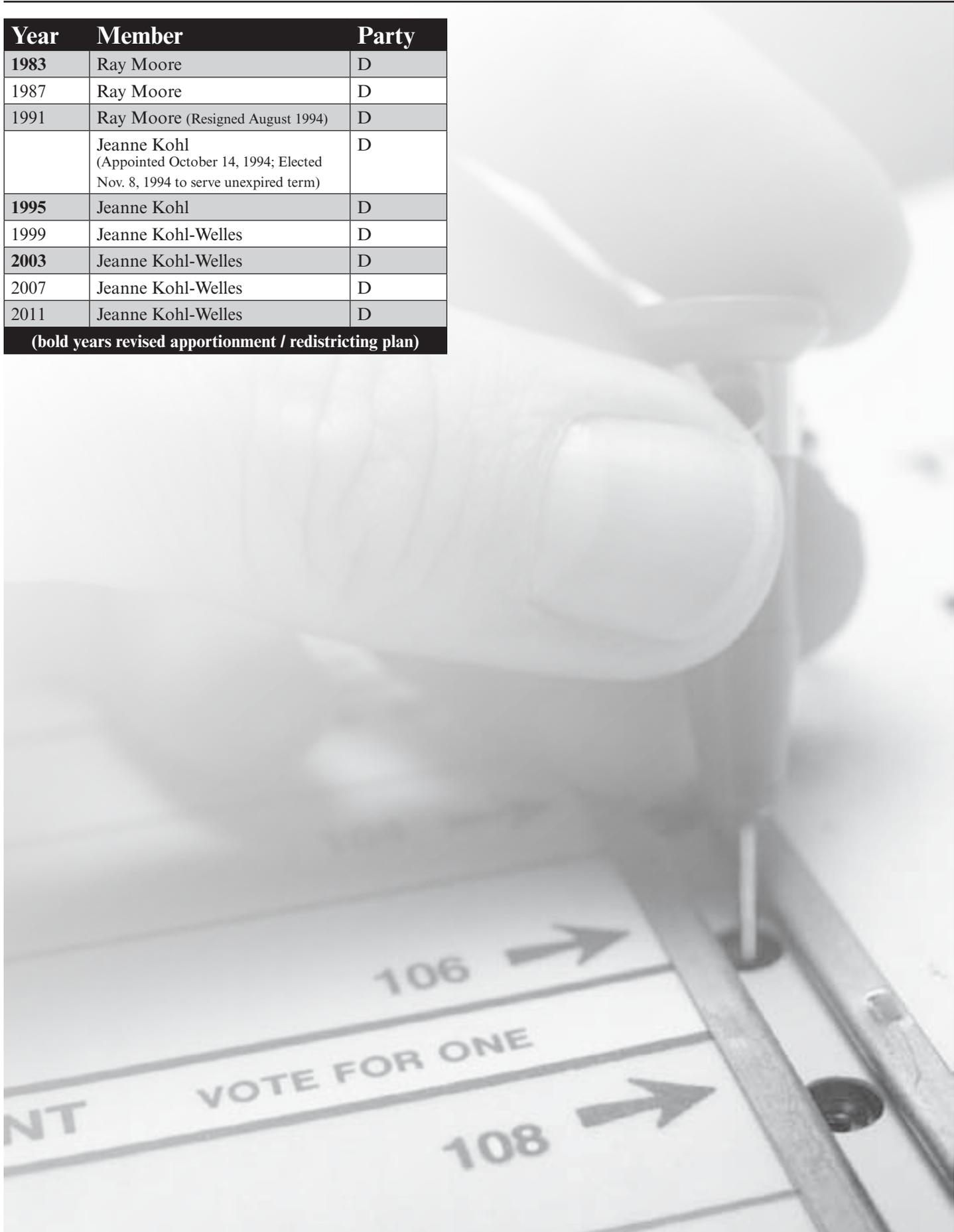
Year	Member	Party
	Joel M. Pritchard	R
1965	Gladys (Mrs. Douglas G.) Kirk	R
	Joel M. Pritchard	R
1967	Gladys Kirk	R
	John S. Murray	R
1969	Gladys Kirk	R
	John S. Murray	R
1971	Gladys Kirk	R
	Kenneth O. Eikenberry	R
1973	Helen Sommers	D
	Kenneth O. Eikenberry	R
1975	Helen Sommers	D
	Kenneth O. Eikenberry	R
1977	Helen Sommers	D
	Joe A. Taller	R
1979	Helen Sommers	D
	Joe A. Taller	R
1981	Helen Sommers	D
	Joe A. Taller (Resigned 1981)	R
	Jay Lane (Appointed January 14, 1981)	R
	Seth Armstrong (Elected November 18, 1981)	D
1983	Helen Sommers	D
	Seth Armstrong	D
1985	Helen Sommers	D
	Seth Armstrong	D
1987	Helen Sommers	D
	Seth Armstrong	D
1989	Helen Sommers	D
	Larry Phillips	D
1991	Helen Sommers	D
	Larry Phillips (Resigned)	D
	Jeanne Kohl (Appointed 1992)	D
1993	Helen Sommers	D
	Jeanne Kohl (Resigned 1994 Appointed to the Senate)	D
	Mary Lou Dickerson (Appointed Nov. 28, 1994 to serve unexpired term)	D
1995	Helen Sommers	D
	Mary Lou Dickerson	D
1997	Helen Sommers	D
	Mary Lou Dickerson	D
1999	Helen Sommers	D

(bold years revised apportionment / redistricting plan)

Year	Member	Party
	Mary Lou Dickerson	D
2001	Helen Sommers	D
	Mary Lou Dickerson	D
2003	Helen Sommers	D
	Mary Lou Dickerson	D
2005	Helen Sommers	D
	Mary Lou Dickerson	D
2007	Helen Sommers	D
	Mary Lou Dickerson	D
2009	Reuven Carlyle	D
	Mary Lou Dickerson	D
2011	Reuven Carlyle	D
	Mary Lou Dickerson	D
DISTRICT NO. 36		
Senate (four-year terms)		
1889 - No district		
1903 - King, part		
1903	Ritchey M. Kinnear	R
1907	George F. Cotterill	D
1911	John A. Whalley (Deceased)	R
1913	G. E. Steiner (serve unexpired term)	R
1915	G. E. Steiner	R
1919	Fred W. Hastings	R
1923	Fred W. Hastings	R
1927	Fred W. Hastings	R
1931	Fred W. Hastings	R
1933	George A. Lovejoy	D
1935	George A. Lovejoy	D
1939	George A. Lovejoy	D
1943	Victor Zednick	R
1947	Victor Zednick	R
1951	Victor Zednick	R
1955	Victor Zednick	R
1959	Victor Zednick (Deceased April 1959)	R
	Charles P. Moriarty, Jr. (Appointed 1959; Elected 1961 to serve unexpired term)	R
1963	Charles P. Moriarty, Jr.	R
1967	Joel M. Pritchard	R
1971	John S. Murray	R
1975	John S. Murray	R
1979	Ray Moore	D

(bold years revised apportionment / redistricting plan)

Year	Member	Party
1983	Ray Moore	D
1987	Ray Moore	D
1991	Ray Moore (Resigned August 1994)	D
	Jeanne Kohl (Appointed October 14, 1994; Elected Nov. 8, 1994 to serve unexpired term)	D
1995	Jeanne Kohl	D
1999	Jeanne Kohl-Welles	D
2003	Jeanne Kohl-Welles	D
2007	Jeanne Kohl-Welles	D
2011	Jeanne Kohl-Welles	D
(bold years revised apportionment / redistricting plan)		



SECTION VI
**WOMEN ADVANCES IN GOVERNMENT
DURING HELEN SOMMERS' CAREER**

HeraldNet

Everett, Washington

Published: Sunday, October 3, 2010

How Washington women won the right to vote

A century ago, Washington was one of the first states to give women the vote

By Gale Fiege, Herald Writer

It was a time when a shocking murder in the streets of Everett and a radical newspaper published by an Edmonds woman named Missouri Hanna helped spark the flagging movement to give women the right to vote.

And to fund the suffrage campaign, women sold for the steep price of a dollar a cookbook edited by a La Conner woman.

A century ago, Washington became one of the first states in the nation to give women the right to vote alongside their husbands, brothers, fathers and sons.

But the tale that leads to this centennial is full of little-known histories. Even before Washington achieved statehood in 1889, women already had won the right to vote, only to see it taken away a few years later when the territorial Supreme Court reversed the decision on a technicality.

The story, with its cast of famous and infamous characters, includes chapters on the state flower, the liquor lobby, labor unions, poster paste and a lot of ladies determined to win a better life for themselves and their families.

On Nov. 8, 1910, men in Snohomish County and around the state cast their ballots and decided overwhelmingly to give women the vote. The news from Washington state energized the national women's suffrage movement and the fight for what would become the 19th Amendment to the Constitution.

Susan B. Anthony, the country's best-known suffragist, once wrote that someday young women would think that their privileges and freedoms were there from the beginning. They would have no idea, Anthony said, that they stood on ground gained

by some brave women from the past.

The origins of women's suffrage reach back to the American Revolution, when people of what would become the United States fought for the right to govern themselves, writes Shanna Stevenson of the Washington State Historical Society in her book "Women's Votes, Women's Voices."

As John Adams and his contemporaries devised a framework with which to govern the new republic, Adams' wife, Abigail, his behind-the-scenes adviser, urged her husband to "remember the ladies" as participants in democracy.

In the early decades of our nation's history, women who wanted to vote were aligned with those who wanted other reforms, such as the abolition of slavery and tempered alcohol use. Drinking was seen as the cause of all sorts of problems that plagued families in the young nation.

In 1848, these women came together for the first women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, N.Y. The convention passed a resolution, "That it is the duty of women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred right to elective franchise."

The first women to win the privilege of voting were those in the territories of Wyoming and Utah. Then, in 1883, women in Washington Territory got the vote.

In the 1870s, women around the country, including a well-known group in Olympia, tested the 14th and 15th amendments to the Constitution, which defined citizenship and a citizen's right to vote. They went to the polls armed with legal arguments, but in the end, it didn't work. Many were arrested and the U.S. Supreme Court determined that the right to vote was not an automatic right of citizenship.

So suffragists switched tactics and began to work for a Constitutional amendment to allow women to vote, said Stevenson in her book.

Over the years, numerous men in Washington's territorial Legislature fought to give the vote to their fellow female citizens. Those efforts never went far until 1877, when women were allowed to vote in school board elections — education being considered the natural realm of women.

In 1883, many in the Legislature who supported the bill that would grant women's suffrage were Eastern Washington farmers, who may have viewed women voters as a way to clean up the morals of the territory, Stevenson said.

Elections in 1884 were attended by a greater percentage of women voters than men. They helped vote out municipal governments run by men involved in gambling and liquor and elect legislators sympathetic to their concerns. The following year, the Legislature made laws calling for alcohol education and alcohol prohibition where local citizens wanted it.

The gambling and saloon lobby began to fear that women voters would further push prohibition and that uppity female activities might harm the territory's chance to achieve statehood. Suffrage was bad for business, they argued. In 1888, the conservative territorial Supreme Court overturned on a minor technicality the legislation granting women's suffrage.

Washington became a state in 1889.

In 1892, state officials needed to choose a flower that would represent Washington state the following year at the Chicago World's Fair. The state's fair commission decided that only women would participate in the election to choose the state flower.

After all, state officials decided, women were concerned about the beautification of cities. And they were, along with more serious issues such as environmental conservation, clean water and underground sewers (for sanitation and to keep their long dresses out of the foul-smelling gutters.)

Most women, many of whom had lobbied for decades for social change and suffrage, were not offended by the request to choose the state flower, Stevenson said.

Indeed, the flower election was popular. In post office polling places from Seattle to Spokane, women signed their names next to their choice for Washington's flower. The ballot included the rhododendron, dogwood, wild rose, Oregon grape and clover — a frontrunner.

In her book, Stevenson tells the story of Alsora Hayner Fry's support for the rhododendron, which

is native to much of Western Washington.

Fry ran her campaign from a drugstore in downtown Seattle. To dissuade other ladies from voting for the clover, Fry set up a store window display of fresh clover and live bunnies to eat it.

When the ballots were counted, the winner was the rhododendron. Fry wore a fancy dress printed with pink rhody blossoms to the state ball in Olympia the following year.

In celebration of the centennial of suffrage in Washington, women are again using the rhododendron as a symbol of enthusiasm for the right to vote.

Women's clubs in Washington kept the suffrage movement simmering early in the 20th century. Organizations such as the Everett Book Club, as well as music clubs, ladies' aid societies and hospital guilds, taught women how to organize and get results. Women rode bicycles and began to hike and climb mountains in the state, proving their physical abilities and stamina.

And though teaching had for many years been a career dominated by women, the state now had three teacher-training schools, and these colleges were populated primarily by young women who wanted the right to vote along with their teaching certificates.

Women were entering the work force in greater numbers, though many were underpaid. This disturbed the labor unions, whose members were worried about losing their jobs to those willing to work for less.

So, women's right to vote became a union cause, too. Labor leaders thought women would surely vote to support better working conditions, safety regulations and eight-hour workdays for everybody. But women also would vote for equal pay for equal work, and then, the union bosses figured, employers were sure to hire men instead of women.

By 1908, the suffrage movement was back in full swing in Washington.

The campaign was funded with quarters pilfered from grocery budgets, the support of labor unions, the state Grange and a few churches, and by the sales of "Washington Women's Cookbook: Votes

for Women, Good Things to Eat,” edited by La Conner suffragist Linda Deziah Jennings.

“At the turn of the century women in the home also were very interested in municipal housekeeping. They wanted sewers, clean water, safe food and municipal beautification,” Stevenson said. “It became clear to men and women that they really needed the vote to influence changes.”

In Everett, the ill treatment of women was on the minds of many who followed in the Everett Daily Herald the story of Margaret Quinn, who was shot and mortally wounded by her drunken husband, Richard Quinn, in the Riverside neighborhood in the fall of 1908.

The tragedy may have energized local people who supported rights for women and alcohol prohibition, said David Dilgard, historian at the Everett Public Library.

Deaths of men working in the cedar shake industry were frequent in part because of the high level of alcohol use among them, Dilgard said.

Richard Quinn was a mill worker and a known drunk. The story went that his drunkenness, cruelty and unfounded jealousy forced Margaret Quinn to move to a nearby boarding house. She found work as a housekeeper.

Upset that his wife refused to come home, Richard Quinn threw her steamer trunk into the street and went off to the saloon.

Margaret was walking to get the trunk when she encountered Richard in the street. He rode up on his horse, carrying a rifle.

Though he claimed later that it was an accident, Richard Quinn shot his wife at point blank range. She died five days later.

“A crowd of women attended her funeral,” Dilgard said. “It was a rallying point for women who were sick of the abuse by drunken husbands and who were without a vote to make social changes.”

As an aside, it was Richard Quinn’s botched hanging that led to capital punishment reforms in the state.

In early 1909, the state Legislature decided to

place on the ballot a referendum to amend the state constitution. It asked the state’s voters, all of them men, if they wanted women to join them at the polls. Suffragists had 20 months to persuade the electorate.

The campaign was waged in the press, in front parlors, at county fairs and on street corners. Women were urged to wear golden Votes for Women pins, talk to all their friends and business associates and distribute suffrage literature.

“Votes for Women,” a statewide suffrage newspaper edited by Missouri Hanna of Edmonds, printed large posters and a recipe for flour paste with which to post the campaign messages. Even timid women can put up posters, the newspaper admonished. The posters quoted Abraham Lincoln, Teddy Roosevelt and Mark Twain in their historical support for women’s suffrage. Other posters noted that women in four other Western states and several other countries already were marking their ballots, so wasn’t it time for Washington women to join them?

In downtown Everett, suffrage club members strung a large golden banner across Hewitt Avenue from their office on the third floor of the Commerce Building at Rockefeller Avenue. It read: “Vote for Amendment, Article VI. It Means Votes for Women.”

In an opinion piece in the Everett Daily Herald the week of the election, club member Mrs. John B. Allen wrote that voters had the opportunity to restore suffrage to the women of Washington. “I beg of you men, do not any longer make (the ballot available) on the inane (basis) of sex,” she wrote.

The Everett Suffrage Club also had one of the most active groups of poll watchers in the state. They were on hand as men in the city and across the state cast their ballots on Nov. 8, 1910.

As the Everett Daily Herald predicted, voter turnout was good despite the rain on Election Day. Along with suffrage, the ballot included a local-option measure to restrict sales of alcohol, which undoubtedly brought out the male voters in the city.

Just two weeks before the election, renowned Chicago lawyer Clarence Darrow, 15 years before he would defend John Scopes, had been in town to

extoll the virtues of personal liberty. Which liberty did Darrow speak about? The workingman's right to whiskey.

Everett voters approved the local option measure by only 271 votes, but ratified the women's suffrage amendment by 1,000 votes. Statewide, in every county, the vote was 2 to 1 in favor of a woman's right to vote.

Stevenson, when researching for her book, found that many newspapers, including the Everett Daily Herald, downplayed suffrage in the election results editions. "That was somewhat puzzling at first," Stevenson said. "But, of course, by then, for most men the time had come and the victory was not a surprise."

Washington's achievement was hailed nationally, she said. Washington was the fifth state in the union and the first state in the 20th century to permanently enfranchise women. "The success in Washington reinvigorated the suffrage movement," Stevenson said.

Within the next several years, California, Oregon, Arizona, Kansas, the territory of Alaska, Montana and Nevada had joined Washington, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah and Idaho in giving women the right to vote.

A popular postcard in 1915 was "The Awakening," in which a golden-clad Lady Liberty spreads enlightenment from West to East. "The West had a more progressive culture," Dilgard said. "And that continues today."

Before the rest of the country granted suffrage, women voters in Washington helped pass legislation that guaranteed pensions to widowed mothers and an eight-hour day for overworked waitresses.

In Washington, D.C., suffragists in 1917 protested outside the White House. Some were arrested, sentenced to prison, beaten and tortured.

In 1919, Congress passed the 19th amendment to the Constitution, "the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged on account of sex," and sent it to the states for ratification. With enough states voting to ratify, the amendment took effect on Aug. 26, 1920.

Of course, not all women immediately had the right to vote. American Indian women achieved suffrage with the 1924 federal Indian Citizenship Act. Most immigrants from Asia had the right by the '50s. And although black women got the vote in 1910 in Washington, and nationally in 1920, racism kept many from voting.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 ended practices that disenfranchised black voters and other minorities.

During the past 100 years, Washington state has elected many women to public office. Women were elected in 1912 to serve in the state House and in 1923 to the state Senate. In all, 250 women have served in the halls of Olympia.

Seattle's Bertha Knight Landes in 1926, became the first female mayor of a major U.S. city.

Dixy Lee Ray was elected the state's first female governor in 1976.

Catherine May of Yakima was elected in the late 1950s as the state's first federal representative.

Since then, six other Washington women have served in Congress, and, in 2005, Washington became the first state to have a female governor and two female U.S. senators serving at the same time.

During her trade mission to China and Vietnam last month, Gov. Chris Gregoire said that when she meets with leaders of other countries, they often want to talk about the rise of women to positions of power in Washington and the rest of the country. That's not a surprise to many women still working for women's rights internationally.

Washington is still leading the way, Stevenson said. "The centennial of women's suffrage in this state is the sort of anniversary that helps us take stock, look back and then look forward," Stevenson said. "It's important to know what happened and why, and draw strength from that."

To commemorate the suffrage centennial, an Olympia nursery has hybridized a new rhododendron named "Emma and May," after two of the state's most active suffragists, Republican Emma Smith Devoe of Tacoma and Democrat May Arkwright Hutton of Spokane.

Everett Community College student body

president Stephanie Kermgard knew little about the history of Washington women until she realized it had been 100 years since women here got the right to vote.

Kermgard likes to think she would have been among the suffragists fighting for the vote a century ago. "I hope I would have been that courageous and that bold."



Washington Women in Government

1848	First Women's Rights Convention is held in Seneca Falls, New York
1853	Washington Territory separates from Oregon, March 3, 1853.
1854	Women's suffrage legislation is introduced during the first session of the Washington Territorial Legislature. It fails on a vote of 8 to 9.
1869	Mary Olney Brown and her daughter attempt unsuccessfully to vote at White River, King County.
1870	Three Thurston County women succeed in voting at Grand Mound, and two more at the precinct in Littlerock. Women attempting to vote in nearby Olympia are turned away from the polls.
1871	Washington Territorial Legislature passes a law giving every inhabitant the right to vote in school meeting elections.
1872	Susan B. Anthony is tried and convicted of casting an illegal vote in Rochester, New York
1878	Northwest suffragist Abigail Scott Duniway presents a petition signed by 600 Washington women and men to the first Washington Constitutional Convention asking that the word male be omitted from the new constitution. The request is denied on a vote of 7 to 8. A separate proposal for the inclusion of women's suffrage also fails.
1883	The Washington Territorial Women's Suffrage Act passes both houses of the legislature.
1884	Catharine Paine Blaine registers to vote in Seattle. Wyoming and Utah are the only other Territories permitting women to vote.

1885	Women of Washington lose the right to vote when the Washington Territorial Supreme Court rules that the title of the 1883 Suffrage Act did not adequately describe the Act's content.
1887	The Territorial Legislature passes the women's suffrage law for a second time.
1888	The Territorial Supreme Court, after hearing a case from Spokane, rules that U.S. territories do not have the authority to extend the vote to women. Washington women lose their voting rights again.
1889	Women, no longer enfranchised, are unable to vote for electors to the Washington State Constitutional Convention. Activists from Olympia petition the Convention to include women's suffrage in the new State Constitution, but women are given the right to vote only in school elections.
1897	Populist/Fusionist Reformers pass a bill in the Washington State Legislature to amend the State Constitution to give women the vote. When the issue goes on the statewide ballot for ratification the following year, it fails.
1908	60th Anniversary of the Seneca Falls Convention
1909	The Washington State Legislature passes an amendment to the State Constitution allowing women's suffrage. The amendment must be approved by the male voters of Washington.
1910	The Fifth Amendment to the Washington State Constitution, giving women the right to vote in all state and local elections, passes on November 8, 1910 and is signed into law three weeks later.
1920	The Washington State Legislature ratifies the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Washington is the second to last state needed to take it over the top.
1922	Sen. Reba Hurn, the first woman admitted to the State Bar and the only woman lawyer or elected official in the city or county of Spokane, became the first female state senator (R-7th).
1943	Washington became the third state to enact an equal pay law.
1943	Sen. Lady Willie Forbus served one term in the Senate (D-44th) from 1943-1947. She was an Attorney in Seattle, having earned her Degree in Law from the University of Michigan in 1918.
1959	Catherine May is the first woman elected to Congress from Washington state.
1963	Washington Legislature formally repeals the prohibition on women holding public office.
1963	Washington Governor Albert Rosellini appoints a 29 member Commission on the Status of Women in Washington.
1968	Governor Dan Evans reconstitutes the commission on the Status of Women in Washington.

1970	Washington Voters approve Referendum 20 which legalized abortion in early pregnancy. The measure passed by 4,222 votes out of 1,509, 402 votes cast.
1970	Governor Dan Evans creates the Interagency Advisory Committee on the Status of Women with instructions to determine how many recommendations of the Commission on the Status of Women had been carried out. Helen Sommers, Seattle President of National Organization of Women (NOW) appointed to the Committee.
1971	Sex is added to the employment section of the Washington State Law Against Discrimination (RCW 49.60) HB 594
1971	Women can sue for personal injuries in their own name and manage their own salaries.
1971	A reconstituted Washington State Women's Council is appointed by Governor Dan Evans. This was a recommendation of the Interagency Advisory Committee on the Status of Women.
1972	League of Women Voters, Status of Women in Washington State is published.
1972	Washington State Voters ratify an Equal Rights Amendment to the Washington State Constitution.
1972	Washington legislature passes a community property measure that requires that ownership and management of assets be equally shared between married partners.
1972	Washington legislature passes a law allowing a married woman to sue for personal injury in her own name.
1972	Washington legislature passes legislation so that women can have their own credit rating separate from that of their husbands
1972	November elections bring 12 women to the state House of Representatives, up from eight. (Helen Sommers elected from the 36th District, defeating Rep. Gladys Kirk).
1973	March 22, 1973 Washington legislature ratifies the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution of the United States.
1973	Washington legislature passes no fault divorce.
1973	HB 404 Expanded Washington State Law Against Discrimination by added sex and Marital status to the existing categories of employment, real estate, insurance and credit.
1973	New categories are added to Washington State Job Classifications to bridge the gap between clerical and professional positions, the first in the nation.
1973	Creation of the Roster of Qualified Women by the Washington Women's Council which created a pool of women for gubernatorial appointments to Boards.

1974	Study on Comparable Worth completed and Submitted to Governor Dan Evans.
1975	Washington Bans sex discrimination in text books and audio visual materials for public school teachers and students.
1975	State Personnel Office changes procedures to recognize volunteer service as work experience on state job applications.
1975	Washington legislature passes a revised Rape Law.
1975	Governor Evans reconstitutes Washington State Women's Council.
1976	The Tax Reform Act of 1976 allows tax credits for child care.
1976	Dixy Lee Ray is elected Washington's First Woman Governor.
1976	Phase II of Comparable Worth study completed. Study reveals that, overall, women were receiving 20% lower pay than men for comparable work.
1976	Changes in policy of leasing public lands organizations that did not allow women to lease lands.
1976	Dual listing of both husband and wife names in telephone books adopted by Washington State Utilities and Transportation Commission.
1977	Washington State Apprenticeship Council includes women in affirmative action plans.
1977	Washington State Women's Commission legislation is passed by the Legislature creating a cabinet level organization.
1977	Publication of Women and the Law in Washington State legal handbook.
1977	Displaced Homemaker Law.
1977	Victims of Sexual Assault Bill
1977	Washington State Creditors must report credit to reflect participation of both spouses.
1977	July Washington State Conference for Women in Ellensburg part of the state's participation in International Women's Year.
1977	November Referendum 40 passed in Washington which was a vote against the creation of the Washington State Women's Commission.
1978	Governor Dixy Lee Ray determines in April that the Women's Council would be phased out by September 1, 1978.
1983	Washington State Comparable Worth Lawsuit in Federal Court.
1983-84	Salary adjustment reflecting Comparable Worth be included in salary survey package; required it be achieved by 1993.
1985	9th Circuit Court of Appeals reverses lower Washington Court decision on Comparable Worth.

1985	Legislature appropriates additional funds for comparable worth and negotiations between the state and WFSE. Settlement is reached on December 1985.
1986	Comparable worth agreement between Washington State and WFSE ratified in 1986 by the legislature. The \$482 million settlement benefited 34,000 state employees.
1989	Judith Billings first woman elected Superintendent of Public Instruction, served two terms (1989-1996) and was succeeded by Terry Bergeson, the second woman to hold the post (1997-2008).
1991	Initiative 120 is approved which repealed the former abortion rights initiative and replaced it with one that declares that every individual possesses a fundamental right of privacy with respect to personal reproductive decisions. (RCW, Chapter 9.02, Initiative Measure No. 120 1991)
1993	The Washington Legislature sets a national record with the highest proportion of elected female lawmakers of any state 41 women in the 98-member House and 17 women in the 49-member Senate, for a total of 58 women to 89 men.
1992	Rep. Jennifer Belcher (D-Olympia) elected Public Lands Commissioner, the first, and so far the only, woman to lead the Department of Natural Resources. Belcher oversaw 5.8 million acres of public land — from forests and wetlands, to urban properties. She served two terms.
2003	When Justice Mary E. Fairhurst was sworn into office on January 13, it was the first time in Washington State history that the Supreme Court had a female majority (five females, four males).
2005	Attorney General Christine Gregoire elected Washington's second Woman Governor. She was the state's first AG.
2005	Washington became the first state in the nation to have, at the same time, a woman Governor (Chris Gregoire); and two women U.S. Senators (Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell).
2005	Women's History Consortium established.
2008	Christine Gregoire re-elected to a second term as Washington Governor.
2008	Rep. Helen Sommers retires after 36 years representing the 36th District.
2010	Supreme Court Chief Justice Barbara Madsen (elected to first term in 1992).

Seattle Times - by Heather Lockman & Shanna Stevenson – (Updated 2010 for Helen Sommers' Oral History by Dan Monahan)



State Legislatures Magazine: May 1999

Washington's First in Women

What a difference a century makes. Washington is riding high at being No. 1, with more women legislators than anywhere else.

By David Ammons

Washington Governor Gary Locke found just the right way to get everyone's attention when the legislature gathered in joint session for his annual state of the state address.

Harkening back a century, he noted that his predecessor had addressed an all-male gaggle of legislators and that women still were 11 years away from winning the right to vote. "Today," he said, "Washington holds the proud distinction of having the highest percentage of female legislators in the United States."

Before he could go any further with the thought, the women members began to cheer and applaud, to whoop and holler. House Co-Majority Leader Barb Lisk hopped to her feet and soon all the women were up and joining in the raucous moment of celebration. Soon, their left-out male colleagues jumped up too and joined in the high-fives and hugs.

A few days later, the women gave notice that they were interested in more than revelry. Women from both parties and both houses held a joint news conference, a first, and said they will pursue a "women-led economic agenda" as they seek to translate their numbers into results.

Their agenda incorporates issues women have championed for years, such as child care and insurance coverage for contraceptives, to newer concerns, such as telecommunications and drug courts.

The dozen female leaders posed next to a large sepia-toned photograph of the House membership

of 1899, that is.

“There is a lot of facial hair there. All men,” said Representative Mary Lou Dickerson, vice chair of the House Democratic caucus. “What a difference a century makes.”

Today, 23 of the 49 Washington senators are women, and 37 of the 98 House members are female. That’s nearly 41 percent of the Legislature’s membership, the first time any state has surpassed the 40 percent marker, according to the Center for the American Woman and Politics at Rutgers University. Women already are talking about the day they’ll cross the 50 percent mark and occupy the governor’s mansion as well.

The national average for female legislators is 22 percent.

A DECADE OF THE WOMAN

Starting with the 1992 election, which saw the election of Patty Murray as the state’s first female U.S. senator and four women to statewide executive office, it has been the Decade of the Woman in Washington state.

In November, Murray was re-elected in the state’s first female vs. female U.S. Senate campaign, women won a third of the state Supreme Court seats and, of course, topped the 40 percent mark for the Legislature.

(The lone clinker, says the state Women’s Political Caucus, is the low number of top women in the Locke administration. Only three of the 20 cabinet directors are women, and only one of Locke’s closest aides is a woman. Locke officials say he’s working on improving the numbers and that at least 37 percent of his 1,000-plus appointees are women.)

In the Legislature, the ascendancy of women has been particularly noteworthy in the Senate, which was a male bastion for most of the state’s history. The Senate now has an almost equal number of men and women; if just two more women had won in November, as analysts had expected, it would have been a female-majority chamber.

As it is though, the majority Democratic caucus has a 2-to-1 female supremacy of 18 to 9. Political consultant Cathy Allen says it could be the first

time that the ruling party of the senior house of any legislative body is two-thirds women. “I think that’s a world record,” Allen says.

Senate Majority Leader Sid Snyder, who holds the most powerful leadership spot in the body, jokes about being one of the token males in his caucus. Indeed, he is the only man in top leadership in his caucus, but is praised by women legislators for his inclusive approach.

Lorraine Wojahn, the dean of the Legislature, is Senate president pro tempore. Caucus chairwoman is Harriet Spanel. Majority floor leader is Betti Sheldon, Rosa Franklin is majority whip and Tracey Eide is assistant whip. All are Democrats.

The dominance is less noticeable on the GOP side of the aisle, where losses and retirement have dropped the numbers to five women and 17 men. The lone female in the top tier of Senate GOP leadership is caucus chair Pat Hale. Republicans like to note, however, that the Senate’s first woman majority leader was Jeannette Hayner, who retired in 1992.

EVERYONE IS PROUD

Snyder and the House co-speakers, Republican Clyde Ballard and Democrat Frank Chopp, (the House is tied 49-49) say the gains by women are a source of great pride. They and the Democratic and Republican state party chairmen quickly credit the policies and inclusiveness of their respective parties.

Treatment by the men of the Legislature is almost unanimously respectful, the women members say.

“We get teased once in a while” about the sisterhood and the lopsided majority, Senator Valoria Loveland, the budget chair, says with a chuckle. She figures it’s just banter, not sexism or jealousy.

But Senator Darlene Fairley still sees vestiges of sexism. She says some male lawmakers are patronizing, talk about the “girls” taking over, and “gripe, gripe, gripe” when the women assert themselves.

GETTING AHEAD, ER, A HEAD

First show of power in the Senate came when women kicked the men out of the big bathroom. They’re still chuckling over that little symbolic victory.

Some of the women also show a dose of humor by wearing lapel pins that declare membership in a club called the MOB, standing for Mean Old Bitches. Before that, the sisterhood called itself the Women's Sewing Circle and Terrorist Society.

Male senators have their own streak of humor: They've formed a tongue-in-cheek Last Man's Club, with a bottle of wine for the last survivor.

In reality, the women don't have a separate caucus and meet only informally and typically on a specific issue like abortion rights or women's health.

House Appropriations Co-chair Helen Sommers, dean of the House, notes that women are not a monolithic voting bloc. Although they share some values and some approaches, they're all over the map ideologically, she says.

Senator Pam Roach says she has mixed feelings about the hullabaloo and being typecast as a feminist just because she's a woman.

"We have women who follow Gloria Steinem and the feminist agenda, and we have people who follow Phyllis Schlafly. I am in some ways offended by all this gender-specific approach. We are not just a curiosity. We have substance."

THE HEAVY LIFTING

Senator Lisa Brown notes that despite their numbers, women haven't quite demolished the glass ceiling. When the "Five Corners" meet (the governor and the four top legislative leaders), there isn't a woman at the table.

The House has never had a woman speaker, and Hayner remains the first and only woman to have led the Senate. (A separately elected lieutenant governor, Democrat Brad Owen, presides over the Senate. The state has never had a woman lieutenant governor. Dixy Lee Ray, a colorful college professor, Atomic Energy Commission chair and former deputy to Henry Kissinger at the State Department, was governor for a lone term in the '70s. The Republicans' nominee against Locke in 1996 was former state Senator Ellen Craswell.)

But women do have powerhouse positions in both houses. House Co-Speaker Ballard calls them "the heavy-lifting jobs."

Besides the female leaders in the Senate, both of the tied House's majority leaders are women: Democrat Lynn Kessler and Republican Barbara Lisk. The Democratic speaker pro tem, Val Ogden, is the first woman to hold that post in decades.

Women head key committees in both houses, including appropriations, transportation and education.

"We sure have our hands on the purse strings!" brags House Appropriations Co-chair Sommers.

Women's power has been growing through the '90s. One such display was in 1990, when a group of seven House committee chairwomen crafted the state's landmark growth management law. The admiring speaker, Democrat Joe King called them the Steel Magnolias. King then negotiated with Jeanette Hayner in the Senate to push the controversial legislation through the divided-control Legislature.

In the Senate, 11 committees are headed by women and only three by men. Women are in charge of the budget and tax committee; agriculture and rural economic development; education; higher education; commerce, trade, housing and financial institutions; energy, technology and telecommunications; environmental quality and water resources; health and long-term care; labor; state and local government; and transportation.

Men head the Senate judiciary, natural resources and human services and corrections committees.

In the House, where committees have co-chairmen from each party because of the tie, women lead 12 of the 19 standing committees. In the case of four panels: transportation, health care and local and state government, both co-chairs are women.

Lining up the chairmanships of the two houses, women are fully in charge of transportation and health care. They hold two of the three chairmanships that deal with the budget, agriculture and ecology, education, higher education, and state and local government.

Put another way, men control only one committee, judiciary, where the chairs are men in both the House and Senate.

WILL IT MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

The women say their ascendancy to power is making a difference, both in terms of style and substance. They say women tend to want more civility in debate and decision making, and want to focus the Legislature's attention on "kitchen table" issues that affect families.

"We talk about down-home stuff," like schools and traffic and the poor, rather than more abstract, bloodless issues like taxes, says Senator Fairley.

Allen, the Seattle consultant who is vice chair of the National Women's Political Caucus, prefers to call it the "humanization" of politics and says it squares perfectly with what pollsters say the voters want.

"You can bet we will make a difference," says Senator Jeanne Kohl-Welles. Women say they know the state, and even the nation, will be watching.

The Spokesman-Review newspaper in Spokane editorialized recently, "Now that female legislators have reached a critical mass in Olympia, they must join together to influence the tone, the process and the results of the session... Now women must turn their energy from celebration to the challenge of creating change."

Brown, who created a stir when she brought her 1-year-old son Lucas onto the House floor in 1993, says women are demanding, and getting legislative hours that mesh with raising families.

"It's a friendlier place for women," says Representative Sommers, who was one of only 12 women when she was first elected in 1972 and recalls a locker-room camaraderie that excluded women.

Brown says women bring "a different orientation to conflict and move away from a winner-take-all mentality." Running households, balancing work and home, and keeping peace among their kids is excellent training for statehouse service, women legislators say.

"I think women are plodders, the workhorses" who worry more about solving problems than who gets the credit, says Representative Lisk. But she also says women won't be bullied and will never again accept all-male leadership teams.

"We didn't get where we are (in leadership and committee chairmanships) because of a popularity contest. It was because we are a bunch of ambitious, aggressive women, she said sweetly," Lisk says.

"We're just nervier," says Representative Ida Ballasiotes, a Republican, with a throaty laugh.

Senators Mary Margaret Haugen and Fairley both say women are credited with being more honest, less ego-driven and less susceptible to power plays and the allure of special interest campaign money. But those are generalizations and as women grow into long-term majority status, some of the luster will wear off and some women will begin to adopt the arm-twisting and good-ole-boy qualities that outrage the current crop of female legislators, they fear.

"Sometimes we process too much," cautions Haugen. "We can blow it, too. Women are inclined to be catty and sometimes don't like other women in leadership. But if we go to the table with respect for each other, we can achieve a lot."

SO WHY HERE?

Although Washington State has become the toast of the women's community, it didn't happen overnight, says Nancyhelen Fischer, longtime feminist leader who has just retired as state chair of the Women's Political Caucus. "It wasn't just something that happened in the '90s. It was something we built up" over decades of recruiting and networking.

A number of analysts, including the women leaders themselves, theorize that the West has a young history and a tradition of being a meritocracy. As settlers moved westward, they left behind the Eastern political machines and strict hierarchy and gender roles and depended on women to be the backbone of a populist new society. Eventually, they claimed a place at the table politically, working their way up the ranks, historians say.

"Women played an important role in establishing this state and it is an establishment that honors women today," says Senator Haugen. "It's too bad the pioneer women aren't around to see us today."

State school chief Terry Bergeson says she and other women educators have been working for

decades to expand educational and athletic opportunities in the schools and colleges. "We have taught girls to really shoot for the stars," she says.

Senator Murray gives credit to women's studies programs and good networking among women.

Washington was the first state to add an Equal Rights Amendment to its constitution and embraced a variety of outreach programs for women, notes Secretary of State Ralph Munro.

Unions and many Washington businesses have developed a tradition of advancing women, as have both political parties, he says. From 1980 until 1992, both major parties were headed by women, who recruited female candidates and served as mentors. Then-GOP Chairwoman Jennifer Dunn now is in Congress and is working on the party's gender gap. Democrat Karen Marchioro has mentored at least two generations of candidates.

But there is no substitute for hard work and moving through the political chairs from town council and the school board on up, says Lisk.

"We made extraordinary gains by some rather orthodox means," agrees Allen, who has conducted campaign schools for women as far away as Barcelona.

"In Washington, it's not a novelty," Allen says. "We became accustomed very early on to voting for the gutsy, entrepreneurial women who were role models in government, business and the community."

David Ammons has covered the Washington Legislature since 1971.

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The Seattle Times



Olympian Women – They Are Changing Both Style And Substance In Legislature

By Dionne Searcey

Seattle Times Olympia Bureau

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OLYMPIA - In the 1970s women who strolled through the testosterone-soaked Capitol Rotunda were candidates for the Leg of the Day award.

Male legislators, who dominated the House and Senate back then, chose the winner from among women sitting in the gallery.

Today, women in Olympia are a bigger presence - and a stronger force - than ever before. They're the ones who dole out the awards. But instead of being rewarded for sexy legs, it's fiery rhetoric that might earn a woman membership in the tongue-in-cheek club called the Mean Old Bitches.

As the good-old-boys club in the Capitol has faded through the years, it has been replaced by groups such as M.O.B., and before that the Women's Sewing Club and Terrorist Committee and the Higher Education Rabble-Rousers Society (HERRS). These loosely knit groups formed by women provide support, solidarity and a sense of sisterhood.

This year a record 60 women are serving in the House and Senate. They make up more than 40 percent of the Legislature, a higher percentage than in any other state.

Among the Democrats who control the Senate, women outnumber men 2-1. Male caucus members have formed a Last Man's Club, with a bottle of wine awaiting the last survivor.

"The women are outnumbering us," said Sen. Michael Heavey, D- Seattle. "You never know."

Governmental girl power is evident in bills ranging from women's health to domestic violence, in the way legislators represent their constituents, and even in women legislators' dealings with colleagues of both genders.

Women legislators say they still encounter remnants of the days when men ruled the rostrum. But lawmakers of both genders agree women are changing the climate here in both style and substance.

It shows as they go about their business just up the hill from the birthplace of the riot-grrl culture, the new-wave feminist movement born in downtown Olympia's punk-rock scene. These are sensible-shoed, smart-suited women who aren't shy about touting their show of force.

During the governor's State of the State Address, they gave themselves a standing ovation when he mentioned their record numbers. Two weeks ago they hosted a bipartisan news conference to promote female-sponsored legislation.

Women are good listeners, say both male and female lawmakers. They are more open and inclusive in decision-making.

"Maybe that's because we didn't play football, and it didn't matter who got the touchdown or the home run," said Sen. Betti Sheldon, D-Bremerton.

This session women are flexing their muscles by proposing legislation that would create a women's commission to promote gender equality. They want to ensure screening for breast and cervical cancer for low-income women and more protection and services for victims of domestic violence.

Several have introduced legislation to create a state office of women's health. And they have secured bipartisan support in both chambers mandating insurance coverage for female contraceptives.

Courage in a lapel pin

The women lawmakers are proud of the informal clubs they have formed to help them cope with working in a traditionally man's world - even the Mean Old Bitches, which doesn't have a membership list or meetings. Women simply give a knowing wink or nod when they meet up with others wearing the tiny golden M.O.B. lapel pins.

"I wear it when I'm feeling feisty," said Rep. Karen Schmidt, R-Bainbridge Island.

The women say the group's name comes from male colleagues' reactions when they stand up for their beliefs.

"I've been accused of being aggressive. I wonder what they would call me if I was a man doing the same thing," said Schmidt, who recently had a book on her desk called "Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun."

"If you work and fight hard for something you believe in, why is it different depending on what sex you are?"

Former Sen. Jeannette Wood, R-Woodway, said she would rub her M.O.B. pin while enduring hostile testimony in committee.

"Sometimes during the Legislature, things get tense," said one lobbyist M.O.B. member. "It gives us courage."

Such bonding has given women strength to change the system in ways both big and small. When they learned of the legendary Open Fly, an all-male summer golf tournament for lawmakers and lobbyists, they created the Double Cup tournament for ladies.

A national trend

The accomplishments of women have been significant. In 1990, six of them, dubbed the Steel Magnolias by their male colleagues, wrote the Growth Management Act, created to help deal with urban sprawl. Women also wrote and promoted the citizens' initiatives that created a state spending limit and the commission regulating campaign spending.

The difference that Washington women are making parallels national trends. A survey of state legislators nationwide, completed last summer, shows women are more likely to bring citizens into the legislative process, to govern openly rather than behind closed doors, and to be more responsive to groups such as minorities and the disadvantaged, which traditionally have not had a strong voice in government.

Regardless of party affiliation, women tend to be more liberal, according to the survey.

“The difference in perspective is brought to bear on policy issues, and that is something that has been missing before women were in the state Legislature,” said Gilda Morales, spokeswoman for the Center for the American Woman in Politics at Rutgers University, which conducted the survey.

Such differences recently surfaced in Olympia over a bill that would outlaw discrimination against women who breast-feed at work. Several women were appalled when male legislators said the bill should be assigned to a judicial committee because it involved “indecent exposure.”

“Guys look at this, and say it’s indecent exposure. Women look at this, and say this is an issue for the workplace,” said Sen. Darlene Fairley, D-Lake Forest Park, who eventually moved the bill to her Labor and Work Force Development Committee. “That little way of looking at policy is a difference.”

When Rep. Helen Sommers, D-Seattle, first was elected to the House in 1973, she was one of just 12 women in the Legislature. By 1985 their number had grown to 35. Today it’s nearly double that.

“The Legislature has changed in tone and tenor enormously since I came here because society has changed,” said Sommers. “There’s no more locker-room kind of approach.”

Sometimes the women’s sheer numbers make all the difference. In the late 1980s Mary Margaret Haugen, then a House member, rallied about 20 women from both sides of the aisle to leave the House floor and storm into then-Gov. Booth Gardner’s office when they learned he planned to veto a bill mandating insurance coverage for mammograms.

“I think he maybe was surprised,” said Haugen, now a Democratic senator from Camano Island. Gardner changed his mind, and the bill became law.

Such boldness was missing when women were rarities in the state Capitol. “Certainly, it was a different atmosphere,” said Sen. Sid Snyder, D-Long Beach, who in 1949 started his career in the Legislature as an elevator operator at the Capitol. “Things have changed in 30 or 40 years.”

Former Lt. Gov. Victor Meyers once told a joke on the Senate floor about a politician who took his homely wife with him everywhere because he didn’t want to kiss her goodbye.

“If you told that story today, you might as well forget about your political career,” Snyder said.

Even women lobbyists were at a disadvantage.

“It’s a fact you can’t lobby the men in the washroom,” said Margaret Casey, who recently retired from a 22-year career as a lobbyist on children’s issues.

No more ‘little lady’

Some women legislators rose to power despite the odds. In the 1950s, Rep. Julia Butler Hansen shattered stereotypes when she stood before her committee and expressed outrage at a male lawmaker who challenged her on a transportation issue.

“Somebody had better tell that son of a bitch to buy lots of road graders, because they’re not going to have any paved roads in his district,” she reportedly said.

But those were also the days when women were called “honey” and on occasion were patted below the back. Women legislators and lobbyists usually were shut out of closed-door meetings, where men made important decisions. Committee chairs nearly always belonged to men.

“That doesn’t happen any more,” said Rep. Ruth Fisher, D-Tacoma, who recalled being insulted during a committee hearing about 15 years ago by a powerful state administrator. “No one has called me ‘little lady’ for a long time.”

The Washington Legislature actually was more friendly to women than most early in its history. Susan B. Anthony’s 1870 speech to territorial legislators was the first delivered by a woman to a legislative body. An 1853 vote on women’s suffrage was foiled by a single male lawmaker who reportedly denounced the plan because it didn’t extend privileges to Native American women.

Women are quick to point out that just because their numbers are higher now doesn’t mean they’ve reached Utopia.

“One (male lawmaker) always says, ‘Hi, girls’

when he sees us," said Sen. Jeri Costa, D-Everett. "And on the campaign trail, people are always asking whether I'm married or have kids I'm leaving behind. I don't see them asking the male candidates that."

Washington's women should count themselves lucky, said Rep. Jeanette Greene, a Republican in the Alabama state Legislature. Alabama ranks at the bottom of the states in number of female legislators, with 11.

"It's just the traditional thing for men to run the government here," she said. "It's that Southern mentality that let's let father do it."

But Greene, a freshman legislator and former English teacher, said she's not nervous about being outnumbered.

"I handled 10th-graders for years," she said. "I can handle those men in the Legislature."

Published Correction Date: 02/02/99 - Sen. Marilyn Rasmussen, D- Eatonville, Was Misidentified As A House Member In A Photo Caption Accompanying This Story About The Record Number Of Women Serving This Year In The House And Senate In Olympia.

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The Seattle Times



Cleaning House In Government: Is That Just Like A Woman?

By Carol M. Ostrom, Barbara A. Serrano
Sunday, August 2, 1992

Maybe it is just that simple: Elect women and solve all our problems.

After all, the argument goes, they're intuitive, cooperative, responsible, altruistic, concerned with domestic issues and, let's face it, more interesting if you're taking color pictures of legislative sessions.

Of course, there is an "other side." Put men on

truth serum and you'll find it: Geez, they'll say. Women will futz around, take all day to decide who's in charge and never get anything done because they're too busy asking each other, "Do you FEEL OK about that?"

Whatever the truth, voters are hellbent for change, full speed ahead and damn the stereotypes. Many seem to agree with the 60-something male voter who told Democratic state Rep. Lorraine Hine of Des Moines: "Men have had years to solve these problems and they haven't done it. We might as well give women a chance."

And women are taking it - in record numbers. Last week, nearly 100 women announced their candidacies for the Legislature in Washington, compared to 73 in 1990.

At least 12 others have set their sights higher by running for statewide executive offices, such as secretary of state and attorney general, and nine are campaigning for the U.S. Congress. Two want to be on the state Supreme Court and another 20 around the state are vying for other seats on judicial benches.

Pollsters say voters think it's time we "got our own house in order." And who better to keep house than a woman!

Some who study politics call this the "feminizing" of the national agenda, moving away from such "warrior" pursuits as the arms race and into the domestic arena.

But can't men "keep house," too? Or are women just better at some kinds of things, and is one of those things running the country? Are men and women really so different?

In this, the "Year of the Woman," there's some thrashing about to try to answer these questions. And some theories - perhaps we should call them notions or points of disagreement - have risen to the top. Some are supported by research, some by anecdotes, some by common sense, others by sheer hope and wild dreams.

- Women bring a different approach to leadership.

"Our tendency is to say, 'Let's sit around the table, let's work out the problems,' instead of standing up

and jousting,” says Jane Danowitz, executive director of the Women’s Campaign Fund, a bipartisan national organization supporting abortion-rights candidates.

U.S. Rep. Jolene Unsoeld, D-Olympia, who was elected to the House in 1988, says the women in Congress “tend to be more problem-solving, goal-oriented than is the tendency with our male counterparts.”

“I think it’s instinctive,” agrees Marilyn Rasmussen, a Democratic state representative from Eatonville, where she and her husband operate a farm.

“It’s like cleaning the house,” says Rasmussen. “When you start, you want to finish. When the kids upchuck, it’s not a matter of delegating it to somebody else, it’s just a matter of cleaning it.”

In Washington’s Legislature, women have chaired more than a third of the House committees in the past few years. Women, says Hine, “are far more apt to bring in more people to try to bring a consensus and less apt to come in with a preconceived notion of what the answer is.”

Often, men get so locked into the win-lose framework they can’t accept even a good compromise, some women politicians say.

Unsoeld tells about a child-care bill that found its way to the women’s issue caucus, an informal, bipartisan group within the U.S. House.

After discussing differences, both Republican and Democratic women felt they would be able to resolve them in a consensus bill that would get broad support. Other efforts had “bogged down between territorial or turf wars” among three committee chairs - who all happened to be men, says Unsoeld.

“So we volunteered our services to our respective leadership. Who did not take us up on it. They did the child-care legislation without us, and it was a pretty poor job.”

In studying women and men in state legislatures, the Center for the American Woman in Politics at Rutgers University found that:

- Women were more likely to bring citizens into the process.

- Women were more likely to opt for government in public view.

- Women were more responsive to groups previously denied full access.

“Women bring special attributes to leadership,” says Dr. Beverly Forbes, lecturer and researcher in leadership issues. Those include empowering others, empathy, listening to others and cooperation.

Some women who’ve looked at politics from the inside, however, say they don’t believe differences are necessarily gender-related.

“I would not for a moment encourage people to think that because a woman is in politics, a woman will be consensual and self-effacing and a man is going to be authoritarian and aggressive,” says Mary Kay Becker, a Bellingham lawyer who spent eight years as a Democratic state representative.

Women may tend to carry their “sense of compassion” into office more than men do, says Veda Jellen, former political director for the Washington State Republican Party.

“But other than that, women are pretty non-monolithic. They vary as much as men do within their own parties.”

And while women do have a “tendency to work together,” says Jellen, now state director for U.S. Sen. Slade Gorton, “let’s not fool ourselves and think that it didn’t happen before women got into politics. Remember the phrase, ‘The Old Boys’ Network’?”

- Women in public office have different priorities.

When she first went into politics in 1975, says Becker, she was convinced gender made no difference.

“I was very theoretical,” she says, and sure that legislators represented their constituents’ issues. Period.

But over the years, she changed her mind. In real life, she says, women have different experiences that translate into having different priorities. And so, while heavily into environmental and agricultural issues, Becker also immersed herself in children’s issues and mental health.

The Rutgers researchers found “a sizable gen-

der gap” in the public-policy preferences of state lawmakers. Among the findings:

– Women were more likely to give priority to women’s-rights issues and to be active in them.

– Women were also more likely to give priority to public policies related to women’s traditional roles as caregivers in the family and society.

– Women public officials were more liberal in their attitudes on major public-policy issues.

The study of state legislatures, says Debra Dodson, senior research associate, found that while Democratic women were most active in reshaping the policy agenda, Republican women were more active on women’s concerns than men of either party.

“It’s not that our stands are so much different than men,” says Danowitz of the Campaign Fund. “Men can be good votes on issues. But women are not just good votes, they’re strong voices.”

That’s because issues affecting families are ones that “women deal with every day,” says Democratic state Sen. Patty Murray of Shoreline, now running for the U.S. Senate. “It’s part of our inborn self.”

– Women come to public office because of specific issues - not because it’s a career.

Murray was a “mom in tennis shoes” when the state tried to eliminate a parent-education preschool program, one of her favorites. “I said I’ve got to do something about this,” Murray recalls. “That’s what jump-started me into politics 12 years ago.”

And she thinks she’s typical. “Many of the women I see in politics today,” she says, “got motivated because of some issue they wanted to make right. This is a real generalization, but more often men look at politics in terms of a career.”

Some researchers back up those perceptions, too. Men tend to seek power for personal gain and for its own sake, while women want to use it to solve problems, say author-psychologists Dorothy Cantor and Toni Bernay.

Unsoeld got into state politics eight years ago because of concerns about water quality and shellfish beds. “I think fewer of the women have deliberately set out to be on a leadership track the way many of

our male colleagues have,” she says. “We want to work on the issues that drove us to office.”

– Nature or nurture, women are different from men.

One recent book puts it succinctly: “Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus.”

Scientists do say the evidence for biological differences is increasing.

Girls with abnormally high levels of testosterone pick trucks, not dolls. And brain researchers have found that women, unlike men, include the “emotional” right side of their brains even while spelling.

Women excel at reading the emotions of people in photographs, adding fuel to the “women’s intuition” notion.

On the other hand, men were much better at rotating three-dimensional objects in their heads.

Scientists also show that environment powerfully influences behavior. And some of the behavioral studies have found marked sex-linked differences.

Harvard researcher Carol Gilligan concludes that women have developed an “ethic of care” that revolves around a central insight: “that self and other are interdependent.”

Female morality, she says, centers more on “the web of relationships” than on a set of rules.

Nature/nurture theories and whether there are gender-based differences are controversial among feminists and conservative women alike.

Republican state Sen. Pam Roach of Auburn, for one, is convinced women don’t hold any special cards genetically, even when it comes to child-rearing. “A duck innately knows what its part is. A mother bear innately knows its. But human beings have to learn it. It isn’t instinctive. I truly believe that.”

When it comes to women in politics, says Representative Hine, “you are going to have as many differences as there are individuals there. Women don’t have halos built in, I’ll tell you.”

It isn’t a matter of whether women are “better than men,” says Maura O’Neill, chair of the Washington State Women’s Political Caucus. “It’s

just that women are different.”

– Women leaders will bring different experiences, which are needed.

Any woman who has ever tried to take a bus with two children and then stop at the grocery store and the dry cleaner looks at transportation needs quite differently than most men, says Karen Campbell, executive director of the Women’s Funding Alliance.

“Transportation is a woman’s issue,” she says, but typically, no female voices are at the table where decisions are made.

Hine, who has raised six children, notes how her one son was able to get higher-paying summer jobs than her daughters. “I’m sensitized to economic policies,” says Hine. One of the first pieces of legislation she worked on was the comparable-worth bill.

It’s time to value these experiences, say many women.

“We have a whole Congress full of heroes, astronauts, basketball stars, Rhodes scholars,” says Danowitz. “This year we’re going to elect women who have championed causes of education, women who have been on welfare, adopted refugee children, women like (Pennsylvania U.S. Senate candidate) Lynn Yeakel, who have spent their lives raising money for battered women and rape crisis centers.

“Who’s to say that raising five children and holding down a job isn’t as courageous as being a prisoner of war?”

That’s something state Senator Roach can relate to, even though she does not believe women’s priorities are fundamentally different than men’s.

The mother of five children, she went back to work after her husband was laid off. Her youngest was 6 weeks old.

Those experiences can’t be created “vicariously,” says Roach, who’s running for Rod Chandler’s vacated U.S. House seat.

“If it’s been a career woman, who’s never been at home, never had children, never been involved in the education world, the PTA,” says Roach, “if it’s a person who’s never been out there with the

people, working with them, if they’ve never had children and stayed home with them, they’re in the same position as a man.”

– Women don’t know “where the card game is.” And anyway, they’re not good players.

One autoworkers lobbyist, quoted in Atlantic magazine this month, said it didn’t matter whether a woman was Republican or Democrat or hard or soft on the issues. What mattered, he said, was that “there’s a card game in the back room and you women don’t know where it is.” And the boys like it that way, he added.

Unsoeld can’t argue with that. Looking back at the child-care bill, she says: “When it came down to the power decision-making role with some authority to it, we were not permitted into the inner circle.”

Another major obstacle for women, says Unsoeld, is having to prove you’re effective.

“For some darn reason, society seems to think that men - I don’t know why, because they wear the pants? - are effective, but women have to prove it,” she says.

“Even after you’ve done a whale of a good job in a term of office, you have to prove it all over again . . . as though somehow your past work were a fluke.”

While women probably have to work harder to be recognized, there is nothing about women that makes them less effective, says Jeannette Hayner, the Walla Walla Republican who’s retiring this year as state Senate majority leader.

“People often say women are more emotional, too sensitive,” she says. “I don’t find that to be true at all.” In fact, she adds, women may be stronger “because they’ve been confronted with a greater variety of things they have to deal with.”

Citing the Legislature’s battle over pension benefits, state Rep. Helen Sommers of Seattle says: “It’s the women who are far more able to stand up to that pressure than the men.”

Rasmussen concurs, recalling a no-compromises battle between Sommers and state Sen. Alan Bluechel over the capital budget. “Hardball was being played and it had nothing to do with gender,” she says.

Women may be most effective when they reach critical mass in terms of numbers, researchers suggest.

The more women there are, the more women get seniority, and “these women become the people who are dealing the cards at that game,” says Rutgers’ Dodson.

“If the speaker of the House is a woman, the game’s not going to go on without her.”

– OK, but the “Thatcher factor” shows that women, once in power, will probably be just like men.

Call it what you will - the Dixy Lee Ray Syndrome or the Indira Ghandi Quandary - most people get the message.

Women who act like men. Who don’t seem to have what the social scientists call a “gender-related impact.”

Does that mean that women who get into high office inevitably become “just like men,” or that they have to be “just like men” to get there?

For starters, not everyone thinks Margaret Thatcher’s such a bad model.

“Frankly, I think Golda Meir and Margaret Thatcher are terrific role models,” says Maura O’Neill of the Women’s Political Caucus and president of O’Neill & Co.

Thatcher may not be the woman you want to emulate, for personal or political reasons. “But everybody has to look at her and say what a terrific role model and what respect we have for her,” says O’Neill.

“When you have a man who is tough, abrasive, do you generalize that when you elect (another) man you’ll get one like that?” asks Hine.

Besides, many women say, that was then, this is now. Twenty years ago, Lorraine Hine played hardball with her all-male colleagues on the Des Moines City Council, then baked cookies for them.

Today, she says, it’s a different game. Women can have their own styles, their own agendas - with or without the cookies.

In the end, it’ll take a lot more women in the public arena to prove or disprove some of these notions.

Some who have studied these things believe that while voters are crying out for politicians who will pay attention to issues affecting their families, they also are asking for a more fundamental change in government and in their relationship to it. And they believe women can give that to them.

In his best-selling book, “Habits of the Heart,” and its successor, “The Good Society,” sociologist Robert Bellah talks about the need to move from rugged self-interest to a recognition of interdependence and community.

It’s an insight that the world is picking up on, says researcher Forbes. “Listen to Bill Clinton talking about “covenants,” she says. He’s talking about relationships, about mutual interdependence, responsibility for one another - her definition of feminism, says Forbes.

Voters, says pollster Celinda Lake, see women as “populist outsiders” who can effect change and can make government work for ordinary people.

But even if every woman running for Congress were to be elected, Rutgers’ Dodson notes, that still adds up to less than 10 percent.

“It’s very unfair to expect, even if it’s a record number, that women will go in there and turn the world upside down,” she says.

Maybe. Danowitz, who still has vivid memories of Anita Hill’s testimony during the Senate confirmation hearings for Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas, isn’t sure. “Think about one woman on the Senate Judiciary Committee,” she says. “Think about what a difference that would have made.”

• Times staff reporter Barbara A. Serrano contributed to this report.



Governor Evans convenes Washington State Women's Council on October 21, 1971

Daniel Jackson Evans 1965

Courtesy Washington State Archives

On October 21, 1971, Governor Daniel Evans convenes the Washington State Women's Council. Its mission is "To consider appropriate questions pertaining to the rights and needs of women in contemporary American and to make recommendations to the Governor and State agencies with respect to desirable changes in program and law."

During its first two years the Washington State Women's Council worked to pass a state equal rights amendment and a community property bill that would require that the ownership and management of assets be equally shared between married partners.

Both of these measures became law. The electorate ratified the Washington state Equal Rights Amendment in November 1972.

On March 22, 1973, the Washington State Legislature ratified the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution of the United States. However, to change the United States Constitution, a yes vote by three-fourths of the states is required. The national Equal Rights amendment fell just short of this and it failed to be enacted.

In 1975, Governor Evans reconstituted the Washington State Women's Council in the Office of the Governor and redirected its composition and activities in the following manner:

"The Council shall consist of eighteen members appointed by the Governor and shall include two members chosen by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, one from each party, and two members chosen by the President of the Senate, one from each party.

"The members shall serve for terms of two years and until their successors are chosen. Nine of the initial appointees shall be appointed for one-year terms and shall include those chosen by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House. Vacancies shall be filled in the same manner as the original appointments.

The Governor shall appoint an executive director of the Council, provided that the current executive director shall continue to serve in that office.

The Council shall advise state departments and agencies on the development and implementation of comprehensive and coordinated policies, plans, and programs to ensure equal opportunity for all women.

The Council is authorized to gather data and disseminate information to the public in order to implement the purposes of this chapter.

The Council shall make recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature regarding changes in administrative practices and existing laws relating to women or particularly affecting women.

"In carrying out its duties, the Council shall communicate with public and private institutions, local governments, and private industry as may be needed to promote the purposes of this order and particularly to promote equal opportunity for women in government, education, and employment" (Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor).

Sources:

Janine A. Parry, "Putting Feminism to a Vote: The Washington State Women's Council, 1963-78," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* Vol. 91, No. 4 (Fall 2000), 173; "Special Characteristics/Issue Impacting Women" Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor (http://www.dol.gov/wb/info_about_wb/regions/washington.htm).

Note: This essay was expanded on October 21, 2006. On November 22, 2009, it was corrected to note that it takes a yes vote of three-fourths of the states to amend the United States Constitution. By Priscilla Long, February 23, 2003

Daniel Jackson Evans 1965

Courtesy Washington State Archives



City Council committee names first Seattle Women's Commission members on April 6, 1971

On April 6, 1971, Seattle City Council's Personnel Committee names 14 city residents to serve on the new Women's Commission, an advisory body that Mayor Wes Uhlman (b. 1935) created the year before. The commission is part of the Uhlman administration's new Office of Human Resources, and its role is relatively straightforward: to "promote full and equal participation of women in affairs of the city, to develop efforts and programs within the community for equal opportunities for women" (The Seattle Times, April 4, 1971). All 14 of the first commissioners are volunteers, and very few are women's-rights activists. Most have gained their political experience in labor unions, local precincts, and community groups.

Members of the Commission:

The members of the first Seattle Women's Commission were:

Jody Aliesan, a feminist activist who worked for the Associated Students' Women's Commission at the University of Washington

Alice Beals, an official at the all-female Waitress Union

Shirley Bridge (1922-2008), a pharmacist and Democratic precinct committee member

Shirley Caldwell, an advertising artist and Democratic precinct committee member

Esther Clarke, secretary to an official at the Aerospace Union and a board member of the Office and Professional Employees Union

Carver Gayton (b. 1938), special assistant to the executive vice president of the University of Washington and director of the University's equal-opportunity office

Alan Graban, a vice-president at the Pacific National Bank

Elinor Hunsinger, a retired real-estate broker and landlord

Barbara Laners, a law student who had worked for Seattle's Model Cities program

Ruth McCloy, a public-relations director for a hotel chain

Kay Regan, a homemaker and Republican activist

Helen Sommers, president of the Seattle chapter of the National Organization for Women

Louisa Torrez, a Chicano activist and coordinator at the Active Mexicanos Center

Rosalind Woodhouse, a social worker at the Seattle Housing Authority

The mayor appointed seven of these commissioners; the City Council appointed the other seven. (Eventually, the commission itself named a 15th member, June Shimokawa.) In July 1971, Mildred E. Henry, an official at the Seattle-King County Economic Opportunity Board and a former state legislator, became the director of the Women's Division at the Office of Human Resources. Though she was not technically a member of the Women's Commission, Ms. Henry was responsible for putting the panel's recommendations into practice, and the Commission's \$25,000 budget paid her \$16,368 salary.

Priorities and Controversies

But it was not easy for the Commission to agree on its priorities. It named several committees right away – on equal opportunity, employment, children's services and day care, public information, and public appointments – but procedural complications, low rates of meeting attendance and participation by some of the commissioners, and increasingly bitter political disagreements got in the way of the panel's work.

For example, shortly after the city named the first group of commissioners, many feminist groups began to argue that in the future the agency's members should be chosen from a list of women "submitted by individuals and/or groups conscious of the discrimination against and oppression of women

in this society and who are working to eliminate these injustices” (The Seattle Times, January 16, 1973). This pre-selection was necessary, the activists insisted, because for the Women’s Commission to be a “training ground” for “persons who are unaware that women have any problems” was a waste of everyone’s time (The Seattle Times, March 15, 1973). This proposal did not go over terribly well with many of the other members of the panel, most of whom were not affiliated with feminist groups. In 1973, likewise, the group voted to censure commissioner Kay Regan because she had traveled to Olympia to testify against ratification of the federal Equal Rights Amendment.

Early Accomplishments

Still, the Women’s Commission managed to accomplish a great deal in the first few years of its existence. It lobbied for an Equal Rights Amendment to the state constitution and for a bill that gave married women equal access to credit and community property. It undertook a study of rape and investigated ways to prevent violence against women. In March 1974, City Councilman Tim Hill proposed that the city eliminate the agency, but the commissioners fought back: they pointed to their achievements – such as an executive order requiring fair employment practices in city government; an ordinance prohibiting gender bias in newspaper want ads; a city affirmative-action plan that explicitly protected women and gay people; and a Fair Employment Practices Ordinance passed in 1973 that prohibited sex discrimination in public and private employment – to show that, indeed, their panel was valuable and effective.

Today, the Seattle Women’s Commission is a volunteer group with 20 members. It works with the mayor, the City Council, and the Office for Civil Rights to address political, legislative, and budgetary issues that affect women of all ages in Seattle. The present commission focuses most of its work on five areas: Economic Opportunity, Advancement, and Security; Health and Human Services; Race and Social Justice; Violence Against Women; and Summit Planning. Any Seattle resident may apply to serve on the commission.



SECTION VII

THE PRESS: NEWSPAPER ARTICLES THROUGH REP. HELEN SOMMERS 36 YEAR CAREER

Representative Helen Sommers has been in the public eye throughout her 36-year career in Washington state government. As her role in the House of Representatives grew, she served as Chair of five House Committees, and she was involved in Washington state budgets for more than three decades. As the only member to have served during the two historic 49-49 ties in the House (1979-80 and 1999-2001) the press has been interested in her knowledge, her power and her respect in the process.

Helen Sommers was not someone who coveted the attention of the media. But she was respected in most circles of the state's newspapers, TV and radio.

In this section of the Helen Sommers Oral History, we are including some of the newspaper stories that reflect her personality, her knowledge, and her leadership.

This section of some newspaper articles about Helen over the years are just the 'tip of the iceberg' of the media perspective of Helen Sommers.

The Seattle Times



No-nonsense manner served legislator well for 36 years

By Andrew Garber
Seattle Times staff reporter



Helen Sommers, photographed at her Magnolia home, retired from the state Legislature on March 13. **Photo by Erika Schultz/The Seattle Times**

Helen Sommers isn't much for idle conversation.

Pass her in a hallway and there's a good chance she won't acknowledge your existence. Stop her to chat, you'll be lucky to exchange a dozen words.

It's a personality trait that's served Sommers well during a long career as chairwoman of the House Appropriations Committee. Her all-business demeanor

and clipped speech have intimidated both lobbyists and politicians on the prowl for state money.

They quickly learned Sommers' favorite word when it came to spending requests: no. She'd often put it more diplomatically, however, said Appropriations Vice Chairman Hans Dunshee. "She'd say, 'Well, we'll consider it.' That meant you were dead."

After 36 years in the state Legislature, Sommers said goodbye March 13, at the end of the legislative session. Asked why she was leaving, Sommers simply said, "I think the time I've been there. Age. My memory." She turns 76 this week.

The Seattle Democrat's departure has made some people anxious about who might replace her. Conservatives viewed Sommers as firewall against more free-spending members of her party. Democrats control the House, Senate and Governor's Office.

While it's true that state spending has increased by billions of dollars during her tenure, including more than \$4 billion in the current two-year budget she helped write, some argue that Sommers prevented even larger increases.

"I think spending would have increased dramatically more without her at the helm," said Bob Williams, president of the Evergreen Freedom Foundation, perhaps the most conservative think tank in the state.

"It makes me nervous that she's leaving," Williams said.

Higher-education advocates are also worried, but for a different reason. Sommers, who earned her bachelor's and master's degrees at the University of Washington, protected spending for colleges and universities during good times and bad.

"It is a passing of the baton, and we're not sure who the baton is getting passed to," said Randy Hodgins, a UW lobbyist.

Sommers views her departure with the same pragmatism she applied to state spending. "I recognize my memory is not as good," said Sommers, who is admired for her intricate knowledge of the state budget and pension system. "I'd just rather retire sooner than I should, rather than stick around longer than I should."

Sommers entered politics at age 40 in 1972, the same year the Watergate scandal broke.

It wasn't an obvious move. She'd lived in Seattle only few years, after having lived in Caracas, Venezuela, for more than a decade working for Mobil Oil.

Sommers had gotten married and divorced in Venezuela. Her connection to Seattle grew out of correspondence courses she took through the University of Washington. She moved to Seattle in 1968 to finish her degrees.

Sommers said she knew nothing about politics when she took on a Republican incumbent in District 36, which includes the Magnolia, Queen Anne and Phinney Ridge neighborhoods. But she was a member of the National Organization for Women at the time and friends urged her to give

it a try. There were very few women in the state Legislature then.

She won the election with 53 percent of the vote and was the first Democrat elected from the district since the end of World War II.

“I did it by doorbelling a precinct a day, seven days a week,” Sommers said. “I doorbelled 109 precincts.”

After her election, Sommers quickly gravitated to the budget and finance committees. Over the decades she’s chaired the revenue and capital-budget committees. In 1999, she became co-chairwoman of Appropriations when Democrats and Republicans were tied for control in the House. She became chairwoman when her party gained control in 2002.

In addition to her efforts to help higher education and limit state spending, budget experts say she played a leading role in revamping and stabilizing the state pension system in the late 1970s.

She’s been widely respected since she was first elected. State party officials recruited her to run for the U.S. Senate in the early 1990s, but Sommers declined.

The idea of running for higher office just didn’t interest her, she said. “I was OK where I am.”

Sommers is probably best known for standing up to people she disagreed with. Friends, critics, political leaders- It didn’t matter. They all got the same treatment.

“I can think of times when I was called on by teachers or public-employee groups to try to get her to soften her stand on issues,” said Paul Berendt, who chaired the state Democratic Party from 1995 to 2005. He didn’t succeed. “I found she was willing to stand up to the chair of the state party.”

Her ability to say no “has gotten her into quite a bit of trouble,” noted Berendt, who has been friends with Sommers for years.

In 2004 the Service Employees International Union, normally a big Democratic supporter, tried to unseat Sommers in the primary. Sommers supports abortion rights, is a former president of the state chapter of NOW, and is generally considered pro-labor. Still, the union portrayed her as too con-

servative and blamed Sommers for not aggressively supporting raises for its members.

The SEIU, and the primary candidate it backed, spent more than \$275,000 trying to defeat her and lost. At the time, there was speculation that House Speaker Frank Chopp played a role in trying to defeat Sommers. Chopp, who’s clashed with Sommers over the years, has said it wasn’t true.

Sommers still thinks Chopp “had some influence” in what happened. But she has only positive things to say about the speaker now. “He’s a very strong leader. And he’s very smart,” she said.

Sommers, in fact, is not the curmudgeon she might seem on first impression.

Victor Moore, the governor’s budget director, spent years working for her on the House Appropriations staff. Sommers was always protective of her staff members, and took great interest in the work they did, he said.

People should not take offense if they walk by Sommers and she ignores them, Moore said. She just has things on her mind.

“When she had her game face on, she’d walk by me in the hallway and not even know I was there,” he said. “People would say, ‘Well she’s not very friendly.’ I’d say, ‘She didn’t even know you were there.’ “

Sommers is well aware of her reputation. It’s not a persona adopted to keep lobbyists and legislators looking for money at bay, she said.

“I’ve been like that all my life. It comes naturally.”

The Seattle Times



Sommers says rainy day fund "foolish, thoughtless"

Posted by David Postman
at 8:58 PM April 20, 2007

House Appropriations Chairwoman Helen Sommers doesn't usually say much during floor debates. She saves her comments for the budget she writes, and even then she remains a woman of few words.

But tonight, in her quiet, methodical way, Sommers unleashed an unflinching attack on a proposed constitutionally-protected budget reserve fund.

She said, "I stand in strong opposition to this proposal." And that was an understatement.

"It is unbelievable to me that the Legislature... would restrict it's own authority... I think it is foolish, thoughtless, highly political and a huge mistake."

That last line led House Speaker Pro Tem John Lovick to gavel Sommers down. I don't recall ever seeing that happen in my 14 years. He told her to confine her remarks to the bill "and not speculate on motive." Apparently, saying something is political speaks to motive.

Sommers responded, "Our rationale, it seems to me, is always important."

She said that legislative leaders spoke "very strongly" against her attempt to amend the proposal in committee.

"So, to me, what we have done, or what we are doing with this piece of legislation, is tying our hands and failing to look forward to the contingencies that we might face which would drive the need to use these funds for purposes that are not yet contemplated.

"I think it is one of the worst pieces of legislation I have ever seen and I regret deeply that it appears to be ready to be passed this House tonight."

She's seen a lot of legislation. She was first elected in 1972 and today is the most senior member of the Legislature. To tell you how long ago that was, her seatmate from her Seattle district that year was Ken Eikenberry, later to be Republican attorney general, GOP gubernatorial nominee and state GOP chairman.

The measure just passed 74-23.

The Seattle Times



State Rep. Helen Sommers to leave Legislature

Politics & Government

Originally published Wednesday,
March 12, 2008 at 12:00 AM

By Andrew Garber and Ralph Thomas
Seattle Times staff reporters

OLYMPIA — State Rep. Helen Sommers, one of the most powerful lawmakers in Washington, is retiring after 36 years in office.

The Seattle Democrat had fended off retirement rumors for months, saying she would make up her mind sometime after the Legislature adjourns on Thursday.

But word got out Tuesday afternoon when the Capitol lobbyist corps began handing out invitations to a retirement party for Sommers and seven other House members who are stepping down.

Sommers, Washington's longest-serving legislator, waited to announce her retirement because she didn't want to be viewed as a lame duck.

"To say you're retiring during the session doesn't seem like the wise thing to do," said Sommers, 75. "I tried to keep it until after session but it leaked out."

Staff and colleagues "squeezed it out of me," Sommers said. "I just wanted to move away quietly without any fuss."

There's already speculation about who will suc-

ceed Sommers as chair of the House Appropriations Committee, one of the most influential positions in the Legislature.

Rep. Kelli Linville, D-Bellingham, said she's going for the job. "I think I have as good a shot as anybody. I'm pretty optimistic," she said.

Rep. Hans Dunshee, D-Snohomish, is vice chairman of the committee and often mentioned as a possible successor to Sommers. Dunshee said he's interested in the job but wouldn't say much else.

"We should do this in a way that gives [Sommers] the most grace and dignity," he said. "It seems unseemly to be ripping her name plate off the door already."

For 36 years, Sommers has represented Seattle's 36th Legislative District. For the past decade, as chairwoman or co-chair of the Appropriations Committee, she's played a pivotal role in writing the state budget.

She waited until after the final deals were reached on this year's budget negotiations before confirming her retirement plans.

Sommers stirred rumors about her plans last fall when she began returning some checks from campaign donors. Though she would not confirm anything publicly before Tuesday, two people are already running for her seat in the Democratic primary.

Sommers is planning to travel to Finland and Russia later this year but said she is not sure yet whether she will try to play any official roles for the state. "What am I going to do? I'm going to take it easy," Sommers said.

House Speaker Frank Chopp, D-Seattle, said Sommers "deserves an enormous amount of gratitude" for her work in the Legislature.

"Helen has been an outstanding legislator for many, many years and has contributed a lot to this state particularly in the area of higher education," he said. "She's been an absolutely tremendous advocate for education opportunity."

The other House members who are stepping down this year are Reps. Bill Eickmeyer, D-Belfair, Mason County; Bill Fromhold, D-Vancouver;

Pat Lantz, D-Gig Harbor; Joyce McDonald, R-Puyallup; Jim McIntire, D-Seattle; Lynn Schindler, R-Spokane Valley; and Bob Sump, R-Republic, Ferry County.

McIntire is leaving the Legislature to run for state treasurer.

The Seattle Times



Washington's budget: Prudent or foolish?

By David Ammons
AP POLITICAL WRITER
Tuesday, March 7, 2006

OLYMPIA, Wash. – Majority Democrats have unveiled their go-home budget, praising it as a compassionate, yet prudent use of the state's projected surplus of \$1.6 billion.

Republicans, though, called it an undisciplined spending spree that will set the state up for massive red ink next year. The final debate and voting on the budget was scheduled for Wednesday.

Leaders continued to hold out hope for adjournment Wednesday, a day before the allotted 60 days runs out. Negotiators released details Tuesday of a \$1.35 billion supplemental state budget that also includes more than \$53 million in business tax cuts and a savings account of \$935 million.

The latter includes appropriations into reserve accounts for schools, health care and pensions. Those pots of money are expected to be quickly depleted next year to help write the 2007-09 budget. House and Senate budget chairwomen said the package is a wise blend of spending, tax relief and savings. The \$522 million in additional general fund spending includes K-12 education, colleges, health care, human services, prisons, mental health and more.

The supplemental spending will go atop the \$26 billion, two-year budget adopted last spring. Including the \$720 million tucked into three sav-

ings accounts, lawmakers' new budget total is \$27.3 billion.

The spending package is a little higher than Gov. Chris Gregoire or either chamber had initially approved. Democrats in both houses asked negotiators to add money for everything from health care to an unexpected new pay boost for teachers.

The governor and leaders also tucked in personal priorities, including low-income housing, a prison computer system and money to refurbish minor league baseball parks.

Negotiators also released plans for construction and transportation budgets and for a tax-cut package. The latter includes a variety of business tax breaks, but no general reductions.

The plan does include elimination of the \$5 daily, \$50 annual, day-use parking fee for state parks.

Minority Republicans, who were shut out of the negotiations, were unhappy with the spending level, which is 17 percent above last biennium if the savings accounts are included.

"They've set themselves up for a \$600 million problem next time, maybe higher," said Rep. Gary Alexander of Olympia, GOP budget lead in the House. "Spending limits for the Democrats seem to have no relevance." Rep. Glenn Anderson, R-Fall City, said Gregoire earlier "dug both high heels in, saying she was going to hold the line" but is acquiescing to a sizable spending increase and lower reserves than she had wanted.

"This is not what I call fiscally responsible," Alexander said. But the budget chairwomen, Sen. Margarita Prentice, D-Renton, and Rep. Helen Sommers, D-Seattle, had high praise for the budget deal. They said the plan makes needed investments in education, health care, human services and jobs, while maintaining a healthy reserve.

"It hit right in my comfort zone," Prentice said in an interview. "This is truly the best give and take I've ever seen in this place." Both parties have been guilty of "frittering away" previous surpluses and have hopefully learned their lesson, she said.

"Notice how cautious we were," Sommers told reporters. "We have \$935 million in savings. I've

never seen THAT before. "Fiscal conservatives reigned here. They really won out."

Gregoire likes the finished product and hasn't talked about trimming it with her veto pen, said spokeswoman Holly Armstrong.

The education section includes \$28.5 million for remedial help for students struggling with the Washington Assessment of Student Learning and \$13 million to help students with math and science.

A small teacher salary increase of 0.5 percent is provided at a cost of \$16 million, combined with an earlier boost of about 1 percent. Money is added to the levy equalization program and equipment for vocational programs. Gregoire's new Department of Early Learning was given over \$2 million in startup money.

The budget boosts higher education enrollments by nearly 500, and adds to opportunity grants, community college faculty pay and the job skills program.

The plan expands the Basic Health Program, the state-subsidized insurance plan for the working poor, by 6,500 clients to 106,500. The Children's Health Program is expanded by 14,000, and extra money is added for pandemic flu preparedness and for community clinics. The proposal adds \$50 million for mental health, \$10 million for nursing homes, \$18 million for prescription drug copays, \$52 million for welfare programs, and money for other human service programs. Natural resource agencies, including parks, are in line for \$19 million.

The budget also has \$7 million for minor league baseball fields, \$14 million for housing, and \$23 million for a new energy loan program. The plan plows \$350 million into pensions - \$48 million this year and the rest in a pension reserve.

The New York Times

Questions Linger as Governor Takes Over in Washington

By Timothy Egan; Eli Sanders Contributed Reporting For This Article.

Published: January 13, 2005

The swearing-in ceremony here that made the Democrat Christine A. Gregoire the new governor of Washington on Wednesday after one of the closest statehouse races in history had all the somber ritualistic touches, complete with prayers and bagpipes wailing "God Bless America."

But outside, on the airwaves, on billboards and in statements made by Republicans, Ms. Gregoire's hold on the office was questioned even as she gave her inauguration speech. Republicans and their candidate, Dino Rossi, have sued to overturn the election, which Ms. Gregoire won by 129 votes after two recounts.

The court case, filed in a Republican-leaning county, will most likely be settled only when this state's Supreme Court weighs in. Republicans say the election was flawed because of irregularities in the biggest and most Democratic county, while Gregoire supporters say the problems were not unusual for a large turnout, and did not change the outcome.

But the Washington Constitution has no specific provision on a revote, leaving leaders of both parties struggling over the high ground of public esteem as the politics of the state enters the frontier.

For Republicans, that means building a base of discontented voters using their allies in conservative talk radio and the building industry. As Ms. Gregoire was giving her speech, the Building Industry Association of Washington ran radio advertisements saying, "We don't even know who our legitimate governor is."

They were backed by conservative radio hosts, who helped to organize a rally of about 2,500 anti-Gregoire forces here on Tuesday. They called on

legislators to delay the swearing-in while the court heard the legal challenge. The motion was defeated along party lines.

For Democrats, the new campaign means trying to build a base of majority popular support for Ms. Gregoire, should a new vote take place.

In her inaugural speech, Ms. Gregoire, the former state attorney general, struck a conciliatory tone, reaching out to Mr. Rossi and calling for election reform. She announced a task force, chaired by Secretary of State Sam Reed, a Republican, to review the state's election process. In her speech, before a packed house in the capitol rotunda, Ms. Gregoire recalled her blue-collar background, thanked her mother – a "short order cook" – and her parish priest, who gave a prayer. She talked about her survival from breast cancer, and praised her husband, a Vietnam veteran.

"Many have asked how I can govern without a clear mandate from voters," she said. "I believe the voters have given us a mandate – a mandate to overcome our differences and to solve problems."

After the speech, Republican leaders tried to walk a line between acknowledging Ms. Gregoire as governor and saying it was not quite over.

"The fact is we will never know who really won this election," said Representative Bruce Chandler, in giving the Republican response. "That's very disconcerting." Republicans said their party base is angry, and not willing to give up.

At the Tuesday rally, Republicans chanted "Re-vote! Re-vote!," while Democrats, in a much smaller rally, held signs that read, "Don't waste our tax \$ on your hurt feelings."

The leader of the Republican minority in the Senate, Bill Finkbeiner, seemed to take a small step toward reconciliation. "She's now the governor of Washington State and we're ready to work with her," he said. "In the meantime, this is going to be sorted out."

What happens next is uncertain. Democrats said the court could throw out the results, but any remedy would be in the Legislature.

A Democratic leader in the House, Representa-

tive Helen Sommers, also said it would be uncharted territory for a court to order a new election. Among the questions are whether there would be a primary, or whether third party candidates could run. A Libertarian candidate got more than 60,000 votes in the race, more than enough to tip the balance.

“If the court were to set aside the result, I assume they would direct the Legislature to find a remedy,” Ms. Sommers said. “But I don’t even think a court could set it aside.”



horsesass.org

Little old lady kicks labor’s ass

by Goldy, 09/16/2004

One of the more interesting races on Tuesday was the 36th Legislative District Democratic primary between Rep. Helen Sommers and challenger Alice Woldt. From my perspective, they were both good candidates, but what made this race curious was the enormous — possibly record — amount of money spent in a state house primary.

Legislative primaries are usually low-key affairs, especially since incumbents rarely draw strong challengers. Many incumbents spend less than \$20,000. But total spending on this primary could exceed a whopping \$400,000, much of it coming from a disgruntled Services Employees International Union, who unsuccessfully targeted Rep. Sommers after her Budget Committee failed to give home health care workers the raise they wanted (and to be fair, deserved.)

Writing in the Seattle Times about Rep. Sommers’ narrow victory, Joni Balter says the union sent a strong message to the Legislature:

The Service Employees International Union sent a message to every legislator in the state. When the tough guys at SEIU come and ask you to jump, the correct response is not “I will think about it” or “I

have a budget to balance.” If you would rather not be ground to a pulp next election, the right answer is “How high, sir?”

Joni is one of Seattle’s more thoughtful and evenhanded political commentators, but I think she got this one wrong. *That* was the message the SEIU *intended* to send to legislators. The message they really sent was: “*Oh my God are we pathetically ineffectual, or what?*”

Union “tough guys”? I’ve lived in Philadelphia and New York, cities with unions that make the local SEIU look about as tough as the Seattle Men’s Choir. You want to influence a legislator? You make them an offer they can’t refuse. You want to threaten them? You better back it up, and make sure that, come election day, their political career is sleeping with the fishes.

My regular readers will not be surprised to learn that I generally sympathize with labor on a broad range of issues, and I’m forever grateful for the money they spend fighting the good fight. But it is so disheartening to watch narrow special interest groups, like the evil-genius Building Industry Association of Washington, dominate public policy, while labor — who should be the most powerful and influential political force in the state — can’t even defeat *one little old lady!*

Personally, I wouldn’t have targeted Sommers, who to be fair, tends to vote overwhelmingly pro-labor. And pro-environment. And pro-other-things-I-believe-in. The SEIU’s interests might have been better served spending the money on behalf of a handful of close general election races, thus possibly swinging control of the Legislature. Win or lose, they would have earned some gratitude.

But if you’re going to put a hit on a politician you damn well better finish them off. The SEIU seems to be following the Roman dictate, it’s better to be feared than loved. But a couple more fiascos like this, and they’ll be neither.

The Seattle Times



Labor turns against leading House Democrat

By Andrew Garber
Monday, June 07, 2004 -
Seattle Times Olympia bureau

OLYMPIA — The word “no” has caught up with state Rep. Helen Sommers, landing her in the cross hairs of organized labor.

Sommers, 72, is one of the most powerful Democrats in Washington. As chairwoman of the House Appropriations Committee, she has vast influence over who gets money and who doesn't.

During the state's deep recession she's turned down lots of people. “Unfortunately, some of them are very powerful and important Democratic constituencies,” said Democratic Party Chairman Paul Berendt.

Sommers is pro-choice, pro-labor and a former president of the National Organization for Women chapter in Seattle. Since 1973 she's represented Seattle's liberal 36th District, an area that runs from Phinney Ridge and Ballard to Queen Anne and Belltown.

But union officials contend Sommers has not been fully supportive on some key issues, such as providing raises for SEIU-represented home health-care workers and restricting corporate tax breaks.

State Sen. Ken Jacobsen, D-Seattle, sees Sommers' primary challenge as a warning by labor to toe the line or else. “I think they're telling you that if you don't cooperate on the program 100 percent, they're going to try and defeat you,” he said.

David Rolf, president of the SEIU Local 775, said his union won't shy from taking on candidates, including Sommers, if they're not in sync with labor's agenda.

“For too long the labor movement has been considered the lap dog of one party rather than

the watchdog for both parties. The time has passed where we can allow one party to write us off and the other to take us for granted,” Rolf said.

Labor doesn't have to worry much about a Republican taking Sommers' seat if she's defeated. In the 36th, winning the Democratic primary is tantamount to winning the election.

Taking on Sommers won't be easy, however. She's been in office for 32 years and was frequently re-elected without opposition. During the past eight general elections, her vote total never fell below 70 percent.

Although facing her most formidable opposition in decades, Sommers was upbeat about the coming campaign. “I think I'll have a lot of support,” she said. “I'm well-known in the district.”

Sommers also has some significant labor endorsements of her own, including the Machinists union representing Boeing employees and the city and county employees union.

Yet she's clearly bothered by the strong union opposition, which she attributes to what she calls the “predatory nature of the SEIU leadership.”

Aggressive tactics

The SEIU, which represents 26,000 home health-care workers, is known for aggressive and sometimes unorthodox tactics.

The union helped recruit Woldt to run against Sommers and has contributed several thousand dollars to her campaign.

The union lobbied hard at the state labor-council convention to win Woldt the council's endorsement. “They were basically the outfit leading the charge,” said David Westberg, business manager of the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 609.

There's been speculation that House Speaker Frank Chopp, who has clashed with Sommers over the years and who is a friend of Woldt's, also urged her to run. Chopp, D-Seattle, said he did not encourage Woldt.

Sommers hasn't always been at odds with big labor; however, union officials say they have plenty

of reasons to oppose her now. They blame her for not putting money in the budget to cover voter-mandated teacher pay raises, supporting charter schools and not putting enough restrictions on corporate tax breaks.

A contentious raise

But what probably spurred the SEIU most was what it considered Sommers' lack of enthusiasm for a home health-care workers contract.

The union in 2002 had reached an agreement with state negotiators that called for a \$2.07-an-hour raise and new state-subsidized benefits. But the contract went to the Legislature in 2003 at the same time state budget-writers were struggling with a projected \$2.6 billion revenue shortfall.

Legislators ended up giving home health-care workers a 75-cent raise. "Helen Sommers actively worked to prevent the Legislature from honoring a union contract with home health-care workers," said Adam Glickman, a spokesman for the SEIU.

Rep. Geoff Simpson, D-Covington, a Kent firefighter and an ally of organized labor, said that during the session, Sommers "would point out the deficiencies of the contract and just emphasize any negative aspect."

Sommers said SEIU did well to get a raise at all. The union was asking for a boatload of money at a time when the state was making deep cuts, plus "the governor said no new taxes, and the Senate said no new taxes," Sommers said. "They received a significant increase when no one else did."

In the 2004 session, she noted, the Legislature did approve the contract and gave the workers an additional 50 cents an hour plus benefits.

Conservative or liberal?

Woldt said she's counting on union support but stressed that she has a broader base than just labor.

"Some of Helen's supporters might want to put me in the box of the labor candidate, but I think I have a much larger draw than that," Woldt said. "I have a lot of friends and people in the community that I've worked with in the human-service community, the peace community and the Democratic Party."

Woldt and her backers are focusing on Sommers' Democratic credentials.

"I think she's pretty conservative for the 36th District. Her economic conservatism has gone too far to the Republican side," said Woldt, 64, who is executive director for the Seattle Alliance for Good Jobs and Housing for Everyone. She recently stepped down after 17 years on the executive staff of the Church Council of Greater Seattle and is a past chairwoman of the King County Democratic Party.

Several prominent Democratic legislators defend Sommers.

"By any standard, Helen is a very liberal Democrat," said Ed Murray, D-Seattle, an openly gay Seattle Democrat and chairman of the House Transportation Committee. "Only in Seattle is she being painted as something else than a liberal."

Rep. Eileen Cody, D-Seattle, chairwoman of the House Health Care Committee and an SEIU member, also said the criticism is unwarranted. "We have worked together on the health-care budget for the last eight years," Cody said. "I certainly felt like health and human services were well represented and that (Sommers) listened to it and tried to get us the money we needed."

Democratic consultant Christian Sinderman sees a hard-fought primary race. "Both sides have something to prove," he said. "Alice and her backers want to show that no Democrat is safe. Helen and her backers want to prove that seniority and experience matters."

If Woldt wins, several state lawmakers will be looking over their shoulders.

State Sen. Jacobsen noted he's cast votes that don't line up with SEIU's agenda.

"I think I'm next," he said.

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Helen Sommers

State representative since 1973, key player in hammering out the state budget as chair of the House Appropriations Committee.

Age: 72

Education: Master's in economics, University of Washington

Pitch: "I think we're both very supportive of schools and interested and concerned in providing health care ... I've had to make tough decisions. I think that is a critical difference."

Alice Woldt

Longtime Democratic activist, past chairwoman of the King County Democratic Party, executive director of SAGE, Seattle Good Jobs and Housing for Everyone. Spent 17 years on the executive staff of the Church Council of Greater Seattle.

Age: 64

Education: Master's in public administration, Seattle University

Pitch: Says she'd play more of a leadership role than state Rep. Helen Sommers on health care and funding for schools. "She could have been out front and influencing those issues. I don't think Helen has made use of that opportunity."

Seattle Post-Intelligencer

Legislature 2003: Budget deal scraps tax boosts Democrats, GOP give ground, but tough state spending decisions loom

By Angela Galloway

Friday, May 16, 2003

SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER
CAPITOL CORRESPONDENT

OLYMPIA – Legislative negotiators have reached a deal to fill the state's \$2.7 billion budget shortfall without substantially raising taxes.

The \$23 billion, two-year bipartisan plan would also reject proposals to expand state-sanctioned gambling, but would boost prices at state-run liquor stores.

"It's a pretty skinny revenue package," said Seattle **Rep. Helen Sommers**, budget writer for House Democrats.

Politicians have cleared a major hurdle by settling the tax question. Majority Senate Republicans and majority House Democrats expect to trade spending proposals this morning.

"We'll be able to see where we're aligned, where we're close and where we're very different," said Sen. Joseph Zarelli, R-Ridgefield, a leading member of the budget committee.

The two parties still must agree on tough spending decisions, including:

- Whether to give state workers pay raises.
- How much to slash from services for the vulnerable and children.
- And how deeply to cut into voter-mandated initiatives for schools and health care.

"Even though we've agreed on a revenue amount, we both want to spend it differently so it's going to take a little bit of time," Zarelli said.

In the compromise, majority House Democrats gave up \$359 million in tax increases they had proposed for candy, tobacco and booze.

And Republicans, who control the Senate, agreed to hold off on renewing \$115 million in business tax incentives that are set to expire next year. The two sides agreed to leave \$300 million in reserve funds, and some of that could be used to extend the tax breaks when the Legislature reconvenes in January for next year's session.

The plan includes some revenue enhancements, such as changes in rules on unclaimed property and increased enforcement of tax collections, possibly including penalties.

To meet the agreed-upon spending level, House Democrats will have to cut about \$327 million from their budget proposal. Senate Republicans have an extra \$250 million to work with.

Democratic Sen. Darlene Fairley of Lake Forest Park said she happily helped the majority Senate GOP find places to spend that money in a meeting yesterday. "I had more fun!"

For example, Fairley said, she added spending in the Senate plan for Medicaid health care for the poor, prenatal community clinic care for undocumented immigrant women, and health benefits for state workers.

Lawmakers couldn't reach a budget deal in time for the legislative adjournment in late April. Democratic Gov. Gary Locke called lawmakers back for a special session that convened on Monday, but most legislators stayed home while the budget leaders negotiated.

The deal reached this week would likely impose a tax on nursing homes, which is supported by both parties and the nursing home lobby. But the details had not yet been ironed out.

"It's good progress and I think we can get moving now," Marty Brown, budget director for Democratic Gov. Gary Locke said of the breakthrough.

"They've got the basics on the (resources) level and now we'll just see where we get on the appropriations side."

Seattle Post-Intelligencer

Enact prescription drug reform

By Rep. Helen Sommers And Rep. Eileen Cody
Friday, February 1, 2002
GUEST COLUMNISTS

Two of the biggest challenges facing the Legislature this session go hand-in-hand and have been well chronicled on this editorial page. The challenges are addressing a \$1.2 billion budget shortfall and getting a handle on the skyrocketing cost of medical care, particularly prescription drugs.

While Washington has long been a leader when it comes to expanding health access, the cost of providing prescription drug coverage is busting our budget.

Drug costs for people covered by Medicaid, children's health insurance programs and other medical assistance programs, as well as for the medically indigent, are projected to increase by 34 percent – to nearly \$1 billion – in the current biennium. That's on top of a 51 percent increase in 1999-2001. Over the past few years, Medicaid's annual prescription-drug bill alone has more than doubled to nearly \$500 million.

Everyone agrees that prescription drugs are increasingly effective at managing chronic disease. Unfortunately, with people using newer and more expensive drugs – and more of them – drug prices are spiraling out of control. They're the 800-pound gorilla driving increases in health care costs.

These higher costs lead many patients to lower their prescribed dosage or simply forgo medication all together. This is wrong. People who are sick should be able to afford the medicine they need.

While people are being forced to choose between buying medicine and buying food or paying the rent, the pharmaceutical industry spends more than \$14 billion a year on marketing nationwide. This includes \$2 billion on television and newspaper advertisements and billions of dollars worth of free samples handed out to physicians.

Simply put, large pharmaceutical companies

are making more drugs, charging more money and marketing more aggressively. Meanwhile, government is providing health coverage for more people and those people are getting more prescriptions.

With the Legislature facing difficult decisions about cutting essential services, we must do something about the rising cost of prescription drugs and we must do it now.

We are proposing a comprehensive prescription drug education and utilization program where state agencies would work from a preferred drug list developed by doctors, pharmacists and other experts.

Such a list would allow the state to use the free market, rather than regulation or cost controls, to encourage price competition and reduce state costs.

Companies and individuals will be more than welcome to participate in this plan, helping to provide coverage to those who don't have access to prescription drugs. We may not be able to buy drugs for every senior who does not have coverage, but we can help make them more affordable.

Exempt from these lists would be cancer drugs and medicine to treat AIDS patients, people with serious mental illnesses and transplant patients.

Our proposal, House Bill 2431, has unprecedented support from doctors, pharmacists and consumers. The AARP, Washington State Pharmacists, Washington Academy of Family Physicians, Washington State Nurses Association as well as groups representing business, labor, consumers and churches support his bill.

The only group that opposes this plan is PhRMA, the drug-industry trade group.

While PhRMA claims that cutting costs would reduce their members' ability to pay for research and development to produce new drugs, those same groups average profits of up to 20 percent per year – the highest of any industry.

However, despite the industry's formidable efforts to stop reform dead in its tracks, individual firms have taken initial steps to address consumers' concerns.

Glaxo announced last fall that it was creating a national discount program for low-income elderly

people who lack prescription drug coverage, reducing the price of its drugs by 25 percent or more.

Pfizer recently announced a plan to charge low-income seniors a flat fee of \$15 for prescription drugs and The New York Times reported that Merck was beginning to limit the perks it offers to physicians

That's a good start, but it isn't enough. We can't wait for the federal government to pass a prescription drug bill. We have to do it in Olympia.

More than 800,000 adults and children in Washington are now covered through medical assistance programs. Many of these are elderly and disabled people. But 1.25 million more do not have any prescription drug coverage, including nearly 1 million people under the age of 65.

These people are counting on us. We must improve access to and affordability of prescription drugs in this state. And we must do it in a way that does not jeopardize other vital state services.

Rep. Helen Sommers, D-Seattle, represents the 36th District and is chairwoman of the House Appropriations Committee. Rep. Eileen Cody, D-Seattle, represents the 11th District and is chairwoman of the House Health Care Committee.

SEATTLEWEEKLY

This Is No Laughing Matter



Robin Laananen
Wednesday, Dec 11 2002

Sommers: She's
Norwegian!

WASHINGTON'S VOTERS
are practical jokers.

That's the only possible explanation for their behavior in recent elections. They have raised havoc with the state budget by voting for initiatives that slash taxes—Tim Eyman's specialty — while simultaneously passing other initiatives that require new services but do not raise new revenue — the educrats' money grabs for smaller classes and more pay for teachers. Add the state's economic woes and you have a deficit of between \$2 billion and \$2.5 billion in the \$25 billion general fund.

To give us an idea of how big that deficit is, Senate Minority Leader Lisa Brown, D-Spokane, points out that funding for all the state's higher education facilities — six public universities and 34 community and technical colleges — is \$2.9 billion. If you abolished all of the state's prisons and eliminated the long-term care of the elderly and disabled, Brown says, you'd only save \$2.5 billion.

The state's pranksters—I mean, voters —didn't end their mischief there, however. They gave control of the state House of Representatives to the Democrats by a slim majority, 52-46, while turning over the state Senate to the GOP by the narrowest possible margin — 25-24. To make matters even more difficult, the voters re-elected a weak governor a couple of years back, Gary Locke. The final joke, of course, was launched by Washington's professional jester, Eyman, in the form of Initiative 800, which he recently amended to require a two-thirds supermajority in the Legislature — or any city or county council, for that matter — to raise taxes.

THE STATE'S POLITICAL parties are respond-

ing differently to these pranks.

State Rep. Helen Sommers, D-Seattle, is chair of the House Appropriations Committee. A 30-year veteran of Olympia whose slim physique and short stature can mislead a casual observer into underestimating her incredible tenacity, Sommers is pushing for deep cuts and new revenues. She has no hesitancy in going after initiatives, which can be overturned by a simple majority of legislators two years after the measures become law. The so-called class-size initiative, I-728, would cost \$772 million over the next two years, according to Brown. Sommers says, "We will not do it." Also in her sights is I-732, which mandated annual cost-of-living increases for teachers statewide. Since health care costs for the poor and for state employees are rising so rapidly, Sommers wants to whack them back.

State Sen. Ken Jacobsen, D-Seattle, quips, "Helen likes to cut. She's frugal, she's Norwegian!"

Sommers cracks up at the joke, points out she's only one-quarter Norwegian, and admits, "I'm not a big social-service spender. I question some of the things we do."

Even with all these Democratic sacred cows entering the slaughterhouse, Sommers insists, cuts alone will not be enough. She believes that revenue — some combination of taxes, fees, and fines — must be increased.

State Sen. Dino Rossi, R-Issaquah, newly elected chair of the Senate's Ways and Means Committee, is adamantly opposed to messing with the education initiatives or increasing revenue. Rossi seems a bit overwhelmed by his new job. The commercial real-estate broker and self-described conservative says, "I've got all these new best friends now. They all want a piece of the \$25 billion." Elected in 1996, this year will mark his first time as chair of a committee. "Some people have been offering their condolences, given the state of the budget," quips Rossi, but he adds with his characteristic optimism, "I look at it as an opportunity."

ROSSI HOPES THE BUDGET can be used to go after those traditional Republican bugaboos: waste, fraud, and abuse. Meanwhile, he believes, government should work on improving the state's

economic climate so business will boom and return the state's coffers to solvency.

Last year, he says, he came up with \$1.5 billion in savings by going after excess in central government. His examples include cutting the fund for state government's miscellaneous expenses — paper, printing, paper clips, and the like — that has increased at five times the rate of inflation. The cost of government's furnishings is also skyrocketing, he argues. The state needs to institute a strict hiring freeze and stop paying for state agencies to have their own lobbyists, he continues.

Rossi stands by the education initiatives, however. "I want to figure out how we can save 728 and 732," he says.

Sommers says Rossi will discover his colleagues don't have the stomach for more than \$2 billion in cuts. "They can't get the votes," she says confidently.

I'm betting Sommers has the last laugh in this showdown.

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Seattle Post-Intelligencer

Income tax is needed, panel tells Legislature

By Angela Galloway And Paul Nyhan
Wednesday, December 4, 2002

SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER REPORTERS

OLYMPIA — A high-profile committee set up by the Legislature called on politicians yesterday to impose a state income tax and to reduce sales and property taxes, condemning the state's current tax structure as unfair and regressive. The recommendations of the committee, headed by Bill Gates, the father of Microsoft Corp's co-founder, were hardly a surprise. In fact, analysts have concluded that the state's tax structure is unfair to poor people for decades, and politicians have responded with ill-fated income tax proposals.

Yesterday's report is also unlikely to lead to any substantial changes from the Legislature, which

convenes in January and must grapple with a \$2 billion budget shortfall. Further, many say such a move would require statewide voter approval to comply with the state constitution.

"The income tax, we just don't see that happening," said Sen. Dino Rossi, R-Sammamish, incoming chairman of the Senate Ways and Means Committee. "We have two billion of our own problems right now."

Authors of the report acknowledged the political realities in a state that has embraced tax cutting in recent years.

They said they hope their ideas generate a public dialogue, rather than a silver bullet that solves the state's tax shortfall.

Gates said he knew the proposal wouldn't be greeted "warmth and enthusiasm," but the fact is the state's revenue situation is grave. "I think we are in crisis mode," said Gates, an attorney.

The Washington Tax Structure Study Committee didn't endorse a specific income tax model, but offered several alternatives for lawmakers to consider.

The committee focused on shifting the tax burden to a more equitable system, rather than increasing revenue to the state.

Still, Rossi and other Republicans tend to view the imposition of an income tax as a prelude to higher taxes.

And even lawmakers who favor an income tax — primarily Democrats — recognize that anti-tax sentiment is strong among voters, and political will to risk fueling that is weak.

"I'm in favor of an income tax — always have been," said Seattle Democratic Rep. Helen Sommers, chairwoman of the House Budget Committee.

But when asked if it could happen anytime soon,

TAXING ALTERNATIVES		
State and local tax burden on a household with an annual income of \$40,000-\$50,000.		
TAXES	CURRENT TAX SYSTEM	ALTERNATIVE TAX SYSTEM
Retail sales	\$1,641	\$1,055
Alcoholic beverages	\$58	\$58
Cigarette and tobacco	\$182	\$182
Insurance premiums	\$63	\$63
Gasoline	\$236	\$236
Public utilities	\$98	\$98
Property	\$1,422	\$1,120
Personal income	\$0	\$1,101
Total	\$3,700	\$3,913
Percent of income	8.3%	8.8%

Source: Washington Department of Revenue
SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER

Sommers said, “The constituents don’t want it. I just don’t know.”

The current state system relies almost entirely on the retail sales tax, the business-and-occupation tax, and the state’s share of the property tax. The system is widely criticized as unduly burdensome on the poor and on new businesses that are taxed on their gross proceeds whether they make profits or not.

The state tax structure forces the poor to devote too much of their budgets to taxes and the wealthy too little, the committee reported.

In Washington, families in the lowest income bracket spend nearly 16 percent of their income on key taxes, while taxpayers at the top pay 4.4 percent, according to the report.

Meanwhile, Washingtonians miss out on the opportunity to deduct state income taxes from their federal tax bill – to the tune of more than \$1 billion a year. Washington taxpayers cannot deduct sales taxes from their federal tax bills.

Most of the committee’s alternatives are variants on a flat income tax, which would fall more equitably on people of differing incomes.

Previous studies have drawn similar conclusions. In more recent decades, those have included, according to the state Revenue Department:

- In 1966 and 1968 a tax committee appointed by Gov. Dan Evans, a Republican, recommended the state impose an income tax. Evans and legislators sent a proposal to voters on the 1970 ballot. It was defeated by a margin of more than 2 to 1.
- In 1973, Evans and lawmakers tried again. Voters rejected it by nearly 3 to 1.
- In 1982, Gov. John Spellman, a Republican, appointed a new council. Its recommendations, in a 1983 package to lawmakers, also included an income tax proposal. Lawmakers did not respond.
- In 1988, Democratic Gov. Booth Gardner appointed another committee, which recommended an income tax among two tax reform options. No such bills passed the Legislature or were referred to voters.

Also, back in his days as a Democratic legislator, current Gov. Gary Locke co-sponsored three income tax bills from 1983 to 1991.

This year, the Tax Structure Committee suggested creating a single income tax rate, while cutting the sales tax; this, it says, would spread the state tax burden more evenly.

While the panel declined to rally around a single detailed proposal, they suggested several options, including imposing a 3.8 percent state income tax, lowering the state sales tax to 3.5 percent from 6.5 percent and cutting property taxes by 24 percent.

“We are saying that if the Legislature wants to overhaul our tax system to make it more fair and less regressive, then asking voters to create an income tax is a way to do that,” Gates said in a statement.

The million-dollar question is if. While 43 states impose some type of income tax, efforts to create new income taxes have run into steep opposition around the country in recent years.

For example, an effort to enact a state income tax in Tennessee sparked a minor riot outside the state Capitol, according to John Logan, a senior tax analyst at CCH Inc.

“It’s a tough climate,” Logan says.

The problem is, income tax payments are obvious on paychecks, while sales taxes are often easy to ignore, as consumers pay a few cents or even several dollars in taxes on individual purchases.

The tax panel maintained, however, that the sales tax system is unfair, forcing poor families to carry a heavier burden.

Many say the fundamental flaws in Washington’s tax structure become more pronounced with the changing economy – and will continue to worsen. The basis of the current system date back to the 1930s.

For example, the rise of online shopping means the state is getting a smaller share of what Washingtonians spend shopping.

For his part, Locke has said – now as governor – that voters have made it clear they don’t want an income tax and he will not advocate one again. On that, nothing changed in the wake of yesterday’s

report, said Ed Penhale, spokesman for Locke's budget office.

"The commission's report is a blueprint for intelligent discussion for how we can improve our tax structure," Penhale said. "There are many ways to improve the tax system, including ideas that voters have been cold to in the past."

Lawmakers most probably will not agree to any substantial change after they convene in January, all sides agree. While some legislation will be proposed, it is expected to go the way of hundreds of bills that get no real consideration.

"We can't enact it to solve our short-term term fiscal concerns," said Sen. Lisa Brown, a Spokane Democrat who sponsored the bill calling for the report. "The Legislature is always short-term oriented."

Brown did say that perhaps the 2003 Legislature would agree to incremental changes, such as reviewing tax exemptions every 10 years.

But any income tax, which Brown would support so long as other taxes are reduced, would have to be backed by a broad coalition of citizens, civic groups, business leaders and politicians, she said.

"I don't really think there's going to be some leader that's going to ride up on a horse," she said.

Why not?

First, taxes are as hot a political button as there is in Washington politics. In fact, when the 2001 Legislature approved the \$318,000 Gates study released yesterday, some Republicans charged it was a disguised first step toward an income tax.

Also, talk of even the tiniest tax increases last year, such as the repeal of an exemption for out-of-state printers – led to arduous debates. And lawmakers faced a huge shortfall then, too.

When legislators convene in January, they won't face the pressure of governing in an election year, which sometimes spurs more political ambitions. Still, they already have a \$2 billion shortfall to deal with – thanks, in part, to voter anti-tax sentiment.

Voters have overwhelmingly approved tax limiting ballot measures in recent years, all while approving billions in mandated spending.

And last month, voters resolutely defeated Olympia's multibillion-dollar tax-and-spend proposal for roads. Besides the high price tag, voter distrust is considered a key factor.

"People like the tax devil that they know and they're nervous about something they don't know," said Hugh Spitzer, a law professor at the University of Washington and vice chairman of the committee.



Office of Governor Gary Locke
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - June 26, 2001
Contact: Governor's Communications Office,
360-902-4136

Locke signs \$22.8 billion state operating budget

OLYMPIA - Gov. Gary Locke today signed a \$22.8 billion state operating budget that continues Washington's commitment to improving public schools, protects vulnerable children and adults and makes the best use of the state's water and energy resources.

"This is a budget that is good for Washington," Locke said about the two-year spending plan. "It continues our commitment to reduce class sizes through the Better Schools Fund and Initiative 728. And it provides additional funding to improve school safety, to stop bullying in our schools and to help struggling young students keep up with their classmates in reading and math."

The governor thanked fiscal committee chairs Sen. Lisa Brown and Rep. Helen Sommers and Rep. Barry Sehlin. Locke also thanked Senate Majority Leader Sid Snyder and House co-speakers Frank Chopp and Clyde Ballard for their efforts in passing the budget.

Locke said the budget approved by the Legislature last week addresses education needs by:

- Encouraging top professionals to become

teachers and take their experience to classrooms

- Allowing dedicated teachers to be rehired by school districts after they retire
- Continuing the Reading Corps and Promise Scholarships
- Establishing a new Technology Institute at the University of Washington, Tacoma

The budget improves safety for the state's most vulnerable children and adults. It reduces caseloads of child-protection employees, improves foster care and creates safer conditions for aging and disabled citizens, the governor said.

"This budget also recognizes our water shortage by including funding that will help us provide water for our farms, cities and towns and for salmon in our rivers and streams," Locke said.

The governor said the budget addresses top public safety concerns including funding for a new special commitment center for sex offenders at the state corrections facility on McNeil Island.

The budget also funds a program to fight the methamphetamine epidemic, restricting sales of ingredients used to make this dangerous, illegal drug.

Locke said the budget respects state workers, providing a salary increase that works toward parity with salary increases for state-funded schoolteachers.

Locke also signed a \$2.5 billion capital budget for the 2001-03 biennium. It provides important funding for new public schools and building projects at state colleges and universities. It also funds renovation projects at state corrections and mental health facilities and at state parks.

Finally, the governor signed a \$3.4 billion "current law" transportation budget that he said continues existing transportation programs but is "woefully inadequate" in the face of serious traffic congestion problems.

Locke called a third special session of the Legislature to begin July 16 for action on a long-term state transportation plan, including new revenue sources.

SEATTLEWEEKLY

Budget blues

The state's transportation crisis hits a political traffic jam.



Lisa Stone

Wednesday, Apr 12 2000

Don't blow the state's savings, warns Rep. Helen Sommers.

IT'S HIGH NOON in Olympia, and no one is backing down. State government is hopelessly gridlocked over how to solve the funding crisis brought on by voters' approval of tax-cutting

Initiative 695 last November. I-695's sponsor Tim Eyman says the politicians are lame. Eyman says we can spend the state's \$1.2 billion surplus and fix the transportation system without ever missing the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax [MVET] that his initiative gutted.

Unfortunately, voters may soon learn the hard way that Eyman doesn't possess all the facts about just how rich the state really is. Road builders and regional planners say that even before Eyman became a household name, tax revenues were not keeping up with the transportation demands of our population growth. By cutting off the revenue stream MVET provided, voters have actually made gloomy economic forecasts even darker.

Being hot has its drawbacks, as any catwalk princess will tell you, and Washington state is perhaps just too damn attractive for its own good. Rick Olson with the Puget Sound Regional Council says that before I-695 passed, the state expected to see a tax shortfall of \$16 billion over the next 20 years. Now that the state can no longer count on MVET, that predicted shortfall has grown to \$25 billion. Olson says by 2020 the state will have 3.2 million more residents than it has now, 900,000 more jobs for them to drive to, and 700,000 new homes for them to drive from. But as I-695 has shown, levying

taxes to pay for public services for all those people ain't easy. Hence the anticipated shortfall.

But you don't have to peer into a crystal ball to see a revenue shortage. According to road builders, we already have one. Duke Schaub with the Associated Contractors of Washington State says road projects are "dead" right now because of I-695. That's ironic, since the anti-car tab euphoria appeared to be tied to a desire to see more road construction, not less. Schaub says the current funding need for road projects, which includes everything from safety improvements to new construction, comes to about \$30 billion. Last year the state could only budget about \$4.02 billion of the demand. I-695 has knocked the road allotment down to about \$3.2 billion. "We're in danger of losing this construction season," says Schaub. In other words, builders are twiddling their thumbs on these nice spring days when they could be building your new road. Schaub says that contractors never got the go-ahead for projects that were supposed to commence in March, and he isn't optimistic that April will be a more productive month. Lawmakers aren't likely to come up with magic solutions to jump-start construction anytime soon.

Meanwhile Eyman suggests that the \$1.2 billion state surplus could not only cover road construction but also save bus and ferry routes, public health clinics, and all the other services formerly funded by MVET. Eyman says if the state suffers because of his ballot measure, it is the politicians' own fault for not using the surplus.

Always a sharp knife, state Sen. Valoria Loveland, D-Pasco, who chairs the Senate Ways and Means Committee, anticipated this suggestion. She proposes taking \$300 million of the surplus to make up for I-695 cuts.

But House Appropriations co-chair, state Rep. Helen Sommers, D-Seattle, points out it took years to build up that surplus. Would it be wise to spend it when anti-tax sentiment threatens the state's ability to gather revenue in the future? To use it now to make up for I-695 would be like "spending your checkbook balance down to zero," Sommers says. Instead of using the surplus, Sommers and her House colleagues suggest funding transportation

with general fund money.

But the general fund pays for education. And the Senate is loath to make public schools bear the brunt of I-695 cuts.

The third "solution" would be to simply put the crisis on hold until next year. Both chambers have agreed to immediately siphon off some general-fund money to local governments and transit districts, and to the ferry system. Loveland says most everything else I-695 has hurt, including long-term road planning, may have to wait until next year's session. By then, voters may have passed yet another Eyman initiative that will make the state's funding crisis even more difficult to solve.

The Seattle Times



Clyde Ballard and Frank Chopp are elected co-Speakers of the state House of Representatives on January 11, 1999

On January 11, 1999, state representatives elect both Republican Clyde Ballard and Democrat Frank Chopp to be Speaker of the House of Representatives. The designation of two co-Speakers, instead of the usual single Speaker elected by the majority party, results from the November 1998 election in which voters sent 49 Republicans and 49 Democrats to the House. With no majority, the parties have to share power, including the Speaker's role, just as they did 20 years earlier, the first time that the House membership was tied between the two parties. Ballard and Chopp will go on to serve as co-Speakers for three years because the 2000 election will also produce a 49-49 tie.

All Tied Up

Normally the majority party elects the Speaker to preside over the session, designates the committee chairs, and selects non-member employees. Since the 1995 session, the majority party in the state House

of Representatives had been the Republicans. Led by Clyde Ballard, an East Wenatchee businessman who represented the 12th District, they won control of the state House of Representatives (as the Newt Gingrich-led Republicans won the U.S. House) in the 1994 election. With Republicans in charge, Ballard was elected Speaker in the 1995 session and he remained Speaker when the Republicans held their majority in the 1996 election. However, on November 3, 1998, the Democrats gained eight seats and forged a 49-to-49 tie with the Republicans.

The tie in membership was not unprecedented, having occurred once before, following the 1978 election. That time Republican House leader Duane Berentson (b. 1928) and Democratic leader John Bagnariol (ca. 1932-2009), longtime colleagues with a good working relationship, devised the power sharing arrangement in which they served as co-Speakers, presiding on opposite days. Under Berentson and Bagnariol the parties also shared control of committees, with co-chairs for the most important committees and the others divided between the parties. The experience from 20 years ago helped as the parties arranged to share power again in 1999.

The official election of Speakers on the first day of the session, January 11, was a formality because as usual each party caucus chose its leader in advance. Ballard, who had been the sole Speaker for four years, became the Republican co-Speaker. His Democratic counterpart was Frank Chopp, the executive director of a non-profit agency who represented the 43rd District in Seattle. Chopp had only served in the legislature for five years, but after fellow Seattle Democrat **Helen Sommers** (the only Representative still serving who had been a member during the 1979-1981 tie) turned down the leadership role, Chopp prevailed in a caucus vote that divided along urban-rural lines.

Two Hands on the Gavel

On January 11, 1999, the two co-Speakers were formally elected by voice vote. After being sworn in, they posed with a two-handled gavel like one that had been presented to Berentson and Bagnariol two decades earlier. The gag gavel was not the only similarity between the two tied House sessions.

Under rules adopted by Ballard and Chopp, as under their co-Speaker predecessors, control of committees was evenly divided and no bill could come to the floor unless both parties approved. As a result, few controversial measures passed and most legislation enacted in 1999 and 2000 had substantial bipartisan support, including patient rights protections and increased unemployment benefits.

As in the 1979 and 1980 sessions, the evenly divided parties managed to maintain a reasonably co-operative working relationship, with the state budget being the biggest exception. Chopp, whose low-key, inclusive leadership style was praised by Democratic colleagues, managed to garner two Republican votes to pass a budget bill over the objections of Ballard and most Republicans.

Although a membership tie in the House was a novelty in 1979, by 2001 it began to seem commonplace. For the second straight election, voters in November 2000 chose 49 Republican Representatives and 49 Democratic Representatives. As a result, Ballard and Chopp were re-elected as co-Speakers in 2001. In that year's session there was less co-operation and more frustration as the House failed to reach agreement on the issue many members had identified as the most important – transportation funding.

Tied and Untied

Because House members serve two-year terms, the tie created in the 2000 election would normally have lasted until the regular 2002 House election. But as it turned out, two Snohomish County House seats were vacated in 2001. Democrat Patricia Scott, who represented the 38th District, died and Republican Renee Radcliff of the 21st District surprised colleagues by resigning midway through her term. Special elections to fill both seats were held in November 2001, and Democrats – Mukilteo Mayor Brian Sullivan in the 21st and Jean Berkey in the 38th – won both by narrow margins.

With their new 50-to-48 majority, House Democrats elected Frank Chopp as the sole Speaker at the start of the 2002 session. Ballard retired at the end of his term following that session. Democrats increased their majority in the House over the next several elections and as of 2009 Chopp remains

Speaker of the House and one of the most powerful politicians in the state.

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The Seattle Times



As Legislative Session Begins, Many Faces Set To Take Spotlight

By Dionne Searcey, David Postman
Sunday, January 10, 1999
Seattle Times Olympia Bureau

Here are some people to watch in the legislative session that begins tomorrow.

Women in the Capitol: More women are members of the Washington statehouse this session than in any other statehouse in the country. They make up slightly more than 40 percent of the membership. Forty-seven state senators are women, and they chair 11 of the 15 Senate committees. Thirty-seven of the 98 members in the House are women.

Although women have had a strong presence in the Legislature for the past several sessions, the top jobs still belong to men. And, according to some female legislators, women are still subjected to negative stereotypes.

Sometimes that works to a woman's advantage, said Sen. Darlene Fairley, chairwoman of the Labor and Workforce Development Committee. "We're not seen as inherently dishonest, or a phony who's going to play around," she said.

The women in power in the 1999 session are smart and tough, said Fairley, who lives in Lake Forest Park. "These are some of the strongest, most aggressive people I've ever seen in my life," she said. "These women do not take prisoners."

Dean Foster and Tim Martin: Though their roles are mostly behind the scenes, Foster and Martin, the co-chief clerks of the House, will be at least partly responsible for how smoothly the session flows.

With control of the House split 49-49, their charge is to set up the legislative infrastructure. "Just like any large and very complex organization, running it can be difficult," said Martin, a former

attorney and Senate Republican policy director, who was elected chief clerk in 1995. "This year will be very difficult."

Foster, first elected chief clerk in 1973, served during the 1979 split in the House and was brought back from retirement to help solve unique problems posed by the tie. So far so good, says Foster, who has been working with Martin to sort out office space and equipment to be shared by party leaders. Once the session starts, the two will meet daily with both co-speakers and help work out compromises at the committee level.

"I will spend most of my time getting people to talk to each other," Foster said.

Sen. Valoria Loveland: With the Democrats' rise to power in the Senate, Loveland gets one of the most powerful seats, chairwoman of the budget-writing Ways and Means Committee. The Pasco Democrat is a plain-talker with little patience for legislative nonsense, even when it comes from her own party. She also has been candid about frustrations with Gov. Gary Locke. She's not likely to be an easy sell on something just because it comes from the Democratic governor.

Sen. James West: For the past two years, West was Ways and Means chairman and now moves aside to be the committee's ranking Republican. He can be mischievous and short-tempered. But during his reign he got high marks for professionalism - at least until he left a death threat on a home-builder official's answering machine late last session.

He may have lost power, but as the Senate Republicans' voice on the budget, he could still play a major role in spending decisions - or be an active roadblock to the Democrats' plans.

Reps. Helen Sommers and Tom Huff: As co-chairs of the House Appropriations Committee, the pair will have to learn how to share their budget power. Sommers, a Seattle Democrat, is the only House member who was here last time the chamber was split 49-49, in 1979 and 1980. Huff was first elected from Gig Harbor in the Republican sweep of 1994.

They're playing nice and have set the tone - after Co-Speakers Frank Chopp and Clyde Ballard - for bipartisan cooperation.

With not much loose money to spend in the budget, Sommers' and Huff's toughest job may be saying no to fellow lawmakers looking for sweeteners. They also have to overcome style differences - he's talkative and expansive; she's not - to write a budget to send to the Senate.

House Finance Committee: This could be the most entertaining of the shared committees to watch. Co-Chairmen Brian Thomas, R-Renton, and Hans Dunshee, D-Snohomish, had spirited debates the past two years under Republican control. Thomas was chairman of the committee and Dunshee the ranking Democrat.

Thomas spent lots of time trying to gavel Dunshee quiet as the Democrat railed against the GOP's pro-business agenda.

They probably have more in common than either would admit. Both can be independent of party dogma, they're outspoken, funny and a bit quirky. And now they can't do anything unless the other agrees.

House and Senate Transportation Committees: Transportation may be where the big fight is this year, with Referendum 49 money to spend and every lawmaker with a pothole to fill or a road to widen.

In the House the co-chairwomen are two long-time colleagues, Democrat Ruth Fisher of Tacoma and Republican Karen Schmidt of Bainbridge Island. They haven't always agreed, but for years have worked together in what seems more like the old-fashioned bipartisanship that once marked transportation debates.

The Senate chairwoman, Mary Margaret Haugen, D-Camano Island, was one of the most vociferous opponents of Referendum 49, the November ballot measure that approved \$2 billion-plus in road spending. She is in no hurry to spend the money.

Bipartisanship and cooperation sometimes looks like a weakness to the ranking Republican on the committee, Sen. Don Benton, R-Vancouver. Fresh from a loss in his race for Congress, Benton is one of the Senate GOP's leading firebrands. (And he probably hasn't forgotten that Locke called him an arrogant blowhard during the campaign.)

Dick Thompson: As director of the governor's

Office of Financial Management, Thompson is charged with winning legislative approval for Locke's 1999-2001 budget proposal - the first budget that can really be called a Locke product.

Thompson, who is the only person to serve as secretary of Social and Health Services, governor's chief of staff and budget chief, has been a closely watched part of Locke's troika of top aides, along with Chief of Staff Joe Dear and Deputy Chief of Staff Marty Brown. Now Thompson may take even a higher profile as the top advocate for Locke's most important policy statement.

Lee Ann Prielipp: With education listed as the top priority of the governor and scores of legislators, Prielipp, the president of the Washington Education Association, plans to settle in among lawmakers on the Capitol campus. Already, she has decried the governor for proposing what she views as a meager raise in teacher salaries.

She is vying for a 15 percent raise for teachers; Locke has proposed a 4 percent raise.

Robbie Stern: Labor unions worked hard to help elect Democrats last fall. And after two years of Republican control, the unions will be pushing to be recognized for their patience and their work in the campaigns. Stern, of the Washington State Labor Council, is the brashest and has the sharpest tongue of the labor lobbyists. He's not likely to let Democrats forget who helped them get to power.

Published Correction Date: 01/11/99 - There Are 23 Women In The State Senate. Because Of An Editing Error, This Story Incorrectly Reported The Number.

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WASHINGTON
Arts & Sciences Perspectives
A Quarter-Century of Service
Autumn, 1997

State Representative Helen Sommers headed to Olympia in 1973 and has managed to hold on to her seat ever since, even as the state legislature has swung to a Republican majority. It's a surprising turn of events for someone who had "almost no interest" in politics before jumping into her first political race.

Sommers credits the National Organization for Women (NOW) with leading her toward a career in politics. As an early NOW president, she was interested in changing laws that were restrictive for women. "NOW encouraged us to become part of the establishment-infiltrate if you will," she recalls, "so I became involved with the Democratic Party." In short order, Sommers decided to run for state representative. She was the first Democrat to win in her district for years.

Although Sommers was "totally green" when she headed for Olympia, she was not without life experience. At 21 years old, she had moved to Venezuela to work for Mobil Oil Company, a decision she describes as "a learning experience and a great time." While in Venezuela, she spent two years earning UW credits through correspondence courses. She eventually returned to the states to complete her B.A. and M.A. in economics, both at the UW, and then taught briefly at Edmonds Community College before joining King County's staff as a financial analyst.

Sommers remained at King County for 22 years—almost the entire time she has served in the legislature. "I'm a stick in the mud," she comments. "I don't jump around a lot." But that doesn't mean she's been sitting still. In the state legislature, she has chaired five different standing committees and

has been a key player on many more. "The state is complicated and varied enough that you can work in many different areas," she says, "and entering a new area is almost like going for a new degree."

In her freshman term, Sommers took on the powerful timber industry in a tax reform battle and prevailed. ("I just didn't know any better," she says.) More recently, she has focused on welfare reform and teen pregnancy prevention. Through the years, she also has spent endless hours working to improve access to higher education and has led numerous initiatives that have benefited the UW.

"She single-handedly got us going on asking for the Evening Degree Program," says Sherry Burkey, UW associate vice president for university relations and director of government relations. "She has continually reminded us of our responsibility as a regional, public university. I can't think of one person who has been more supportive or effective than Helen."

Evidently others agree. In a 1994 Seattle Times rating of all legislators, Sommers ranked highest. Sommers appreciated the recognition but mostly shrugs off both compliments and criticisms. "I've made just about everybody mad in my tenure in the legislature," she says. "You have to be able to take heat and not be too upset about it. I don't have a need to be loved. Being respected; that's different."

The Seattle Times



After Two Decades, Helen Sommers Rises To Prominence, Scowl and All

Jim Simon
Thursday, March 10, 1994

OLYMPIA - "I have exactly the wrong personality for this job," **Rep. Helen Sommers** says. "I'm impatient. I'm blunt. I'm candid. I'm told I don't smile enough."

The trademark scowl that can leave an ill-prepared lobbyist, reporter or fellow state lawmaker squirming gives way to the faintest grin. Then a chuckle.

Last night, Sommers was in the spotlight as she completed negotiating her first state budget as chairwoman of the House Appropriations Committee. No matter how the final numbers come out, her role represents a triumph of persistence.

It has taken the Seattle Democrat 22 years - two decades of being labeled brainy but abrasive, gutsy but tough to get along with - to achieve a position of power many think she deserved long ago.

By her own measure, Sommers, 61, has had "the rough edges beaten off me" in several failed attempts to win leadership posts. Colleagues say she spends more time cajoling and soliciting their ideas, less time skewering them with figures and policy arguments. And she laughs more.

If Sommers has mellowed a bit, Olympia has changed more dramatically.

Today nearly 40 percent of Washington's legislators are women. Few vestiges remain of the clubby atmosphere where lawmakers and lobbyists cemented ties nightly over after-hour drinks. And Sommers' tightfisted skepticism about spending state dollars, formed long before the term "New Democrats" was coined, is in vogue.

"It's Helen's time," says state Lands Commissioner Jennifer Belcher, a former Democratic House member. "She changed her style when she figured out it was being used against her. But the Legislature has also come to look a lot more like Helen these days."

Sommers isn't easy to pigeonhole. An ardent feminist, she championed a welfare-reform proposal this session that appalled some allies in the women's movement with its tough medicine for teen mothers and women who stay on the dole too long.

While most Democrats, led by Gov. Mike Lowry, were clamoring for tax cuts, Sommers rolled out a budget plan that panned the notion. Her initial spending proposal left out so many favored projects or budget-cutting ideas that 75 amendments to it were drafted in her own committee.

Sommers dutifully stuck in millions of new dollars for a rash of anti-youth-violence programs passed by the House. But she voiced her skepticism for how bloated and poorly conceived the crime-fighting effort had become by quipping, "I don't dare read what the money is going for."

"She's the right person for this budget because she's given to making cuts and being hard-nosed," says House Judiciary Chairman Marlin Appelwick, D-Seattle.

"But she's in many ways a loner. I think what's handicapped her over time is she's gone out of her way to fight issues. . . . She hasn't always done that with an optimum of grace."

From the moment Sommers arrived in Olympia in 1972 - as the former president of the King County chapter of the National Organization for Women, a reform-minded economist and the first Democrat elected from her Queen Anne district in 30 years - she's rarely shied from a fight. In her first term, she took on the timber industry in a successful attempt to revamp the archaic tax on forest holdings. Male opponents smugly derided her as "the girl forest ranger from Queen Anne Hill."

Sommers has been a staunch ally of the Seattle schools, community colleges and the University of Washington. Many think her real influence, though, has come as the watchdog over arcane, multibillion-dollar areas of state spending, such as pensions and capital budgets.

Her leadership in closing loopholes in the state retirement system prompted traditional Democratic allies like firefighters and state workers to back her opponent, current GOP state Chairman Ken Eikenberry, in 1976. She has worked with Republicans to restrain teacher salaries and deny professors collective-bargaining rights.

Her admirers, particularly women, complain Sommer's toughness and directness have been unfairly used to portray her as cold.

"If you come in as a 'bleeding heart' simply looking for money, off with your head," says Rep. Cathy Wolfe, D-Olympia. "But if you logically show how it will help, she listens and has a lot of compassion."

Her welfare-reform proposal may offer a more clear window on what makes Sommers tick.

She has grappled with the problem of teen pregnancy for years. Poster-size charts in her office cite the cost: \$30 million for delivery and prenatal care of teen mothers, \$30,000 a month to care for a crack baby.

Driven by such facts, she drafted a bill that included ideas few Democrats have spoken aloud: forcing teens receiving a welfare check to live at home, reducing benefits for families on welfare for more than four years and freezing benefits for those who have more babies.

Some of her ideas, such as establishment of a teen-designed media campaign to promote abstinence, won wide support. But liberal Democrats stripped most of the harsher provisions from the welfare bill. Several complained the bill punished women for getting pregnant.

But Sommers says her feminist ideals drove the proposal: "The welfare system does no favor for women. It traps them. Being dependent on the government is no better than being dependent on a bad marriage."

Her own life has been marked by similar self-reliance. Sommers was reared in a small, blue-collar New Jersey town, the daughter of an alcoholic father. Unable to afford college, she moved to Venezuela to work as an oil-company clerk for 14 years. She married and divorced there.

At age 36, Sommers made her way to the University of Washington, where she got bachelor's and master's degrees in economics. She eventually landed a job with King County. She still works there as a financing analyst.

In her last four elections, Queen Anne and Magnolia residents have never given Sommers less than 70 percent of the vote. But inside the Legislature, Sommers suffered a string of defeats for leadership posts.

The toughest came in the early 1980s, when she lost fights for Budget Committee chair and the majority-leader slot to Dan Grimm, a legislator with barely half of her experience.

“A part of what made those losses so painful for Helen is that she felt she wasn’t being taken seriously and treated equally by the men in charge,” says a friend, political activist Krishna Fells.

Others think those defeats were less a matter of sexism than style in a place where personal relationships are often more valuable than policy proposals.

“Helen has never suffered fools gladly,” Rep. Ruth Fisher says, “which can be a big disadvantage around here.”

At a recent Appropriations Committee hearing, she granted one legislator time to testify about a bill. As he rambled on beyond the allotted time, Sommers’ eyes twitched in irritation and she clutched her microphone. Finally cutting him off, Sommers apologized to committee members for wasting so much time.

Sommers says her stint as caucus chairwoman for the last two years, where she had to minister to the needs of members, taught her some lessons. She’s better able to recognize when she’s going to lose, as she did on tax cuts this year, and when to call off the fight.

“But I’m not in this position just to get along with people,” she says. “I’m clearly an old-fashioned person. I’m inner-directed. I’m not all that influenced by what my peers think of me.”

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The Seattle Times



The Insiders Rate State Legislators – The Best & The Rest – Who Has The Most Energy, Integrity And Intelligence? Who’s The Most Effective? Times’ Survey Finds Out

By Mark Matassa, Jim Simon
Sunday, May 15, 1994

Brains and hard work, not necessarily the qualities most often associated with politicians, are in fact the best predictors of success in the state Legislature. Integrity helps, but you can do without it.

And experience, the seeming soul of power in legislative politics, is no guarantee of effectiveness or respect.

Those are among the findings of a new Seattle Times survey on the skills and effectiveness of the state’s lawmakers. With three-fourths of the Legislature up for election this year, The Times set out to measure the vast differences among the women and men who make up the House and Senate.

The Times asked 200 lobbyists, nonpartisan legislative staff members and lawmakers to rank all Legislature members. More than 60 participated.

As in 1990, when The Times conducted its first legislative survey, the highest-rated lawmakers this year are those who control state finances. House Appropriations Committee Chairwoman Helen Sommers, the Seattle Democrat who took over as budget chief last year when Gary Locke was elected King County executive, finished atop the list. And her counterpart in the Senate, Ways and Means Committee Chairwoman Nita Rinehart, ranked second.

There are some surprises in the survey, too.

Rep. Cal Anderson, whom many voters know only as an openly gay legislator leading the annual crusade for gay rights, finished third statewide.

Survey respondents praised Anderson's work ethic and integrity, saying the chairman of the House State Government Committee is far more than a single-issue legislator. Anderson has earned respect from across the spectrum, overcoming open hostility at times.

"He won medals for bravery in 'Nam," said one lobbyist. "He shows it in Olympia."

On the other hand, a lot of people admit they don't much like veteran state Sen. Phil Talmadge of Seattle, who can be intimidating and blunt. But his No. 5 ranking is testimony to his intelligence and his impact during 16 years in the Senate. Talmadge, who is leaving to run for the state Supreme Court, has placed his mark on a dizzying array of legislative initiatives from health-care reform to the war on drugs.

At the other end, Sen. Tim Erwin, R-Mill Creek, finished last in the survey, and at or near the bottom of every category but "energy." He works about as hard as the average lawmaker, in other words, but has shown little knack - and at times, befuddlement - when it comes to actual legislating. Erwin does have plenty of ambition: He knocked off an incumbent state senator in 1990 and this year is running for Congress for the second time.

Many of the top-rated lawmakers aren't household names, at least in the Puget Sound area. Among those in the top 10, for example, are Sens. Irv Newhouse and John Moyer, both Eastern Washington Republicans. Both are widely respected in Olympia - Newhouse for his behind-the-scenes legislative savvy, Moyer for his integrity and gentlemanly ways - but rarely get attention west of the mountains, especially with the GOP out of power.

Conversely, some of Olympia's biggest names don't fare well in the survey. As Speaker of the House, Rep. Brian Ebersole should be among the Legislature's most powerful members. But the Tacoma Democrat ranked 31st - reflecting, many respondents said, the generally weak nature of the Capitol's current crop of leaders.

Ebersole doesn't work as hard as someone in his position should or exert tough enough leadership, many respondents said. Some see him as reaching

the speakership without ever having developed a clear idea of what he wanted to accomplish other than keeping his party in power.

Said one lobbyist bluntly: "He's reached the 'Peter principle' apex as speaker."

Ebersole's Senate counterpart, Majority Leader Marcus Gaspard, D-Puyallup, received better marks; he finished seventh overall. He's not considered a classically strong leader, but most say he's honest, even-handed and growing in the job.

Republicans, in the minority in both the House and Senate, don't do as well as Democrats in the survey. That's partly due to political happenstance: It's hard to be effective when you don't control committees or the state purse. For example, Sen. Dan McDonald of Yarrow Point was ranked third among Puget Sound lawmakers in 1990, when he chaired the Budget Committee. He hasn't gotten any less smart and he's still the GOP's expert on fiscal issues, but now that he's in the minority his statewide ranking has fallen to 17th.

In the House, where the GOP holds only about a third of the seats and has been out of power for more than a decade, the long drought is having an impact. Insiders say many Republican House members have become shrill critics of the Democrats, rather than real players.

But several rookie Republicans - Dale Foreman of Wenatchee, Phil Dyer of Issaquah, Suzette Cooke of Kent and Ida Ballasiotes of Mercer Island - get high marks. Their common traits: Each is considered a political moderate and a pragmatist, has gained expertise on specific issues and often has worked or voted across party lines.

Those are qualities that many more-senior lawmakers could use. Indeed, rigid ideologues - conservative and liberal - received generally poorer ratings.

The five top-rated lawmakers are all Democrats from the city of Seattle. That's a notable change from the 1990 survey, when the city's lawmakers were known primarily for their dislike of one another and for liberal politics wildly out of touch with the rest of the state.

Today, not only do Seattle lawmakers run the key budget committees, but they chair 11 of 32

committees - clout far beyond what their numbers should justify. Again, part of that is political coincidence: All the city's lawmakers are Democrats and, in a period when Democrats have emerged, most have seniority. Insiders say the city's delegation also works together better, primarily because of the efforts of Anderson and Sommers.

The survey also reconfirms that women - who now make up nearly 40 percent of the Legislature, the nation's second highest percentage - wield real power in Olympia. Nine of the top 25 ranked lawmakers - with Sommers, Rinehart and House Transportation chairwoman Ruth Fisher of Tacoma at the top - are women. And six of the top-10 rated freshmen, headed by Rep. Lynn Kessler of Hoquiam, are women.

The "integrity" rating is new to The Times survey this year, and it adds some interesting dimensions to the results. Defined in the survey as "honesty and trustworthiness," the category shouldn't necessarily be read as measuring whether a lawmaker is corrupt or unethical. Rather, in an arena where policy issues can live or die based on an advance reading of legislators' intentions, "integrity" is meant primarily to reflect how well a lawmaker keeps his or her word and sticks to convictions.

When Moyer, the Spokane Republican, tells a colleague he opposes a bill, for example, it's a good bet he'll end up voting no; he was rated highest in the integrity category.

Conventional wisdom suggests integrity ratings should closely follow effectiveness ratings. "He's only as good as his word," is an Olympia adage. But in fact a statistical analysis of the survey results shows no correlation between the two. Particularly trustworthy and untrustworthy lawmakers are about equally apt to be effective, in other words.

As chairman of the House Commerce and Labor Committee, Rep. Mike Heavey, D-West Seattle, gets more than his share of legislation passed, and he's considered a policy leader on some issues, like gambling. But he ranks near the bottom of the integrity list. He was criticized this year for pushing a bill that appeared to help a legal client.

By contrast, his 34th District seatmate, Democrat

Georgette Valle, rarely accomplishes anything of note in Olympia, but she's widely respected for her guileless honesty.

Nor is there a strong connection between experience and effectiveness. While the top lawmakers all have been at it awhile, plenty of veterans show up toward the bottom of the list. Sen. Al Williams, a Seattle Democrat, has been getting elected and re-elected since 1970. But he finished dead last in the energy category and second from the bottom on the effectiveness list. Most say he all but retired in office years ago; he's retiring for real this year.

The "smarts" and "energy" categories are the best indicators of success at the Capitol.

"Smarts," as defined in the survey, combines intellect and political savvy, two qualities that sometimes, but don't always, go together. They're joined here because a surplus of one often can compensate for a deficit of the other, and because in the end they get at the same ability: whether a legislator can figure out how to put his or her ideas into law.

At or near the top of both the smarts and effectiveness lists, not surprisingly, are Sommers and Rinehart. Both begin as enormously intelligent, their admirers say, and over the years have learned how to work the byzantine Olympia process, especially in the last year or two as top committee chairwomen.

When you add dedication and hard work - and they finish at or near the top of the energy category - you've got a pair of extremely potent lawmakers.

When Rinehart was in the minority, she spent a lot of time on the kind of harsh partisan attacks she now accuses Republicans of making. But as budget chairwoman, she's excelled at the pragmatic, give-and-take politics needed to win votes for her tax-and-spending plans.

Sommers entered the Legislature three years after Williams, but instead of growing complacent with experience she's become "the workhorse of the caucus," according to a fellow legislator: blunt, combative, but ultimately respected.

She's prospered by knowing more than anybody else how the state spends its money in a lot of key areas - pensions, budgets, public schools, colleges,

welfare - and by seldom giving ground.

"She's smart, she's honest and she's no one's fool," said one lobbyist. "That's why she scares some people."

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The Seattle Times



Capitol Asks: Where Are Leaders?

By Mark Matassa, Jim Simon
Sunday, June 30, 1991

OLYMPIA - In the Legislature's first vote this year, Sen. Marcus Gaspard supported a plan to roll back property-tax assessments, even though he didn't like the bill, because he was afraid not to.

In his mind, he was already reading the campaign brochures proclaiming, "Gaspard opposes tax relief."

Nearly six months later, with the Legislature closing what nearly everyone describes as an underwhelming session, the Sumner Democrat's skittish opening vote seems an apt metaphor for what ails Olympia.

Fear has displaced leadership as the Capitol's prime motivator.

While some lawmakers are proud of the session's achievements, which include a growth-management bill and landmark environmental legislation to clean up oil spills and the air, this Legislature is more likely to be remembered for few ideas, missed opportunities and the sour taste it left behind.

Education is a good example.

A little more than two months ago, with 20,000 teachers on strike, the state's attention was focused on something called the "crisis in education." But neither the politicians nor teachers themselves conjured any plan to solve the crisis - instead, they squabbled over who would control the session's school agenda.

The winner, Gov. Booth Gardner, ordered a six-week "cooling-off period" and gave a new panel 18 months to ponder the emergency.

Tick off many of the issues important to the state's residents - education, crime, gridlock, drug abuse, poverty, taxation - and the question arises, "Where are all the leaders?"

If you ask that question at the Capitol, the answer is likely to be the same from business lobbyists, welfare advocates, campaign professionals and legislators: "There aren't many," they answer, often after a quick look around and a plea for anonymity.

"There's a lot of talent in Olympia," said King County Councilman Ron Sims, a former legislative staffer who notes that the problems at the Capitol are mirrored at every level of politics. "But I'd love to know where the train is going. No one is really articulating where we should be going. No one wants to offend anyone."

That isn't to say there aren't powerful lawmakers or that nothing gets done.

The top budget writers, Sen. Dan McDonald, R-Yarrow Point, and Rep. Gary Locke, D-Seattle, have as much say as anybody about the direction of state government. They use their technocrats' intimacy with the budget to fight, often successfully, for programs favored by themselves or their colleagues.

But there's a difference between political victories and leadership.

"My biggest frustration here has been that nobody has a vision," said Sen. Patty Murray, a Shoreline Democrat elected in 1988. "There's a strong sense here that the goal is just to keep things from changing."

There are exceptions, some observers say.

House Speaker Joe King has more ideas on more issues than any other politician in Olympia, say his admirers. If it weren't for his proposal and his political tenacity, for example, it's unlikely the Legislature would have written laws this year and last to manage growth. But the speaker also has endured spells, especially this year, when he is unable to inspire even his own caucus to action.

Senate Majority Leader Jeannette Hayner, R-Walla Walla, is recognized as a different kind of leader. She doesn't want anything new out of government, and to ensure she doesn't get it, she masterfully holds together just enough of a Republican majority, 25-24, to keep things going her way.

Rep. Dennis Braddock, a Bellingham Democrat who wants to establish universal access to health care in the state, is credited even by his opponents as a leader in the field. Starting from an unpopular position, they say, Braddock has delineated a clear vision and campaigned for support for it, all the while risking the wrath of special interests and tax-weary voters.

"Three or four years down the road," said one health-care lobbyist, "people not only will say this is a great idea, but will claim to have supported him all the way. That's leadership."

Still, those examples are the exceptions. Bob Williams, a former Republican legislator and unsuccessful candidate for governor and Congress, said every year he sees fewer lawmakers willing to launch ideas into the Capitol morass: "throwing grenades," Williams calls it.

The question is, why?

One reason is the partisan division that has defined Olympia since 1987 - the split between a reform-minded Democratic House and a Republican Senate dominated by Eastern Washington conservatives.

In years past, the two sides figured out a way to push through innovative reforms in welfare, health care and mental health and to agree on sweeping anti-crime bills, a big gas-tax increase and AIDS legislation.

But this session, many House Democrats said they simply grew weary of voting for controversial measures that inevitably would die in the Senate. For example, they refused to vote this year on an abortion-rights initiative backed by King. Why invite the grief, the Democrats wondered, if the initiative wasn't going to pass the full Legislature?

Even King, while contending that talk of a lead-

ership vacuum is overblown, concedes the Capitol power structure may be growing a "bit calcified."

Others blame Gardner, a popular governor who frustrates many of his supporters by jumping from issue to issue and staying out of legislative combat. Gardner acknowledges that his style of striving for consensus, often leaving the details to a "blue-ribbon committee," frequently results in legislation, but rarely inspires.

"He's popular as the devil," said former three-term Republican Gov. Dan Evans, who pushed his ideas with more hardball tactics. "I always thought governors ought not to hoard popularity but use it to push people where you're going. Otherwise, it just stacks up like unused poker chips."

Those on the sidelines say the reluctance to discuss big issues was nowhere more evident than in the so-called "welfare vs. education" debate prompted by the teachers' strike.

McDonald, who is preparing to run for governor next year, bashed Gardner for mismanagement of welfare programs. But the Republican senator never came up with any alternatives.

Later, as McDonald and his allies declared themselves willing to put education spending ahead of social services, House Republicans justified their stance using tax-funded polls that suggested the public would rather spend money on schools than welfare checks.

Pushed aside, say Sims and other critics, was any real debate about how the state should spend its social-service money and what the state's kids are getting for the education dollar.

"I'm like the rest of the public - frustrated," said Sims. "Here's a chance to talk about our decaying education system and the debate down there is how to find extra revenue to make both sides look like a winner. We're in the era of the simplified response."

Much of what afflicts politics in Olympia afflicts politics nationwide.

Winning elections is expensive; negative campaigning works, and the political machinery - from special-interest lobbyists to paid partisan staff - is bigger and more efficient than ever. And, as the

term-limit and salary-rollback campaigns now under way suggest, the public is increasingly cynical.

“Morale is low,” said Rep. Greg Fisher, D-Des Moines. “You’ve got a Legislature where sticking your neck out isn’t always rewarded, a cynical press and hundreds of special-interest groups. It can bleed your courage.”

The effect of campaign spending can’t be overstated. In 1990, legislative candidates spent \$11.5 million, and several of the winners spent more than \$200,000. Twenty percent of that money came from fewer than 10 business or labor contributors.

Those groups, whether it be Boeing or the state employees union, are normally more interested in protecting their turf than in sweeping reforms.

“The elections are so expensive that that’s the fact you tend to remember when you get down here,” said a top Democratic staffer. “You tend to forget why you wanted to come here in the first place.”

As legislative staffs have grown, so has the political threat. The Republican and Democratic caucuses each employ large staffs whose unofficial job descriptions include compiling voting records and policy positions that might be used later in campaigns.

Knowing that, many legislators, especially those with ideas of seeking a higher office, justifiably cringe at the prospect of any vote that could be twisted into fodder for a 30-second radio commercial. A few weeks ago, even as negotiations continued on a growth bill, the state Democratic Party was mailing fliers attacking Puget Sound Republican senators for killing the measure.

All of which helps explain why Gaspard and others voted for the property-tax bill, which ultimately died. It explains why Rep. Jennifer Belcher, D-Olympia, voted two weeks ago for a bill that appeared to shift lottery revenue to schools, but really made no change. The measure was a fraud, Belcher said, but she didn’t have the energy to explain a vote against it.

Fear has so surpassed leadership as Olympia’s driving force, says a business lobbyist specializing in environmental issues, that it even explains the session’s greatest successes - the measures to pre-

vent oil spills, clean up the air and manage growth.

“The only reason those passed,” he said, “is that people were afraid of voting against environmental bills.

“Everybody’s afraid that if they do anything wrong, the voters are going to kick them out of office,” the lobbyist says. “The irony is that voters are ready to kick them out because they don’t do anything.”

PEOPLE WE LOOK TO FOR LEADERSHIP

GOV. BOOTH GARDNER

Democrats, especially, credit Gardner for having good ideas, or at least big ones. The criticism is that he rarely follows through on the ideas with a lasting effort. His unsuccessful 1989 bid for tax reform is an example. Gardner’s style of consensus and compromise is more practical than inspiring.

HOUSE SPEAKER JOE KING

King, who loves the kind of back-room wheeling and dealing Gardner eschews, has shaped the House Democratic caucus into a powerful and progressive force. But the speaker had a rough session. His own caucus balked at following him on issues such as abortion rights, he got into a feud with the Boeing Co. and with an eye toward higher office, he seems to have grown more cautious.

SENATE LEADER JEANNETTE HAYNER

The Republican majority leader starts with much different goals: Her vision of government is to contain it. Given that, and her slim 25-24 majority in the Senate, Hayner is widely hailed for expertly controlling her caucus. If you want to go nowhere, say her critics, Hayner is the perfect leader. She may have single-handedly broken the Legislature’s logjam on growth controls, however.

SEN. DAN MCDONALD

As chairman of the Senate Ways and Means Committee, McDonald has as much control over the state’s \$15.7 billion budget as anybody besides

Gardner and Rep. Gary Locke, D-Seattle. But despite his rhetoric, McDonald hasn't successfully used the budget or the bully pulpit it provides to lead the charge for real changes in the welfare system he berates.

REP. GARY LOCKE

The House Appropriations chairman, who lives and breathes the legislative life, has an unsurpassed knowledge of the state's finances that makes him a tough negotiator. Locke has become the champion of social services, protecting those programs and presiding over the expansion of services like mental health. But he is seen by some as a technocrat, and he alienated many of his colleagues by keeping them in the dark about the budget.

REP. DENNIS BRADDOCK

Democratic chairman of the House Health Care Committee, Braddock, of Bellingham, isn't one of the biggest names in the Legislature. But he's often cited, even by Republican opponents, as a true leader: He has a big-picture view of the state's health-care system and a plan to get there. The secret, he says, is that he's not afraid to be unpopular, or even unelected.

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The Best & The Rest – The Insiders Rate Seattle-Area Legislators – Political Pundits Say Smarts, Congeniality Beget Power These Days At The Capitol

By Mark Matassa, Jim Simon
Sunday, January 7, 1990

OLYMPIA - On paper, they're equals - 147 men and women who each have a single vote on the laws and policies of the state of Washington.

However, voting is only the final and formal stage of the lawmaking process. And in the ability to get their pet proposals to that stage, Washington's

legislators are anything but equal.

There is, in fact, a colossal range in the abilities and effectiveness of individual lawmakers. As the Legislature prepared for the 60-day session that begins tomorrow, The Seattle Times set out to measure that range.

The Times surveyed more than 30 Olympia insiders - mostly lobbyists, government staff people and elected officials, of various political stripes - on the quality of the 53 legislators from the Seattle area, including King, northern Pierce and south Snohomish counties.

Predictably, two widely acknowledged power-brokers - House Appropriations Chairman Gary Locke and Senate Ways and Means Chairman Dan McDonald - finished at or near the top.

But other findings were more surprising. Most notably, the survey suggests that the traditional political equation - longevity equals power - no longer holds true in Olympia. Consider:

- A first-term senator, Democrat Patty Murray, finished in the top five. Freshmen are generally presumed to wield little influence, but the energetic Murray, who represents northwest Seattle and the adjoining suburbs, made a big impression in her first year.

- Two other relative newcomers from the north, Reps. Maria Cantwell of Mountlake Terrace and Art Sprenkle of Snohomish, both Democrats, were judged highly, having combined studious work habits and political smarts to rise quickly through the ranks.

- Two Democratic fixtures - Sen. Al Williams and Rep. John O'Brien, both of Seattle - were raked by survey respondents as lazy and ineffectual. Between them, Williams and O'Brien have nearly 70 years of legislative service.

The survey is not a formal, scientific poll. Instead, it is a reflection of thinking among those who watch how public policy - and reputations - get made on a daily basis. Those perceptions can differ greatly from the election-time view of voters back home.

Respondents were asked to rate the lawmakers in several categories - intellect and savvy, energy, effectiveness and their relative standing in the Legislature.

As might be expected, some of the Legislature's best-known members made good showings.

Locke, a Seattle Democrat elected to the House in 1983, was named the delegation's top legislator. Insiders described him as an intelligent, hard-working lawmaker who, since taking over the Appropriations Committee last year, has honed his political skills and consolidated power to become one of Olympia's leaders. And unlike many Seattle liberals, he moves comfortably among business groups and conservatives.

His counterpart in the Senate, Ways and Means chairman McDonald, R-Yarrow Point, also has impressed those surveyed with his attention to detail and willingness to work long hours sorting out complexities in the budget. Considered a potential candidate for governor, McDonald has become a forceful spokesman for GOP lawmakers on a wide range of issues.

Sen. Phil Talmadge, D-Seattle, was rated as both the smartest and hardest-working member of the delegation. He might have finished even higher than No. 7, except that many said he lacks political graces, often angering his colleagues with a bullying manner and unwillingness to play second fiddle.

Still, even his critics concede Talmadge has left his mark on important legislation in a staggering variety of areas.

In many cases, the lawmakers who fared poorly in the survey are those who are perceived to be ill-prepared, who don't show much initiative or who simply don't know how to work with others.

Rep. Paul King, D-Mountlake Terrace, received the lowest marks in the delegation. Although he is entering his eighth year in the Legislature, King hasn't sponsored much meaningful legislation, and critics say he hasn't worked hard to get up to speed on any issue.

A fellow caucus member said that in the House, where Democrats dominate with a 63-35 majority, there's plenty of competition for leadership positions and it's easy for low-profile lawmakers such as King - as well as Reps. Ernest Crane, D-Auburn, and Karla Wilson, D-Lake Stevens, who also received low ratings in the survey - to slip toward the back of the pack.

Sometimes those rated low in the survey got there after a long slide from the top or the middle.

Al Williams, for example, was considered a solid lawmaker when he entered the House in 1970 and when he was appointed to the Senate in 1978. But now, say those who work with him, the Seattle Democrat has grown ineffectual, putting little energy into legislation and using the Senate Democrats' minority status as an excuse for his lackluster performance.

Notably, Williams and his two 32nd District seatmates - Reps. Joanne Brekke and Dick Nelson - perennially run away with their races in one of the state's most solidly Democratic enclaves. All three finished in the bottom half of the survey.

Another showing that might surprise voters is that of O'Brien, the Seattle Democrat who is speaker pro tempore of the House. After 50 years in Olympia, O'Brien remains popular in his district, and he is a living legend at the Capitol; the House office building was recently named after him.

But in the trenches of day-to-day lawmaking, he is considered past his prime. Only Williams ranked lower in the survey's "energy" category, and O'Brien simply isn't a player any longer in major legislation, insiders said.

If it's hard to get noticed as a back-row House Democrat, it's an even tougher job in the minority House Republican caucus, which doesn't control any committees and can't block Democrats on many issues.

In that context, showings by Reps. Jean Marie Brough, R-Federal Way, and Louise Miller, R-Woodinville, are particularly impressive.

Both women were described as persistent and congenial, an apparently winning combination that has helped them build working coalitions with some members across the aisle. Last year, for example, Brough and Miller were among the leaders of a so-called women's caucus that walked out of a House session to call attention to their demand that mammogram testing be included in a larger health bill. The tactic worked: The testing provision was added.

Women in general did well in the survey. Of the

53 lawmakers in the delegation, only 17 are women. Yet five of those - Rep. Lorraine Hine, D-Des Moines, Murray, Cantwell, **Rep. Helen Sommers**, D-Seattle, and Brough - are among the top 10.

One former lobbyist, a woman, said some of the best people in the Legislature are women because their skills have been undervalued in the marketplace.

"In King County, most good, qualified men have jobs that pay well enough that they can't afford to go down to the Legislature," the former lobbyist said. "With women, that hasn't happened yet."

Hine and Sommers, both political veterans, have shown different ways how to crack the remnants of Olympia's old-boys club.

Hine, the former mayor of Des Moines, has been in the Legislature since 1980, but her stock has risen fastest in the past two years. Increasingly, said one observer, Hine has learned to listen to all sides of an issue and has emerged as somebody likely to propose a compromise solution. As caucus chair, she is part of House Speaker Joe King's leadership corps.

Sommers, chairwoman of the House Capital Facilities and Financing Committee, has made her mark in policy rather than politics. She's not the negotiator or political strategist that Hine is, but she is considered one of the delegation's smartest members.

She has become an expert in the capital construction budget, an area many lawmakers find repulsively dull, too complicated or both. At the same time, she is subject to a complaint often heard about Seattle's lawmakers: Politicians, staffers and lobbyists find her aloof and difficult to deal with, and as a result she is not as effective as she might be.

One of the survey's more interesting perceptions is of Sen. Frank Warnke, D-Auburn.

Warnke, a lawmaker since 1965, is an old-style politician who likes to cut deals in a back room and who is famous for remembering and returning favors. It's a style that has made him one of the delegation's more effective members, and his No. 18 ranking reflects respect among insiders.

But several respondents said Warnke also can use his power to undercut those whom he deems

disloyal, especially those who waltz on a favor. As caucus chairman for the Senate Democrats, for example, he has been known to prevent an errant colleague's bill from getting a timely vote, or to keep somebody's pet pork-barrel line item out of the capital construction budget.

Increasingly, Warnke's style is fading in favor of a more open, understated approach.

With the strong showing by Cantwell, Sprenkle and Sommers - not to mention the detail-loving budget writers Locke and McDonald - a case could be made for the rise of the technocrat.

In each instance, the lawmakers have found success not by trading favors over a late-night scotch but by putting forth thoughtful policy proposals.

Add to that a warm personal style, and you have someone insiders believe could be a rising star in the 1990s - Patty Murray.

"I think the worst legislators are people who don't have good people skills," a state bureaucrat said. "The system depends on people skills - on being able to communicate with your caucus and with the people across the aisle."

That's part of the explanation for the high marks given to Murray's first-year performance.

One business lobbyist said Murray set the standard against which all first-term lawmakers should be compared. She worked very hard early in the session last year making contacts, studying the backgrounds of several issues and learning about the Capitol's political workings.

In the waning days of the session, she wasn't afraid to use what she'd learned. The most frequently cited example is her decision - against the advice of some of those in her caucus - to fight powerful special interests on a family-leave bill. Murray, despite long odds against success, insisted the legislation be extended to include leave from work for people who have a family member with a terminal illness.

To almost everybody's surprise, she won.

"Man, I was impressed," a second lobbyist said of Murray. "She wants to change the world, and she makes you believe there's a good chance she can do it."



Duane Berentson and John Bagnariol are elected co-Speakers of the state House of Representatives on January 8, 1979

Washington House of Representatives Co-Speakers John Bagnariol and Duane Berentson, Olympia, 1979 – Courtesy Washington Secretary of State



On January 8, 1979, state representatives elect both Republican Duane Berentson (b. 1928) and Democrat John Bagnariol (ca. 1932-2009) to be Speaker of the House of Representatives. The novel arrangement of two co-Speakers presiding over the legislative session results from a tie in membership: there are 49 Republicans and 49 Democrats in the House, so neither party has a majority. As a result, the parties have to work out procedures for sharing power, a process made easier by the cordial relationship between Berentson and Bagnariol, who are longtime legislative colleagues.

For many years a tie for control of the Washington House of Representatives would have been impossible because that body had an odd number of members – 99 since 1933. However, in 1972 the United States District Court redistricted Washington’s legislative boundaries to comply with the

United States Supreme Court’s “one person, one vote” rule, which mandated that electoral districts have approximately equal populations. The court-imposed redistricting plan reduced the number of seats in the House of Representatives from 99 to 98 (two representatives elected, along with one senator, from each of 49 districts).

No Majority, New Rules

In the 1972, 1974, and 1976 elections, Democrats controlled the 98-member House by comfortable margins. As the majority party, the Democrats held the Speaker’s post and chaired all the committees, controlling what bills were voted on. In the 1977 session, John Bagnariol, a Renton insurance agent who had represented the 11th District since the 1966 election, was chosen House Speaker by his fellow Democrats.

Democrats were expected to retain their House majority in the 1978 election. However, Republicans mounted an aggressive effort to gain control of the House and, in the words of State Democratic Party chair Joe Murphy, “[t]hey sneaked up on us” (Larsen, “GOP Sneaks Up ...”). When all 98 races were decided, the Republicans had picked up 13 seats, reducing the Democrats’ previous 62-to-36-seat majority to a 49-49 tie. The unprecedented situation left observers and legislative leaders uncertain how the evenly divided House of Representatives would function.

Normally the majority party elects the Speaker to preside over the session, designates the committee chairs, and appoints non-member employees such as the chief clerk. Lacking a majority, neither party could do so in the 1979 session. Various options were suggested, including bringing in a non-member to preside as Speaker, before the co-Speaker arrangement was agreed upon.

Berentson and Bagnariol

Working out how to share power was made easier because Bagnariol and Duane Berentson, the Republican House leader from Burlington, Skagit County, who had represented the 40th District since 1962, had served together for many years and were on good terms. Vito Chiechi, who was the Repub-

lican co-chief clerk under the co-Speakers, said years later of Bagnariol and Berentson, “Sitting there with those guys was just a lot of fun. They could fight with one another and still be friends. It’s not like that today when [the parties] fight and become enemies” (Turner and Callaghan).

Chiechi’s Democratic counterpart, co-Chief Clerk Dean Foster, recounted that “Baggie” (as Bagnariol was often known) and Berentson, joined by other legislative leaders and the chief clerks, reached agreement over drinks at the Thirteen Coins restaurant in Seattle. In late December 1978 Bagnariol and Berentson announced that they would serve as co-Speakers, presiding over the House on alternating days. Under the carefully negotiated arrangement, each party would also name co-chairs of seven of the most important House committees. Chairs of the remaining 14 committees were divided evenly between the parties. Procedural rules ensured that no significant action could occur without participation by both parties.

With the agreement in place, the formal election for Speaker on January 8, 1979, took place in an upbeat and friendly atmosphere. Bagnariol and Berentson each received 49 votes and were each sworn in as Speaker. Republican Representative Irv Newhouse contributed to the festivities by presenting Berentson and Bagnariol with a special gavel that had two separate handles set 90 degrees apart, so that the co-Speakers could jointly the gavel session to order.

Reflecting the amiable spirit of the day, which concluded with dual champagne receptions for the co-Speakers, the official House Journal dutifully recorded Bagnariol’s assurances of co-operation:

“I would like to point out just a few similarities – we purposely wore suits that were very close to being the same; we both wear the same kind of glasses. Duane and I are both salesmen; we both drive reddish-brown Lincolns – his is a little faster than mine [Berentson had recently been stopped twice for speeding]. We’re going to work well together” (Journal).

Co-operation Continues

By all accounts the co-operative spirit largely endured through the 1979 legislative session. Controversial matters were generally avoided and much of the legislation that passed did so unanimously or by large margins. The one big exception was the budget, which could not be put off and on which the parties were deeply divided. As in most years, the Legislature did not agree on a budget during the 60-day regular session and was called back into a special session, which this time dragged on for months. Berentson finally ended the stalemate by reluctantly voting with the 49 House Democrats for the Democratic-supported budget, allowing the House to adjourn for the year.

Berentson and Bagnariol presided jointly over a much shorter House session in the spring of 1980, before that fall’s election ended the membership tie. Propelled by the scandal surrounding the arrest and eventual conviction of Bagnariol and Senate Democratic Leader Gordon L. Walgren on racketeering charges and by the nationwide Republican landslide led by Ronald Reagan (1911-2004), House Republicans claimed a 56-to-42-seat majority and elected Bill Polk of Mercer Island as Speaker.

By then both former co-Speakers had left the House. Bagnariol lost in the primary after his arrest. Berentson ran unsuccessfully for the Republican nomination for governor; in 1981 he was appointed head of the Washington State Department of Transportation. Bagnariol and Berentson were not the last duo to serve as co-Speakers. Republican Clyde Ballard and Democrat Frank Chopp reprised the roles when the elections of 1998 and 2000 produced consecutive membership ties in the House.

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