



# Ruth Fisher

An Oral History – 1925-2005



**Washington State Legislature  
Oral History Program**

# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> . . . . .	1
<b>Ruth Fisher bio</b> . . . . .	2
<b>Governor Christine Gregoire’s remarks</b> . . . . .	16
<b>Interview transcripts</b> . . . . .	17
Joan Fisher . . . . .	17
Jeannie Darneille . . . . .	29
Helen Sommers . . . . .	42
Dennis Flannigan . . . . .	48
Beverly Callaghan . . . . .	63
Ed Murray . . . . .	73
Mary Margaret Haugen . . . . .	83
Karen Schmidt . . . . .	94
Ralph Munro and Gary McIntosh . . . . .	109
Art Wang . . . . .	119
Bill Baarsma . . . . .	131
Gene Baxstrom . . . . .	146
Peter Callaghan . . . . .	167
<b>Longtime legislator Ruth Fisher dies</b> . . . . .	168



Ruth Fisher was a fighter. She was righteous and quick witted, pithy and impatient. She detested political posturing and disingenuous gestures. She had no tolerance for people who performed their jobs poorly. Sarcasm and disdain, when it came to those who had inadvertently solicited her commentary, were not in short supply. Ruth Fisher fought against government corruption. She fought for equity among people, for rights for the marginalized, for a voice for the disenfranchised. Abuse of power was, to her, an egregious, heinous act. If she could do something to stop it, she would, and she often did.

For twenty years, Ruth Fisher represented the Twenty-seventh District for the state of Washington. Most notably, serving on the House Transportation Committee as chair, co-chair, or ranking member. She did so at a time when women did not do such things, when the subjects of building bridges and creating alternate means of transportation were not considered issues women normally tackled. Ruth entered politics when political activity for most women of her stature meant hosting fundraisers. Ruth did that, but she did that and much more.

Before Ruth Fisher entered the Legislature, she twice served as a delegate at the Democratic National Conventions. At the 1968 convention in Chicago, Ruth joined the protesters in the streets. In Tacoma, she helped to oust corrupt members of the City Council. When she landed in the Legislature, she helped protect voters' rights and access to voting while chairing the Constitutions, Elections and Ethics Committee. She became one of the most powerful chairs the Transportation Committee had ever seen. She introduced the long-needed High Capacity Transportation bill and was instrumental in finding new means of funding and negotiating the passage of key pieces of transportation legislation. She helped to create the state's most significant and comprehensive legislation related to growth and land usage: The Growth Management Act.

I did not know Ruth Fisher. I came to know her, however, in the way we come to know those who came before us, through the stories others tell. This may be the most time-honored form of leaving a legacy. Ruth's legacy is legislative history. It's a testament of determination and tenacity. Ruth wanted to participate in creating an oral history, and, upon her

retirement from the Legislature in 2002, made this known. Sadly, she passed away in 2005 before she could be interviewed. Instead, I interviewed twelve people who knew her well, from differing perspectives, relationships, and eras. I am grateful to them for their candor, recall, and trust. The result is a multifaceted telling of the political and personal challenges and triumphs of one of Washington state's most powerful political figures.

Ruth Fisher is forever a fixture in Washington state landscape, both the political landscape and the land itself. She had a hand in shaping it, literally and figuratively. One doesn't have to search hard for evidence of her existence. She is with us still.

*Maria McLeod, Oral Historian  
Sept 19, 2007*



**Personal:**

- 3 children
- Divorced

**Education:**

- University of Puget Sound
- Attended Stadium High School in Tacoma

**Community Service:**

- Comprehensive Mental Health Center of Tacoma, Pierce County, board of directors
- County Ethics Code Committee
- United Way Budget Review

**Affiliations:**

- Tacoma Urban League
- Women’s Political Caucus

**Awards:**

- Women’s Transportation Seminar Achievement Award
- Legislator of the Year, Good Roads Association
- Washington State Transit Association’s Recognition Award

**Legislative & State Service:**

- Prime mover of laws that led to the creation of Sound Transit and funding for a second Tacoma Narrows bridge.
- Legislative contributions include: the creation of Washington’s Growth Management Act, the 1990 High Capacity Transit legislation and Transportation Revenue Package, and legislation on Fuel Tax Evasion.
- House Ethics Board
- Capitol Design Advisory Committee
- Washington State Historical Society
- Washington Environmental Council

**Committees:** (1983) Constitution, Elections & Ethics; Labor; Transportation (1985) Commerce & Labor; Constitution, Elections & Ethics, chair; Transportation (1987) Commerce & Labor; Constitution, Elections & Ethics, chair; Transportation (1989) State Government, chair; Natural Resources & Parks; Transportation (1991) Transportation, chair; State Government (1993) Transportation, chair; Local Government; Capital Budget (1995) Transportation, ranking minority member; Government Operations; Agriculture & Ecology (1997) Transportation Policy



& Budge, ranking minority member; Government Reform & Land Use (1999) Transportation, co-chair; Local Government (2001) Transportation, co-chair; Select Committee on Elections, vice chair

**House Bills sponsored:**

\*all bills listed were passed by the legislature

**(1983 session)**

134-Modifying the civil service laws for public employees  
Substituted, vetoed by Governor Spellman

146-Modifying provisions relating to the Asian-American Affairs Commission  
Signed by Governor Spellman

150-Requiring special reports of campaign contributions over five-hundred dollars  
Signed by Governor Spellman

153-Establishing additional requirements for reports of transfers of funds by political candidates or committees  
Signed by Governor Spellman

239-Regulating exit polling  
Signed by Governor Spellman

240-Revising procedures for mail voting  
Signed by Governor Spellman

251-Establishing the state employment and conservation corps  
Substituted, signed by Governor Spellman

266-Restricting voting devices to single precinct use  
Substituted, signed by Governor Spellman

434-Modifying provisions relating to collective bargaining  
Substituted, signed by Governor Spellman

511-Adding certain aquatic programs to the local improvement powers of cities and towns  
Signed by Governor Spellman

534-Modifying procedures for public transportation benefit areas  
Signed by Governor Spellman

540-Permitting public transportation benefit areas to designate a person other than a county treasurer as the PTBA treasurer  
Substituted, signed by Governor Spellman

555-Revising provisions relating to discrimination  
Signed by Governor Spellman

569-Prescribing duties of county auditors or elections official handling public disclosure report  
Prime sponsor, signed by Governor Spellman

683-Providing for interest on workers compensation awards if appealed  
Signed by Governor Spellman

**(1984 session)**

69-Providing for Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday as a state and school holiday  
Substituted, signed by Governor Spellman

392-Modifying the hearing procedures for the formation of local improvement districts  
Signed by Governor Spellman

1125-Mandating a study of children's mental health services  
Substituted, signed by Governor Spellman

1133-Specifying requirements for political advertising  
Signed by Governor Spellman

1138-Requiring comprehensive plans to provide for protection of ground water  
Signed by Governor Spellman

1142-Modifying procedures for filing claims for occupational disease  
Signed by Governor Spellman

1147-Authorizing bed and breakfast facilities to serve beer and wine  
Signed by Governor Spellman

1174-Regulating acid deposition pollution  
Twice substituted, signed by Governor Spellman

1191-Mandating water quality testing by public water supply systems  
Substituted, signed by Governor Spellman

1205-Establishing a provisional center for international trade in forest products  
Substituted, signed by Governor Spellman

1219-Establishing collective bargaining procedures for community college employees  
Vetoed by Governor Spellman

1373-Developing an environmental profile and assisting businesses to locate in Washington  
Signed by Governor Spellman

1427-Requiring identification placards on vehicles using alternative fuel sources  
Signed by Governor Spellman

1509-Authorizing a county tax on nonresidents of the state employed in the county  
Signed by Governor Spellman

1625-Prohibiting mandatory measured telephone service rates  
Substituted, signed by Governor Spellman

1652-Modifying the regulation of fireworks  
Substituted, partial veto by Governor Spellman

**(1985 session)**

50-Making certain reimbursements for social security assistance retroactive  
Original prime sponsor, substituted, Signed by Governor Gardner

178-Establishing the Washington State internship program  
Substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

179-Requiring a migratory waterfowl stamp to hunt migratory waterfowl  
Substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

222-Creating a state holiday observing the birth of Martin Luther King Junior  
Signed by Governor Gardner

297-Establishing standard for organic food products  
Substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

409-Regulating the practice of architecture  
Signed by Governor Gardner

575-Authorizing payroll deductions for political contributions by public transportation employees  
Prime sponsor, signed by Governor Gardner

1153-Facilitating registration and voting by handicapped persons  
Original prime sponsor, substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

**(1986 session)**

507-Improving freeway traffic flow  
Signed by Governor Gardner

1148-Regulating strip searches  
Substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

1182-Requiring the use of safety belts and child safety seats in motor vehicles  
Substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

1349-Altering procedures regarding the administration of elections  
Original prime sponsor, substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

1363-Preventing escape of debris from vehicles  
Substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

1385-Authorizing water and sewer district commissioner elections from commissioner district  
Substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

1462-Establishing regulations to govern the sale of nursing home insurance policies  
Signed by Governor Gardner

1505-Establishing a pilot program to employ those hard to employ  
Twice substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

1647-Repealing sunset termination of public disclosure commission  
Prime sponsor, partial veto by Governor Gardner

1678-Regulating telephone solicitation  
Substituted, partial veto by Governor Gardner

1703-Revising the implementation of comparable worth  
Signed by Governor Gardner

1802-Deleting provisions on marginal labor force attachment  
Substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

1838-Changing provisions relating to campaign financing  
Substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

1865-Revising provisions on electricians and electrician installations  
Substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

**(1987 session)**

4-Revising provisions governing the release of public records  
Original prime sponsor, substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

124-Standardizing ballot order rotation of all candidates  
Substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

161-Requiring motorcycle helmets  
Prime sponsor, signed by Governor Gardner

163-Compensating school district boards of directors  
Twice substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

188-Specifying the time for filing initiatives and referendums  
Original prime sponsor, substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

194-Changing provision relating to designation of metropolitan park district treasurers  
Signed by Governor Gardner

220-Extending collective bargaining provisions to printers at the University of Washington  
Signed by Governor Gardner

235-Legalizing the possession of drugs prescribed by out-of-state physicians  
Signed by Governor Gardner

291-Revising procedures for voter challenges  
Original prime sponsor, substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

324-Revising public disclosure exemptions  
Original prime sponsor, substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

445-Authorizing unemployment compensation for certain locked-out workers  
Substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

506-Creating the children's trust fund  
Substituted, Signed by Governor Gardner

559-Extending and revising vanpool laws  
Signed by Governor Gardner

614-Revising laws on absentee voters  
Original prime sponsor, substituted, partial veto by Governor Gardner

669-Authorizing law enforcement agencies to donate unclaimed bicycles, tricycles and toys to nonprofit charitable organizations  
Substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

750-Changing provisions relating to farm contractors' security bonds  
Substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

782-Changing reporting requirements for lobbyists  
Original prime sponsor, substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

825-Revising motor vehicle fund uses  
Signed by Governor Gardner

844-Authorizing a dependent care plan for state employees  
Substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

954-Making genderless designations in some of the elections statutes  
Partial veto by Governor Gardner

1034-Establishing the rail development account  
Prime sponsor, signed by Governor Gardner

1035-Creating the rail development commission  
Original prime sponsor, substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

1069-Eliminating obsolete references to workmen's compensation  
Substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

(1987 second and third extraordinary session)  
1260-Providing minimum wages for low wage earner nursing home employees  
Signed by Governor Gardner

1261-Authorizing funds to increase the number of persons served in the chore services program and the community options program entry system  
Signed by Governor Gardner

**(1988 session)**

1302-Establishing penalties for sexual offenses against developmentally disabled persons  
Substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

1306-Specifying the disciplinary authority and protecting classified school employees  
Signed by Governor Gardner

1319-Establishing minimum standards for leave for family care  
Signed by Governor Gardner

1341-Revising procedures for write-in voting  
Signed by Governor Gardner

1592-Authorizing workers' compensation for workers with asbestos related diseases  
Substituted, partial veto by Governor Gardner

1660-Establishing a motorcycle skills program  
Substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

1686-Regulating the use of the state seal  
Signed by Governor Gardner

1857-Creating a transportation improvement board  
Signed by Governor Gardner

**(1989 session)**

1024-Notifying victims and witnesses of sex offenses of escape, release or furlough of inmates  
Signed by Governor Gardner

1074-Requiring health insurance to cover mammograms  
Substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

1133-Regarding employer involvement in childcare  
Substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

1254-Providing immunity from civil liability  
Substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

1322-Authorizing cost-of-living adjustments for members of retirement systems  
Substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

1324-Creating a department of health  
Substituted, full veto by Governor Gardner

1330-Changing provisions relating to ferry operation  
Signed by Governor Gardner

1354-Continuing the interagency committee for outdoor recreation  
Signed by Governor Gardner

1388-Limiting the application of the Good Samaritan statute

Substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

1395-Exempting certain financial and commercial information from public disclosure

Prime sponsor, signed by Governor Gardner

1412-Authorizing remembrance tabs for veterans' license plates

Full veto by Governor Gardner

1438-Increasing public transportation reporting requirements

Signed by Governor Gardner

1480-Changing provisions relating to the productivity board

Signed by Governor Gardner

1503-Relaxing bonding requirements on ferry contracts

Substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

1520-Changing provisions relating to salary surveys for ferry system employees

Signed by Governor Gardner

1545-Increasing penalties for registering a vehicle in another state

Signed by Governor Gardner

1572-Clarifying procedures for nominations of minor parties and independent candidates

Original prime sponsor, substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

1582-Establishing a before and after school child care pilot program

Substituted, full veto by Governor Gardner

1645-Regulating the relationship between motor vehicle dealers and manufacturers

Partial veto by Governor Gardner

1664-Restricting the use of tinted glass on motor vehicles

Signed by Governor Gardner

1671-Providing major solid waste reform

Substituted, partial veto by Governor Gardner

1698-Consolidating standards for establishing precinct boundaries

Prime sponsor, signed by Governor Gardner

1788-Pertaining to the Puyallup tribe of Indians' land claims

Substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

1958-Specifying chiropractic board membership requirements and clarifying the duties of board members

Substituted, partial veto by Governor Gardner

1996-Revising voter registration cancellation procedures

Signed by Governor Gardner

2129-Promoting diverse cultures and languages in Washington

Signed by Governor Gardner

2244-Providing for maternity care for low-income families

Signed by Governor Gardner

**(1990)**

1055-Financing fire protection for state-owned buildings

Prime sponsor, signed by Governor Gardner

1323-Changing provisions relating to portability of public employment retirement benefits

Signed by Governor Gardner

1565-Relating to family relationships presumed to be valid for immigrants

Substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

1571-Changing the procedure for filing port district vacancies

Prime sponsor, signed by Governor Gardner

1703-Revising computation of subsistence and travel expenses

Prime sponsor, signed by Governor Gardner

1724-Establishing criteria for state highway designation

Signed by Governor Gardner

1825-Changing provisions relating to high capacity transportation systems

Original prime sponsor, substituted, partial veto by Governor Gardner

1890-Changing provisions concerning redistricting

Prime sponsor, signed by Governor Gardner

2335-Regulating preservation of historical and abandoned cemeteries

Signed by Governor Gardner

2386-Clarifying the state of temporary permit fees paid to vehicle dealers

Signed by Governor Gardner

2390-Regulating hazardous substance and waste

Substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

2494-Changing provisions relating to oil and hazardous substance spill

Twice substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

2567-Changing provisions relating to state employment

Signed by Governor Gardner

2602-Changing provisions relating to support services for adoptions

Partial veto by Governor Gardner

2655-Changing reporting requirements for lobbyists and for employers of lobbyists

Signed by Governor Gardner

275-Prohibiting the use of voting machines that do not record votes on separate ballots

Signed by Governor Gardner

2797-Rearranging provisions relating to candidacy and changing provisions relating to ballot forms and voting equipment

Prime sponsor, partial veto by Governor Gardner

2840-Creating the position of executive director of the county road administration board

Prime sponsor, signed by Governor Gardner

2882-Authorizing the department of transportation to approve emergency contracts

Signed by Governor Gardner

2929-Enacting comprehensive growth planning provisions

Substituted, partial veto by Governor Gardner

2932-Providing for regional water resource planning

Substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

2989-Delaying required registration for freight brokers and forwarders

Signed by Governor Gardner

**(1991 session)**

1025-Establishing growth management strategies  
Engrossed, substituted, partial veto by Governor Gardner

1024-Adopting oil and hazardous substance spill prevention and response provisions

Engrossed, substituted, partial veto by Governor Gardner

1028-Making major changes to air quality laws

Engrossed, substituted, partial veto by Governor Gardner

1057-Providing protection to the lieutenant governor

Signed by Governor Gardner

1071-Changing provisions relating to the appointment of precinct election officers

Engrossed, signed by Governor Gardner

1072-Changing provisions relating to elections

Signed by Governor Gardner

1081-Implementing a bicycle safety program

Engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

1118-Adjusting length restrictions on buses

Prime sponsor, engrossed, signed by Governor Gardner

1262-Lessening emergency service tow truck restrictions

Signed by Governor Gardner

1274-Adjusting provisions relating to street utilities

Original prime sponsor, substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

1342-Authorizing cities to impose an excise tax on the sale or distribution of motor vehicle fuel and special fuel

Substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

1431-Updating the Model Traffic Ordinance

Prime sponsor, signed by Governor Gardner

1452-Creating the high-speed ground transportation steering committee

Prime sponsor, substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

1558-Improving the state patrol compensation survey

Signed by Governor Gardner

1671-Changing provisions relating to growth strategies  
Original prime sponsor, twice substituted, partial veto  
by Governor Gardner

1677-Updating population criteria for high capacity  
transportation programs  
Engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

1771-Changing transportation authority of first class  
cities  
Substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

1992-Implementing advance right of way acquisitions  
Prime sponsor, signed by Governor Gardner

1995-Exempting converter gear and tow dollies from  
licensing  
Prime sponsor, signed by Governor Gardner

2005-Regulating freight brokers and forwarders  
Substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

2140-Assisting transportation agencies in budgeting  
and planning  
Substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

2151-Revising provisions relating to high capacity  
transportation systems  
Original prime sponsor, engrossed, substituted, signed  
by Governor Gardner

2198-Making changes to the joint center for higher  
education  
Signed by Governor Gardner

**(1992 session)**

1631-Establishing in statute the commission on  
African-American affairs  
Engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

2281-Modifying requirements for crew size on pas-  
senger trains  
Substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

2319-Improving election administration  
Substituted, partial veto by Governor Gardner

2417-Allowing the department of licensing to issue  
special disabled parking permits and license plates to  
boarding homes  
Prime sponsor, signed by Governor Gardner

2553-Adopting the 1992 supplemental transportation  
budget  
Prime sponsor, engrossed, substituted, signed by  
Governor Gardner

2609-Making airport expansions consistent with the  
state air transportation policy plan  
Engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

2610-Authorizing regional transit authorities and cre-  
ating a regional transportation council  
Original prime sponsor, engrossed, substituted, signed  
by Governor Gardner

2643-Restructuring reimbursement of vehicle licens-  
ing and registration activities  
Engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

2714-Regulating addition of territory to public trans-  
portation benefit areas  
Original prime sponsor, substituted, signed by  
Governor Gardner

2746-Authorizing contracts between town truck  
operators and landowners for payment of impound  
charges  
Signed by Governor Gardner

2844-Removing the limitation on deficiency claims  
against owners of vehicles subjected to a law enforce-  
ment impound  
Signed by Governor Gardner

2876-Making changes in public disclosure laws  
Engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

2896-Authorizing state ferry bonds  
Signed by Governor Gardner

2964-Modifying rental car taxation and providing  
funding for traffic safety education programs  
Engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Gardner

**(1993 session)**

1006-Enabling public-private transportation initia-  
tives  
Original prime sponsor, substituted, signed by  
Governor Lowry

1007-Enhancing state-wide transportation planning  
Prime sponsor, engrossed, partial veto by Governor  
Lowry

1059-Regulating possession of weapons in court  
facilities  
Engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

1064-Requiring the adoption of a policy prohibiting  
corporal punishment in schools  
Substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

1085-Authorizing community and technical colleges to develop and fund transportation demand management programs

Original prime sponsor, engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

1103-Changing the model traffic ordinance from statute to rule

Original prime sponsor, substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

1107-Requiring yielding right of way to buses

Prime sponsor, engrossed, signed by Governor Lowry

1119-Prohibiting state agencies from accepting advertising from unregistered sellers

Substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

1127-Controlling vehicle tax or license fee evasion

Original prime sponsor, engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

1129-Limiting commercial motor vehicle inspections

Original prime sponsor, substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

1144-Providing a funding mechanism for the office of marine safety's filed operations

1174-Regarding the study of American Indian languages and cultures

Signed by Governor Lowry

1218-Changing requirements for claims against local governmental agencies

Signed by Governor Lowry

1263-Specifying testing for state patrol promotion

Prime sponsor, signed by Governor Lowry

1271-Prescribing allowed vehicle lengths

Prime sponsor, engrossed, signed by Governor Lowry

1303-Authorizing state highway bonds

Prime sponsor, engrossed, signed by Governor Lowry

1333-Providing for youth gang violence reduction

Engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

1338-Prohibiting interference with access to or from a health care facility

Engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

1343-Allowing the reduction in sentences of battered women convicted of murder prior to July 23, 1989

Substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

1346-Repealing enforcement and right of action provisions for family leave

Signed by Governor Lowry

1355-Increasing nonvoter-approved debt limit for metropolitan park districts

Prime sponsor, signed by Governor Lowry

1372-Creating the governmental accountability task force

Engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

1379-Making housekeeping changes in various service programs of the department of licensing

Prime sponsor, signed by Governor Lowry

1401-Describing when tax foreclosed property may be disposed of by private negotiations

Signed by Governor Lowry

1444-Requiring identification for driver's licenses and identicards

Signed by Governor Lowry

1477-Creating a fuel tax exemption

Signed by Governor Lowry

1617-Planning high-speed ground transportation

Prime sponsor, engrossed, signed by Governor Lowry

1635-Purchasing jumbo ferries

Partial veto, substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

1670-Providing service credit for periods of paid leave

Engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

1707-Regulating motor carriers

Original prime sponsor, substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

1713-Revising vehicular window tinting labels

Signed by Governor Lowry

1761-Clarifying and extending dates established under the growth management act

Engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

1845-Modifying certain horse racing purses

Engrossed, signed by Governor Lowry

1893-Regulating motor vehicle dealers' buyer's agents' relationships

Substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

2001-Clarifying voter approval procedures for transit agencies

Signed by Governor Lowry

2032-Authorizing counties with a population of one million or more to have family court and mental health commissioners

Signed by Governor Lowry

2036-Providing multimodal transportation funding

Original prime sponsor, substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

2054-Reforming public employment law

Engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

2055-Creating the department of fish and wildlife

Substituted, partial veto by Governor Lowry

2066-Changing school levy provisions

Signed by Governor Lowry

2067-Encouraging commute trip reduction programs

Original prime sponsor, engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

2111-Adopting the supplemental transportation budget

Prime sponsor, engrossed, full veto by Governor Lowry

**(1994 session)**

1928-Providing for more comprehensive regional transportation planning

Original prime sponsor, substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

2169-Establishing board membership criteria for regional transit authorities

Prime sponsor, signed by Governor Lowry

2224-Regulating licensing of motor vehicles and vessels

Engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

2326-Eliminating gasohol tax exemption

Original prime sponsor, engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

2334-Printing educational publications of the state historical societies

Substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

2414-Changing provisions relating to child passenger restraint systems

Substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

2510-Implementing regulatory reform

Partial veto, engrossed, twice substituted, partial veto by Governor Lowry

2592-Harmonizing oversize vehicle permit laws

Prime sponsor, signed by Governor Lowry

2593-Funding highway improvements

Prime sponsor, signed by Governor Lowry

2628-Revising provisions relating to condemnation of blighted property

Original prime sponsor, engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

2629-Revising the definition of junk vehicle

Original prime sponsor, substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

2707-Revising transportation improvement funding procedures

Original prime sponsor, substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

2760-Authorizing sales tax equalization for transit systems

Original prime sponsor, substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

2909-Authorizing bonds for public-private transportation initiatives

Prime sponsor, signed by Governor Lowry

**(1995 session)**

1039-Increasing the number of citizen members of the Washington Citizens' Commission on salaries for elected officials

Signed by Governor Lowry

1107-Eliminating and consolidating boards and commissions

Signed by Governor Lowry

1109-Transferring the aeronautics account and the aircraft search and rescue, safety and education account to the transportation fund

Signed by Governor Lowry

1192-Revising vehicle load fees

Substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

1193-Giving the department of transportation discretion in setting capital facility rental rates

Signed by Governor Lowry

1195-Excluding site exploration as a substantial shoreline development

Substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

1225-Regulating vehicle and fuel licensing

Signed by Governor Lowry

1233-Avoiding conflicts of interest on election canvassing boards

Substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

1310-Strengthening the provisions of the pilotage act affecting marine safety and protection of the marine environment

Signed by Governor Lowry

1311-Providing for enforcement and administration of the pilotage act

Signed by Governor Lowry

1407-Transferring functions of the Maritime Commission to a nonprofit corporation

Signed by Governor Lowry

1452-Allowing voters to protect a portion of metropolitan park district property taxes from pro-rationing

Engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

1512-Expanding the adopt-a-highway program

Engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

1527-Recognizing veterans of World War II

Engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

1787-Restoring certain provisions deleted in 1993

Engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

1790-Changing appointment provisions for the director of a combined city and county health department

Partial veto by Governor Lowry

1922-Regulating excursion vessels

Engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

2090-Revising provisions relating to taxation of gas-ohol

Engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

**(1996 session)**

1964-Simplifying accident report record-keeping

Substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

1967-Increasing penalties for repeat violations of vehicle licensing requirements

Twice engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

2150-Authorizing investigation of documents submitted with a driver's license application

Engrossed, substituted, partial veto by Governor Lowry

2343-Funding transportation

Engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Lowry

2604-Providing vehicle owners' names and addresses to commercial parking companies

Full veto by Governor Lowry

2659-Computing special fuel tax on a mileage basis

Signed by Governor Lowry

2660-Revising procedures for refund of certain fees and taxes

Signed by Governor Lowry

2687-Revising regulation of vehicle size and load

Signed by Governor Lowry

2836-Authorizing speed limits set according to engineering and traffic studies

Signed by Governor Lowry

**(1997 session)**

1008-Standardizing issuance of license plates

Substituted, signed by Governor Locke

1011-Exempting state and county ferry fuel sales and use tax

Engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Locke

1189-Making the moratorium on oil and gas exploration and production off the Washington coast permanent

Signed by Governor Locke

1198-Regulating motor vehicle dealer practices

Signed by Governor Locke

1234-Modifying the size of the state advisory board of plumbers

Substituted, signed by Governor Locke

1316-Designating state route number 35

Signed by Governor Locke

1353-Facilitating sale of materials from department of transportation lands

Signed by Governor Locke

1402-Providing additional alternatives for financing street, road and highway projects

Substituted, signed by Governor Locke

1420-Modifying local public health financing

Signed by Governor Locke

1457-Regulating the issuance and cost of permits and certificates issues by the department of licensing

Signed by Governor Locke

1458-Regulating vehicle and vessel licensing

Partial veto by Governor Locke

1459-Regulating licensees of the department of licensing

Signed by Governor Locke

1539-Regulating fire district associations

Full veto by Governor Locke

1604-Clarifying advertising requirements for limousines

Signed by Governor Locke

1802-Requiring auto transport companies to report revenues to the UTC on a yearly basis

Signed by Governor Locke

2165-Paying interest on retroactive raises for ferry workers

Signed by Governor Locke

**(1998 session)**

1211-Making accident reports available to the traffic safety commission

Substituted, signed by Governor Locke

1487-Enhancing transportation planning

Signed by Governor Locke

1786-Requiring the transportation improvement board to report to the legislative transportation committees

Substituted, full veto by Governor Locke

2342-Providing tax exemptions for businesses in community empowerment zones that provide selected international services

Engrossed, twice substituted, signed by Governor Locke

2615-Creating partnerships for strategic freight investments

Engrossed, substituted, partial veto by Governor Locke

2659-Regulating collection of special fuel taxes and motor vehicle fuel tax

Original prime sponsor, substituted, signed by Governor Locke

2858-Reflecting current practice for payment of taxes on rental cars

Substituted, signed by Governor Locke

2917-Regulating fuel tax and international registration plan payments

Substituted, signed by Governor Locke

3015-Providing tax exemptions for the state route number 16 corridor

Substituted, signed by Governor Locke

**(1999 session)**

1053-Simplifying the transportation funding statutes

Original prime sponsor, signed by Governor Locke

1125-Funding transportation for the 1999-2001 biennium

Original prime sponsor, engrossed, substitutes, partial veto by Governor Locke

1143-Authorizing deductions from inmate funds

Engrossed, twice substituted, signed by Governor Locke

1181-Changing provisions relating to penalties and treatment for crimes involving domestic violence

Substituted, signed by Governor Locke

1204-Coordinating land acquisition and environmental mitigation activities

Substituted, signed by Governor Locke

1264-Making corrections regarding combing water-sewer districts

Engrossed, signed by Governor Locke

1294-Technically editing chapter 46.20 RCW (driver's licenses)

Original prime sponsor, substituted, signed by Governor Locke

1304-Updating references to the transportation improvement board bond retirement account

Substituted, signed by Governor Locke

1321-Requiring stops at intersections with nonfunctioning signal lights

Signed by Governor Locke

1322-Adding information to motorist information signed

Signed by Governor Locke

1324-Planning for transportation safety and security  
Original prime sponsor, substituted, signed by  
Governor Locke

1463-Adjusting deadlines for reports to the secretary  
of transportation  
Signed by Governor Locke

1495-Regarding refunding bonds  
Prime sponsor, signed by Governor Locke

1547-Authorizing sales and use tax for zoo and aquar-  
ium purposes  
Engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Locke

1550-Extending Milwaukee Road corridor franchise  
negotiations  
Signed by Governor Locke

1703-Revising law governing the disposition of sur-  
plus real property  
Signed by Governor Locke

1798-Enhancing coordination of special needs trans-  
portation  
Engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Locke

2005-Managing the state employee whistle blower  
program  
Substituted, signed by Governor Locke

2053-Allowing credit card payment of vehicle regis-  
tration fees  
Substituted, signed by Governor Locke

2201-Imposing a surcharge on trip permit fees  
Prime sponsor, signed by Governor Locke

2259-Extending the term of drivers' licenses  
Signed by Governor Locke

**(2000 session)**

2392-Creating the joint task force on local govern-  
ments  
Substituted, signed by Governor Locke

2397-Revising provisions relating to local govern-  
ment fiscal notes  
Signed by Governor Locke

2532-Allowing the department of transportation to  
recognize volunteer pilots  
Prime sponsor, signed by Governor Locke

2599-Creating a training program for port district offi-  
cials  
Substituted, signed by Governor Locke

2675-Updating requirements for child passenger  
restraint systems  
Engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Locke

2765-Authorizing delegation of authority regarding  
revenue bonds for port districts  
Signed by Governor Locke

2788-Funding transportation projects  
Prime sponsor, engrossed, signed by Governor Locke

3076-Convening a work group on streamlining the  
project permit processes  
Substituted, signed by Governor Locke

3077-Modifying provisions on unemployment insur-  
ance  
Substituted, signed by Governor Locke

3169-Strengthening the state expenditure limit and  
providing for timely deposits to the education con-  
struction fund  
Engrossed, signed by Governor Locke

**(2001 session)**

1095-Updating oversize load permits  
Signed by Governor Locke

1098-Improving the effectiveness of the commute trip  
reduction program  
Prime sponsor, signed by Governor Locke

1100-Modifying notice requirements  
Prime sponsor, signed by Governor Locke

1133-Determining liability for donated labor on com-  
munity projects  
Substituted, signed by Governor Gary Locke

1266-Making supplemental transportation appropria-  
tions  
Original prime sponsor, twice engrossed, substituted,  
signed by Governor Locke

1287-Extending the prohibition on mandatory local  
measured telecommunications service  
Signed by Governor Locke

1407-Modifying the taxation of fuel  
Prime sponsor, engrossed, signed by Governor Locke

1567-Increasing the penalty for intentional misuse of abstracts of driving records

Prime sponsor, signed by Governor Locke

1568-Updating procedures for actions against driving school licenses

Full veto by Governor Locke

1596-Authorizing transportation for persons with special needs

Substituted, signed by Governor Locke

1678-Funding advance right-of-way acquisitions

Original prime sponsor, substituted, partial veto by Governor Locke

1680-Extending design-build for public works

Substituted, signed by Governor Locke

1750-Authorizing cities and towns to require full compensation from abutting property owners for street vacations

Prime sponsor, signed by Governor Locke

2029-Authorizing changes to the VIN inspection program

Signed by Governor Locke

2222-Providing funding for emergent needs

(Nisqually earthquake)

Signed by Governor Locke

**(2002 session)**

1444-Requiring school districts to adopt policies prohibiting harassment, intimidation and bullying

Substituted, signed by Governor Locke

1460-Enforcing seat belt laws as a primary action

2284-Disqualifying commercial drivers for grade crossing violations

Prime sponsor, signed by Governor Locke

2285-Modifying fuel tax provisions

Prime sponsor

2286-Correcting language regarding certificates of ownership for stolen vehicles

Prime sponsor, signed by Governor Locke

2288-Facilitating perpetual management of environmental mitigation sites

Prime sponsor, engrossed, signed by Governor Locke

2304-Adopting certain recommendations of the state Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation

Original prime sponsor, engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Locke

2451-Making supplemental transportation appropriations

Original prime sponsor, engrossed, substituted, partial veto by Governor Locke

2506-Creating a joint task force on green building

Engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Locke

2537-Providing authorization for projects recommended by the public works board

Signed by Governor Locke

2560-Shifting approval of driver training schools from the Superintendent of Public Instruction to the department of licensing

Engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Locke

2969-Addressing transportation improvement and financing

Original prime sponsor, engrossed, substituted, signed by Governor Locke

**House Joint Memorials sponsored:**

**(1983 session)**

17-Urging the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution  
Went to first reading

**(1984 session)**

16-Requesting the adoption of the Economic Equity Act II  
Passed

**(1986 session)**

26-Urging Congress to negotiate a verifiable test ban treaty and to stop nuclear weapons testing  
Passed

**(1987 session)**

4000-Requesting congress to enact a continuing Surface Transportation Assistance Act  
Passed

**(1989 session)**

4001-Requesting removal of the highway trust fund and the airport trust fund from the unified federal budget  
Passed

**(1990 session)**

4030-Requesting that the new Division Street Bridge in Spokane be named the Sam Guess Memorial Bridge  
Passed

**(1991 session)**

4011-Asking Congress for adoption of the new Federal Surface Transportation Assistance Act by October 1, 1991

Prime sponsor, engrossed, passed

4012-Asking Congress to make motor fuel tax mon-  
eys available to the states for highway work

Prime sponsor, engrossed, passed

4015-Asking Congress for equal tax treatment of employer-provided transportation benefits

Passed

4020-Concerning displaced timber workers

Passed

**(1993 session)**

4000-Honoring Home M. Hadley

Engrossed, passed

4010-Expressing opposition to sanctions on federal highway funds

Prime sponsor, passed

**(1995 session)**

4028-Urging passage of legislation authorizing the National Highway System

Passed

4029-Urging Congress to use transportation funds for transportation purposes

**(1997 session)**

4006-Encouraging greater federal funding of research into finding the cause, prevention and cure for breast cancer

Passed

**(2002 session)**

4025-Requesting that Congress modify IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) to allow parent choice for assessment and treatment

Passed

**House Concurrent Resolutions sponsored:**

**(1986 session)**

19-Directing the department of ecology to report to the legislature on the prevention and cleanup of oil spills

Passed

**(1987 session)**

4404-Acknowledging the accomplishments of Senator Al Henry for the state of Washington

Passed

**(1990 session)**

4443-Creating a commission on health care cost control

Passed

**(1996 session)**

4423-Requesting the governor to declare the Year of the Reader

Passed

**House Joint Resolutions sponsored:**

**(1987 session)**

4212-Lengthening legislative terms

Prime sponsor, passed

**(1988 session)**

4231-Revising constitutional references to persons with mental or sensory disabilities

Substituted, passed

**Leadership, Positions & Appointments:**

- Washington State Transportation Commission, 2004-present
- Pierce County Planning Commissioner, 9 years

**Sources:**

- "Legislature's road warrior strikes fear in freshmen," by Patrick Condon, The Olympian, February 2, 2002.
- "'Queen of liberals' Fisher blooms in pivotal House position," by Joseph Turner, The News Tribune, April 1, 1990.
- "Incumbent targets 27th District seat," by Joyce Redfield, Pierce County Herald, August 23, 1984.
- Ray Moore: An Oral History, interviewed by Sharon Boswell, Washington State Oral History Program, Office of the Secretary of State, 1999
- Interview with Ruth Fisher, TVW, February 1, 2001

# Governor Christine Gregoire's remarks

*Ruth Fisher Memorial  
March 12, 2005*

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I am honored to be here today to share a few thoughts about Ruth Fisher. Ruth was such an important part of our state. Her contributions to Washington will live on long into the future.

Most people know Ruth from her years in the state Legislature. But Ruth had a quite a life in politics before

being elected to the House. She was a delegate to the 1968 and 1976 Democratic National Conventions. There are some pretty interesting stories about Ruth's participation in that highly contentious 1968 convention in Chicago. Let's just say the police in Chicago got a taste of the Ruth Fisher attitude. And you know Ruth didn't mince words in letting her opinion be known!

But it was in the House that Ruth really had an effect on public policy. There is an endless list of contributions Ruth made during her 20 years in the Legislature. Every time you enjoy the quiet atmosphere in a rural area unaffected by sprawl, think of Ruth and her work on the Growth Management Act. Every time you take advantage of the services offered by Sound Transit or drive on a road that's a little less crowded, think of Ruth. And in the future, every time you drive on the new Narrows Bridge, think of Ruth. These are all significant policies or projects that

were passed because of the skill and tenacity of Ruth Fisher.

If you notice, some of these projects directly helped her district, and some of them did not. I think that is the hallmark of a great legislator—she looked out for her district, but she always had the best interests of the state as a whole in mind as well.

As an aspiring female politician, Ruth Fisher was someone I could look up to. She really cracked the old boys club in Olympia with her blunt and unblinking style. I remember going into a caucus meeting while Attorney General to discuss a serious matter with the House Democrats – I believe it was regarding sex predators. After my presentation, where I may have been somewhat emphatic, (which is not like me), Ruth shouted out from the back, "You're pretty tough for a girl!" As far as girls go, or boys for that matter, Ruth was as tough as they come. I consider it a huge honor to have been called "tough" by Ruth Fisher.

I spoke with Ruth on the phone during her final days, and she sounded as feisty as ever. That same fighting spirit we saw in her throughout her life was still very present. She was strong and courageous until the very end. I am sure that none of us expected any less.

Washington will forever be indebted to Ruth Fisher for her dedication and commitment to the well-being of our state. I thank her family for sharing her with us all these years. We will miss her, but we will always remember her. Thank you.

*Joan Fisher is Ruth's daughter. This interview took place on November 1, 2006.*

**Ms. McLeod:** So I'd like to know, to start off with, about your mom's early life prior to her involvement in politics, and prior to marriage and children. So, going back to when she was young, where and when was your mother born, and who were her parents?

**Ms. Fisher:** She was born in Tacoma, also. Same hospital I was. We were all born at T.G.

**Ms. McLeod:** Tacoma General?

**Ms. Fisher:** Yes. Her birth date was July 21, 1925 and her parents were Arthur and Hazel Macemon.

**Ms. McLeod:** And where were they from?

**Ms. Fisher:** They were all pretty much from Yakima. I think my grandfather came from Minnesota to Yakima.

**Ms. McLeod:** So he came to Tacoma from Yakima?

**Ms. Fisher:** Yes. That's where they came from.

**Ms. McLeod:** What did they do?

**Ms. Fisher:** He was a mechanic, and I can't remember the name of what it used to be. It's now Pierce Transit. He was a mechanic for the buses.



**Ms. McLeod:** Did your mother have any siblings, and if so, what are their names?

**Ms. Fisher:** She had a younger sister named Margaret. She married a man from California named Voorhes. She was younger by a couple years, and she actually died before my mother ran for office.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did she die in '81?

**Ms. Fisher:** Somewhere around there, yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** How would you describe your mother's upbringing and life as a child?

**Ms. Fisher:** I know their house was full of books. My mom was an avid reader. Lots of books, magazines. My grandmother was a tailor of her own. She did it for the family. So everyone was always very well dressed, but I know that they did not have a lot of money. I used to hear stories as every child does, you know, "I walked five miles to school in bare feet in the snow." Who knows if they're real stories or not. I don't know. I have no idea.

**Ms. McLeod:** Do you feel that either of your grandparents influenced what would become your mother's interest as an adult?

**Ms. Fisher:** I would have to say my grandfather must have because she went into transit, and that was his area. So she was brought up around the buses, with him working on the buses. My mom was always fascinated with transportation and moving people around. So in that respect I would have to say, yes. They were very staunch Republicans, however.

**Ms. McLeod:** Oh, really?

**Ms. Fisher:** Yes. And I don't know if she rebelled or what. Yes, they were very Republican, and she was not. I don't understand how that happened other than she didn't like some of their ideas and beliefs, probably.

**Ms. McLeod:** Were they active in politics, do you know?

**Ms. Fisher:** I know that my grandmother was one of the ladies when you go and vote, she'd sign you in. But not really in politics, no, no.

**Ms. McLeod:** But interested in voting and the democratic process, not the Democratic Party.

**Ms. Fisher:** Yes. They were pretty conservative as far as that goes. My mom never really talked about what made her go the other way. But just knowing my mom, I'd have to say it was rebellion.

**Ms. McLeod:** What were your grandparents' ethnic background and their religious background?

**Ms. Fisher:** They were religious. They had lots of Bibles around. My mom was not. She believed people should be able to believe whatever they wanted to, and don't shove something down their throats. And I know that her grandmother, whom I never met, was a Mennonite. So that's pretty hard, staunch stuff.

**Ms. McLeod:** Was that her mother's mother, your great grandmother?

**Ms. Fisher:** Yes. So they were brought up pretty strict.

**Ms. McLeod:** She was from the Yakima area, too, her grandmother?

**Ms. Fisher:** Yes. The only relatives I knew over there were Aunt Edith and Uncle Orvis, and they owned a farm. And that was part of that family.

**Ms. McLeod:** Do you know what kind of farm?

**Ms. Fisher:** There was lots of alfalfa and hay. That's what I remember being out there—going there and seeing the horses.

**Ms. McLeod:** Was politics something that you ever witnessed your mother talking about with her parents? Do you remember arguments between them?

**Ms. Fisher:** Oh, yes. Absolutely. Absolutely. Yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** Do you remember the substance of any of those arguments?

**Ms. Fisher:** No. But she would never back off from what she believed. Actually, the funnier times were when one of my father's brothers, who was a real Republican, would come over. They would sit and argue for hours upon hours.

**Ms. McLeod:** Really?

**Ms. Fisher:** Yes. And that's before she was in...

**Ms. McLeod:** The House?

**Ms. Fisher:** Oh, yes. It's when she was still married and we were growing up. Oh, yeah.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did your uncle seem knowledgeable? Who won those arguments?

**Ms. Fisher:** I think they ended up being draws. I think my mom thought she won and he thought he won. There's really no winner in those arguments. There's just, you know...

**Ms. McLeod:** Two sides.

**Ms. Fisher:** Yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** Who do you think were your mother's early mentors or inspirational figures in her young life?

**Ms. Fisher:** I don't think there were any teachers. I don't know. There was really never anyone she talked about other than someone fairly large like John F. Kennedy. So there wasn't anyone local here.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did Ruth have any particularly strong relationships with any relatives? I think I read something about her relationship with her grandmother.

**Ms. Fisher:** Yes, but I didn't know her, so... Her sister was her main person. She was very close to her sister, who was also a Republican.

**Ms. McLeod:** What was her sister's name?

**Ms. Fisher:** Margaret.

**Ms. McLeod:** Do you think there were other events or individuals that might have shaped your mother's aspirations?

**Ms. Fisher:** She talked about John F. Kennedy coming to Cheney Stadium in Tacoma. I think his speech, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country," that's basically my mother's philosophy. She almost lived that persona. So, I'd have to say he was a big influence.

And then the assassinations of him and Robert Kennedy, they just really got her. I mean, she was just devastated, depressed. I do remember that and I was only a few years old. My dad's a very good Democrat, too, still is. Our whole house was just like the world had ended. She was in mourning for a long time about that. And I remember that feeling when I was a child, watching the funeral procession and the drums and all that stuff on the black and white TV.

**Ms. McLeod:** The Kennedys were your parents' contemporaries. Their children were the age that you guys were, more or less.

**Ms. Fisher:** Yes. Exactly.

**Ms. McLeod:** I'd like to come back to the theme of your parents being good Democrats together, but I first I want to ask a few more questions about the past. Where did your mother attend high school in Tacoma and what subjects were of most interest to her? Do you know?

**Ms. Fisher:** She went to Stadium High School. I don't know what her subjects were other than, I'm sure, civics and politics. Also, she was on the basketball team. She loved basketball.

**Ms. McLeod:** Do you know what position she played?

**Ms. Fisher:** I don't know. I've got some old books here somewhere that probably have that in it. She loved sports. She did. And it was funny because if she'd be watching something, and it's a critical point in the game, it's like, don't talk to her. Don't even talk to her.

**Ms. McLeod:** You said that she was on the basketball team. I just wanted to go back to that, because that brings to mind her appearance, her size. When I see photos, I get a sense of what she looked like, but can you describe what your mother looked like?

**Ms. Fisher:** She was probably five-seven, very thin, very small. She never weighed over a hundred that I know of. I think she hit one-o-one once. She was very small boned, just like me. Dark hair, glasses. She was not very photogenic; so, in all the pictures there are, she's usually making a face or she looks funny. And she knew that. One thing she did not like was having her picture taken.

**Ms. McLeod:** Oh, really. How difficult for a public figure.

**Ms. Fisher:** Exactly. But she got to the point where she just didn't care. She didn't wear makeup. She was just a real person. She wore lipstick, and I think that came back from her childhood. You know, grandma always said, put your lipstick on before you leave the house, or something.

**Ms. McLeod:** Do you know what kind of student she was?

**Ms. Fisher:** I don't have any transcripts, but I'm sure she was an excellent student. She was very intelligent.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did she pass that on to you when you were growing up? Did she make sure you guys did your homework, got good grades?

**Ms. Fisher:** Oh, yeah. Absolutely. She took us to the libraries and wanted us to read. When she died I donated the books to the UW (University of Washington). There were over four thousand of them, I think. I don't have room here and Steven, my brother, didn't want them. Some of them I kept. And I know that she would have enjoyed that, knowing others are reading them. She had such a wide variety of books. Every subject you could think of. And we're not talking romance novels. We're talking non-fiction books.

**Ms. McLeod:** Can you kind of help me with identifying the scope of those books?

**Ms. Fisher:** There was a lot on John F. Kennedy. And lots of old books like *Grapes of Wrath*. And then big books about Hawaii, about Jewish people. I mean every single subject you can think of. It was a library.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did you feel that when you talked to your mother, or when other people talked to her, that she could recall some of these things that she had read in books?

**Ms. Fisher:** She knew everything that she read in the books. And I think that's where she got all of her intelligence, too. You'd be talking about something and she'd say, well, wait a minute, and she'd pull the book out and say, here's...

**Ms. McLeod:** She remembered?

**Ms. Fisher:** Oh, yes. And she knew where every book was, and they were in no order. They were everywhere over that apartment.

**Ms. McLeod:** So there was no theme. They weren't alphabetized by author?

**Ms. Fisher:** Oh, no, no, no. They were thrown up on shelves. Thrown on the hearth. Just everywhere. Everywhere. There was no rhyme or reason to anything.

**Ms. McLeod:** What were some of your mother's first jobs, or early professional experiences?

**Ms. Fisher:** I know that she was a courier for—and I don't know the name of it—somewhere in Seattle because my dad was going to dental school. She'd ride a bicycle, couriating stuff back and forth.

**Ms. McLeod:** She was a bike messenger in Seattle?

**Ms. Fisher:** Yes. They lived on the tide flats. They had nothing. They had a door that they used as their dining table. They were poor. My dad was poor, too. He came from a poor family in Hoquiam.

**Ms. McLeod:** That is no easy feat being a bike messenger in Seattle.

**Ms. Fisher:** I think that back then—we're talking what, nineteen fifty something—I think her route was more on the tide flat area, industrial area. I don't think it was up and down the hills of Seattle. Like where Boeing is, that area. I think it was down there.

**Ms. McLeod:** There's something, and I don't know if you know the story at all, but Rep. Jeannie Darneille had written in her journal about a story your mother told her about working for a Mr. Wingert at a refrigeration company. Do you know that story?

**Ms. Fisher:** She had mentioned it a few times. I guess he poked her in the ribs. I don't know if she was at a file cabinet or what. But when a man comes behind you and pokes you in the ribs, both sides, it's like, what do you call it, a pass? And she just turned around and slapped him.

**Ms. McLeod:** And then what happened to Mr. Wingert?

**Ms. Fisher:** I think he ended up apologizing, but I don't know. That whole story doesn't surprise me, because my aunt also did something like that to one of her bosses.

**Ms. McLeod:** Oh, really?

**Ms. Fisher:** Yes. She actually cut his tie off in an elevator.

**Ms. McLeod:** When Jeannie Darneille tells the story in her journal, which I guess your mother had told Jeannie, she said that not only did your mother smack her boss but he fell over, hit the ground. You're describing someone who's little, but she could pack a wallop.

**Ms. Fisher:** Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

**Ms. McLeod:** Any other instances like that?

**Ms. Fisher:** No. Not that I know of. She was not a violent person. That was a reaction to "Why are you touching me? What do you think you're doing?"

**Ms. McLeod:** Were there any other jobs that you remember?

**Ms. Fisher:** I don't know. I know that she worked and my dad went to school. I don't know how long. Basically, when my parents got divorced, we didn't talk about any of that stuff any more.

**Ms. McLeod:** In what year did they get divorced?

**Ms. Fisher:** 1978.

**Ms. McLeod:** You would have been eighteen?

**Ms. Fisher:** I was eighteen. Exactly the day I turned eighteen, yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** I read that your mother attended the University of Puget Sound while your dad was getting his dental degree. Is that correct?

**Ms. Fisher:** I don't know. I think it was pre-med—not pre-med, they don't have pre-med there—he was just trying to get things to get into dental school, I think. Pre whatever it's called. That's where they met.

**Ms. McLeod:** Do you know what she was pursuing at that time?

**Ms. Fisher:** Political Science.

**Ms. McLeod:** Do you know how far along she was? How many years she attended?

**Ms. Fisher:** A year or two, I'm not sure. I'd say a year.

**Ms. McLeod:** During your parent's marriage, they were both involved in politics in some way. Can you tell me about their involvement at all? Do you remember?

**Ms. Fisher:** When they were married, our whole life was brought up around fundraising and politicians—lots of people around, organizing fundraisers and having fundraisers at our house. We had a pretty big house back then.

**Ms. McLeod:** Where did you live?

**Ms. Fisher:** Down on Aurora Avenue in Tacoma. In the Narrows area.

**Ms. McLeod:** A nice area?

**Ms. Fisher:** Yes. Very nice. My dad was a dentist.

**Ms. McLeod:** Didn't you have a home with a pool?

**Ms. Fisher:** Oh, yes. We used to have parties in the pool. Fundraisers. I remember one we did; it was a pancake breakfast. It was fun because we got to make shark fins and put those in the pool. We'd do all kinds of stuff.

**Ms. McLeod:** Do you remember whom any of those fundraisers were for?

**Ms. Fisher:** Let's see. Harold Moss, Norm Dicks.

**Ms. McLeod:** Norm Dicks who's now a U.S. Congressman?

**Ms. Fisher:** Yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** Who was Harold Moss?

**Ms. Fisher:** Harold Moss was—he's a city councilman now—but I think that was when he was mayor.

**Ms. McLeod:** What about the present Tacoma mayor Bill Baarsma, or would that have been later?

**Ms. Fisher:** I don't remember any of Bill Baarsma's fundraisers being there because it would have been later. But he was always there. I grew up around all these people.

**Ms. McLeod:** Would your parents hire caterers?

**Ms. Fisher:** No, no. We'd do it all. My dad liked to cook Chinese food, and we had built a Chinese kitchen with gas woks and everything. For a lot of the fundraisers he would do all the Chinese food. We'd prep for two or three days chopping. My dad is a fantastic Chinese cook. He took lessons from Esther Chin up in Seattle. And that's what people came for, his food.

**Ms. McLeod:** How many people do you think attended these fundraisers?

**Ms. Fisher:** Oh, hundreds. It was a big house.

**Ms. McLeod:** What do you remember about your mother's dedication to certain politicians?

**Ms. Fisher:** There's a story that Congressman Norm Dicks told at my Mother's memorial service. It was about my mom calling him over to meet before he was a congressman, when he was running. She interviewed him, and others. I don't know where she got the clout to do that. Because when I was growing up she was an accountant in my dad's office. That was her work.

**Ms. McLeod:** In '68, when you only would have been eight years old, you probably don't have any memory of this, but your mother left to go to the Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

**Ms. Fisher:** Oh, I remember it, yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** Was it unusual for your mom to leave you kids home?

**Ms. Fisher:** No. She was always very busy.

**Ms. McLeod:** Her involvement in the '68 convention has become a story that people tell about her. Can tell what you know about her involvement?

**Ms. Fisher:** She never really would tell anyone, not even me. I heard rumors that she was arrested and that the Democratic Party had to bail them out. Because if my mom saw somebody being hit, abused in any way—and that's what those police were doing back then to the protestors—she would have stepped in and done something. But I don't know. She was real funny about stuff like that. She wouldn't talk about it. We'd have to go back and see if she has an arrest record. If she did, she probably wouldn't have been a state rep, though. I can't imagine that she was ever arrested, but it sounds like she was.

**Ms. McLeod:** I haven't read about her arrest, but I have read that she was in the park and she did see violence and she did object to it. Actually, in one article, it said that she had a four-letter expletive written across her forehead.

**Ms. Fisher:** Probably. I wouldn't doubt that. I wouldn't doubt that at all. She was very anti-Vietnam, and that's what that was about.

**Ms. McLeod:** What were her feelings about Richard Nixon?

**Ms. Fisher:** She couldn't stand him. She thought he was crooked from day one. My mom was a very good judge of character.

**Ms. McLeod:** Do you think that she was concerned with telling her children things that, I don't know, she might have seen as too extreme to them?

**Ms. Fisher:** No. No. Because we knew what she was. We knew how she was and acted. We kind of lived through all that stuff. She would just stand up for what she believed.

**Ms. McLeod:** She would have been like forty-three at the time, I think in '68?

**Ms. Fisher:** Around forty-something, yes. She was thirty-five when she had me.

**Ms. McLeod:** She had her children later in life?

**Ms. Fisher:** Well, no, it didn't start out that way. She had Sam. Gosh, when was he born? I can't tell you that. Steve was born in '58 and I was born in '60.

**Ms. McLeod:** Why do you think your mother pursued politics?

**Ms. Fisher:** I know that she was always interested in politics. That's what I know her life was about. I think she felt like they could make a difference. A lot of people would say that her ability to succeed in politics was due to naivety on her part because she couldn't be bought. Nobody could buy her. Nowadays a lot of politicians are bought by lobbyists or whatever. Nobody could buy her, nobody could buy her opinion, nobody could buy anything.

**Ms. McLeod:** What drove that?

**Ms. Fisher:** I think it was her internal sense of integrity.

**Ms. McLeod:** What do you think drove that or what created that?

**Ms. Fisher:** I don't know. Part of it might have been her upbringing. That's how she raised me, too.

**Ms. McLeod:** Was there a real right and a wrong? Is that kind of what she taught you?

**Ms. Fisher:** There's a right and a wrong for yourself, but allow other people to make their own right and wrongs, more like it. It wasn't like, yes, there's a definite right and definite wrong to this, and that person's wrong. Period. End of discussion. She always allowed other people to speak and to have their own opinions. She never really tried to influence their opinions. She believed in freedom of the mind, of choice. But she had her own personal set of ethics, yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** You mentioned your brother Sam, and I know that your mother lost Sam in an accident when he suffocated in a refrigerator?

**Ms. Fisher:** No, it wasn't a refrigerator, it was a toy box. There were the two of them, my brother and a friend, at a neighbor's house, two of them died. I

wasn't even born yet. The two boys got inside a toy box that had a latch on it in a garage. The mother was not watching them. The latch came down, and from what I understand it only took a couple hours. They had already called the police and they had started the search because the boys were missing, and they found them a few hours later, in the toy box, both of them dead.

**Ms. McLeod:** How do you think your brother Sam's death impacted your mother your mother's character, her convictions and her compassions for others?

**Ms. Fisher:** She had a lot of compassion for people who would lose children. We'd be watching the news program and hear about somebody missing or losing children through different accidents, and she would absolutely tear up. She would never talk about Sam. Very rarely would she talk about him. I don't even know that much about him and I could tell that it was such a sensitive thing—that was her first born child—that I didn't bring it up too much. I wanted to ask all kinds of questions, but I didn't feel I should. So the only thing I really have on all that is from watching her reactions to things like that. She wouldn't talk to me about it. She talked to other people who had lost children. She'd help other people all the time who had lost children, so she'd open up to them to try to help.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did that event have an impact on any of her legislative work?

**Ms. Fisher:** She'd probably sign a bill that would protect children, but she didn't go that route. She did the transportation stuff.

**Ms. McLeod:** What about when your parents divorced when you were eighteen in '78 after thirty-two years of marriage? How do you think that that divorce impacted your mother's professional choices?

**Ms. Fisher:** Well, it gave her a lot more time to pursue other things. A lot more time because she wasn't working for him anymore, and she wasn't taking care of him anymore. You know, running a dental practice takes quite a bit of energy, and it's not just the one person. So she had a lot of time and, basically, she needed a job for the money.

I know that when they first got divorced she worked for minimum wage for the Census Bureau, taking counts. That would have been, what, 1980,

'79 or '80? I'm pretty sure it was the minimum wage. That was her first job after the divorce.

**Ms. McLeod:** What about—and I don't even know if these are paid positions—the Pierce County Planning Commission?

**Ms. Fisher:** I don't think that was a paid position. Most of what she did wasn't paid. Even what they paid her at the state was not great. I made more money at my job as a payroll supervisor than she did at hers.

**Ms. McLeod:** And so your mom, when she was working on the Pierce County Planning Commission, that would have been concurrent with her marriage and maybe the end of her marriage, because she held that position for nine years, and I know it was prior to joining the House in '83. And then she began doing the Census Bureau work, you think, in 1980?

**Ms. Fisher:** I think it was '79 because I think the actual census numbers came out in '80. They're every ten years.

**Ms. McLeod:** And then she had a force of friends that banded together to encourage her to run for the House?

**Ms. Fisher:** Bill Baarsma, Doris Evans, Bob Evans, all of those.

**Ms. McLeod:** Can you tell any of that story? Do you remember?

**Ms. Fisher:** I can't remember the exact time, place, date, nothing like that. After my parents divorced we would always get together with all those other people for the holidays. That was our family. Everyone was always involved in politics. That whole group.

**Ms. McLeod:** Bob Evans at the time was a city councilman for Tacoma?

**Ms. Fisher:** No. That came later.

**Ms. McLeod:** So he became a Tacoma city councilperson and Bill Baarsma obviously became mayor. Doris became Ruth's assistant in the Legislature.

**Ms. Fisher:** Right. There was like Brian Ebersole who became mayor, too, later on and Baarsma. Harold Moss, Art Wang. A lot of people. Oh, Ron Culpepper, he was the other one, he's now a judge. Ron and Wendy Culpepper were very involved.

It's so long ago, I'm trying to remember. There was a whole band of people. Carol Larson, Darrell Larson.

**Ms. McLeod:** And their kids, too? You'd all get together during the holidays?

**Ms. Fisher:** Oh, yes, yes. That was our family. Because my dad had started another family, and so we didn't go with him, we stayed with my mom.

**Ms. McLeod:** Do you remember people saying, "Come on Ruth, you've got to run." That kind of thing?

**Ms. Fisher:** I remember her all of a sudden saying she was going to run for office. I remember the exact night. We were up at a place called Lorenzo's during election night, and she was so scared. She didn't think she was going to win. It was her first go 'round.

**Ms. McLeod:** Was this the primary?

**Ms. Fisher:** No. This was the final. I think it was. You know, I cannot remember if she had an opponent, to be honest with you, or if it was just the primary and she had already won at that point or what. I can't remember.

**Ms. McLeod:** I think the primaries were pretty tense because there were quite a few people running for the Twenty-seventh District seat. And then she definitely came out ahead.

**Ms. Fisher:** I just remember when she won. We were at Lorenzo's, and at one point I said, "Mom, I'm going to throw you in the trash can just to calm you down. You need to get away from here." She was just totally uptight. So, it was pretty funny. She said, "Oh, please do!"

**Ms. McLeod:** So this was something she really wanted?

**Ms. Fisher:** Oh, yes. Yes. Then we went down to where they do the election results. We were down there and then we were at Culpepper's house. Big party there. And she won!

**Ms. McLeod:** That must have been the night that she won the election.

**Ms. Fisher:** Yes. It was. It was. She was so relieved and so happy. She just didn't think that enough people knew her, or knew who she was as a person, I guess, because back then they didn't do the television ads. It wasn't like that. It was just yard signs, and she didn't

have very many yard signs. She only used yard signs once. After that, there was no need to.

**Ms. McLeod:** Why?

**Ms. Fisher:** No one would run against her that was worth anything. Also, she that yard signs were “yard trash.”

**Ms. McLeod:** Your mom was born and raised here in Tacoma, when you were growing up or even into adulthood what kinds of city offerings did she want for the town? And what were the kind of services and cultural offerings that she wanted for her children, those kinds of things?

**Ms. Fisher:** What she used to say to me a lot was that she wanted to leave this place better for her children than she came into. She was very involved in Union Station; all that historic stuff down there. The 509 Bridge. Obviously, the Tacoma Narrows

Bridge. I think that’s kind of what drove her, to be honest with you, because she used to say that all the time—“I’m trying to leave this world a better place for you children.” And I don’t think she meant her just biological children, she meant children, the next generation.

**Ms. McLeod:** Yes. Some amazing things happened while she was in office in which she played a part. Do you want to name some of those things for me?

**Ms. Fisher:** The biggest one would be the second Narrows Bridge and the Frank Chopp problem.

**Ms. McLeod:** That was a conflict that reached a fever pitch more towards the end of her time in office.

**Ms. Fisher:** That’s basically why she quit. She just ran out of steam. She couldn’t fight any more.

**Ms. McLeod:** You’re referring to the split between public/private partnership for the bridge, which your mother supported, and a state-funded, more public funding of the bridge, which was supported by the Speaker and a few others.

**Ms. Fisher:** Yes. She didn’t think that the people should have to pay for all of it. She didn’t want that. She thought it was wrong, and obviously people are pretty ticked off now about it.

**Ms. McLeod:** Yes. And that’s something that she really wanted to see go the other way and it didn’t.

**Ms. Fisher:** She did. She did.

**Ms. McLeod:** Other things happened in Tacoma, in which a lot of people played a part, but there was the art museum and there was the glass museum. And then the Union Station was a huge renovation project. That became a beautiful federal building, which now houses several offices and people can rent part of it for functions.

**Ms. Fisher:** I remember her telling me. It was right when she first took office. She went to Washington, DC and got actually handed the check for the new dome on the Union Station. She brought it back here.

**Ms. McLeod:** That renovation was something that she helped push through right away.

**Ms. Fisher:** Big. Yes. Big

**Ms. McLeod:** That must have felt really exciting to her to be able to have done that for her town, for her city. You live in this town. Are there things that you drive by and say, “That’s mom.”

**Ms. Fisher:** Oh, absolutely.

**Ms. McLeod:** And what are those things?

**Ms. Fisher:** The 509 Bridge. Downtown Tacoma. A lot of it is just downtown Tacoma. Definitely the Narrows Bridge.

This is kind of a sad story, but my dad lives down that way, and I remember driving by Christmas Eve or Christmas night and the Narrows Bridge was all lit up because they put colored lights on while they’re constructing it. And I looked at it and said, “Look, mom, there’s your bridge,” and I started crying. And I do that most every time I drive across the 509.

This is my mom’s bridge. She’s got her name on it. They inscribed their names in it somewhere because a friend of mine saw it one day. And he says, it says Ruth Fisher—he was working on it, he’s the electrician—and he said, “It says Ruth Fisher on here, I’d better go see Joan. It’s a sign. I need to talk to Joan.” He was a funny guy. So I guess they were the first ones who crossed the 509 Bridge.

**Ms. McLeod:** Your mother?

**Ms. Fisher:** Yes and Norm Dicks and a whole group of them, yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did they walk across or did they drive?

**Ms. Fisher:** They drove. It's a long walk. It's not that big of a bridge, but it's cool looking. The design of it, really.

**Ms. McLeod:** She really fought for the architecture of the 509, because the originally proposed architecture—a box girder construction—but it's not very attractive. And she came out publicly and said, we can have that anywhere, but what I want to see is a cable-stayed bridge? Is that right?

**Ms. Fisher:** Yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** Which is really beautiful. Your mother had a good feeling for not only how to get things done, it seems, but for beauty.

**Ms. Fisher:** Yes. Oh, yes. She was very into art. She loved art.

**Ms. McLeod:** What do you think were the political issues nearest and dearest to your mother's heart? And what about those issues inspired her tireless dedication?

**Ms. Fisher:** Oh, boy. Nearest and dearest to her heart was the Tacoma Narrows Bridge. I mean, even from the first day she took office, there were pictures—and I have them here—artists renderings of different types of bridges to put with the other Narrows Bridge. She had been fighting for that thing from day one. It took twenty years to get it built.

And the light rail, too. That was another big one. I remember going with her to Portland and to California, probably in the early eighties, and going to look at all the different systems they have, like BART. So that was right when she started, too. So she did see the fruition of one of her dreams before she died. She never got to see the bridge.

**Ms. McLeod:** So she went into the Legislature knowing this was her agenda, knowing that she wanted to serve on the Transportation Committee, of which she became chair and later co-chair.

**Ms. Fisher:** Yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** Then she was named to the Transportation Commission by Governor Locke, but didn't get to serve very long before she became ill.

Your mother did a lot of work, much of which is documented in newspapers and of course documented in the Legislature. Your mother was widely admired. Like you said, she was reelected time and time again,

and she served for twenty years. But press about her decisions wasn't always popular. Do you know how that impacted her, to see herself depicted negatively in the news?

**Ms. Fisher:** I think it made me more mad than it did her. There were a few real choice comic strips that they made of her that just really ticked me off.

**Ms. McLeod:** Can you describe them?

**Ms. Fisher:** There was one with her on the 509 Bridge, and they had her made out to be a troll with long fingernails and, like grabbing. And then Norm Dicks is in a car, and Norm says, "What are we going to do about the troll?" Stuff like that. I got offended by that more than she did. She took it in stride.

**Ms. McLeod:** Why did your mother retire when she retired and what were the events surrounding her retirement?

**Ms. Fisher:** From what I saw, personally, I think that she already had cancer. I think she couldn't fight any more; art of that that happened with Frank Chopp. She just lost her steam. She could not fight any more. I remember when she decided to retire. She was so depressed because she felt that she did not get everything done that she wanted to get done. She didn't know that she was dying at that point, but I think she had the cancer already, because when she got diagnosed it was third stage. She was not one to go to doctors. She would avoid doctors at all costs. Just from archival pictures and news stories, she looked totally different. I saw my mom kind of deteriorate. I was worried about her being so damned depressed. But it was because as she kept sitting here saying "I just didn't get enough done. I didn't finish everything I wanted to finish." I think she was disappointed in herself.

**Ms. McLeod:** When you could see her deteriorating—you could see photos—what was it you were seeing?

**Ms. Fisher:** I was seeing her skin change, just everything about her. I would notice things because she was my mother, about how she'd hold her side or she didn't have breath anymore. She not only had lung cancer, she had COPD [Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease], but she was never diagnosed.

**Ms. McLeod:** Had you asked her to go to a doctor?

**Ms. Fisher:** Of course! Of course! In fact, when she broke her ankle during the Sound Transit opening the light rail opening, I asked her doctor to get a lung X-ray. Because she had to have surgery on her ankle, she had to have pins put in it and stuff. And I had asked her doctor to take an X-ray, and she did, but she didn't see anything. And that was only a year later that she was diagnosed with third-stage cancer.

**Ms. McLeod:** So that was in the summer of 2003 that she broke her ankle? The opening of light rail in Tacoma?

**Ms. Fisher:** Yes. I remember it was summer and she was here for six weeks. And it wasn't fun.

**Ms. McLeod:** Because your mother was a person who liked to be doing things?

**Ms. Fisher:** Yes. She could not stand to be held down or tied down. She wanted her freedom.

**Ms. McLeod:** And how had she broken her ankle?

**Ms. Fisher:** She told me—I was not there at the time—that she slipped off a curb. I think she was so excited to see that train. It was when she was getting on for the initial ride on the light rail. The maiden voyage or whatever they call it. She slipped off the curb and fell, and she got on that train anyway with that broken ankle and she rode the whole thing. They ended up having to call an ambulance at the end for her—that's how strong she was—because they knew that she had broken her ankle. But, by God, she was going to ride that train!

**Ms. McLeod:** Who was she with?

**Ms. Fisher:** I don't know. I know there were a lot of Sound Transit people there and they're the ones who called the ambulance. And I got the phone call. She was going to ride that train no matter what.

**Ms. McLeod:** You mentioned that when she retired she sat here and said there were other things she wanted to do. Can you tell me what some of those things were?

**Ms. Fisher:** I think that would be the correct funding for the second Tacoma Narrows Bridge.

**Ms. McLeod:** The correct funding?

**Ms. Fisher:** In her eyes, the correct funding. Where people aren't shelling out tolls and doing these sticker things.

**Ms. McLeod:** What were the other things?

**Ms. Fisher:** I don't know. It was so strange to see my mother like that to begin with that I didn't delve into it too much. I just knew if she wanted to say something, she'd tell me.

**Ms. McLeod:** Was your mother usually more upbeat about what she was getting done, or why was it strange?

**Ms. Fisher:** Oh, yes. It was strange because it was almost like she knew that she wasn't going to be around very much longer. She had no diagnosis or anything at that point. But she was quitting work, and she just kept saying, "I didn't accomplish everything I wanted to get done." And she was disappointed in herself.

**Ms. McLeod:** As you listened to your mother's memorial service,—as her friends shared memories of not only the work she did but stories of her acerbic wit—what stories of your mom did you find best reflected her character and attitudes towards political work?

**Ms. Fisher:** I think the story showing her wit and her commitment at the same time would be the Frank Chopp one where she said—she was going to speak about funding or something for the bridges and all the roads—and she says, "Well, I wasn't sure that you were going to turn my microphone on." And then she was downright serious after that, saying we need to solve all these transportation problems. That would show her wit and her commitment all at one time. That's a great one. There's actual footage on that. I love that.

**Ms. McLeod:** It's symbolic of her saying, I didn't think that you really wanted to hear from me.

**Ms. Fisher:** And it was not only on tape for all the public to see, she was saying it right in the Chamber. Frank Chopp is there, saying, "You can speak, Ruth Fisher." And she just said it out in the open. I couldn't believe it! She was not afraid of anybody. She didn't care if he was the Speaker. She had respect for the office and the person, but I don't know, everybody to her, no matter who you were, was a person. Big, little, rich, poor, it doesn't matter.

**Ms. McLeod:** I see. She saw them all on the same plane.

**Ms. Fisher:** On the same level. Everybody's on the same level.

**Ms. McLeod:** So at the same time someone's not going to intimidate her, no one is too low for her to stand up for?

**Ms. Fisher:** Oh, absolutely not. Absolutely not. She always fought for the underdog.

**Ms. McLeod:** Do you have examples of that? The fighting for the underdog?

**Ms. Fisher:** Sure. Actually, there's one I learned about not too long ago. It was right after she died. One of my neighbors came up to me—and she didn't know that Ruth was my mother, and some of us were out talking about her. When my neighbor, Helga, realized she was my mother, she said, "Your mother was the only person who would help me with my son." Her son is in Western State Hospital. It had to be over ten years ago from what she was saying, and they wouldn't allow the children to have Christmas presents. And my mom thought that was just wrong. I guess Helga had talked to other politicians, big congressmen at the time. I can't tell you who they were, but nobody would do anything. She called up my mother, whom she didn't know, and told her the story, and my mom went to bat for her and got her son, who was in Western State Hospital, a Christmas present!

**Ms. McLeod:** What kind of facility is Western State?

**Ms. Fisher:** Western State is a mental hospital. It's a state-run hospital. But for some reason, they weren't allowing Christmas presents. Helga said, "I owe you big time." I said, "You don't owe me anything. My mom did that because she wanted to." That was my mom. That's what she did. Yes. There's all kinds of stories about her. She was always rooting for the underdog. Always.

**Ms. McLeod:** It must have been really interesting for you because you're the daughter of this woman who's also a very public figure. So you see Ruth from the daughter's side and then you see Ruth coming back to you in the newspapers...

**Ms. Fisher:** And I hear all the people bitching and complaining. There's a lot of people that I knew who did not like her. And it's very hard to work with people like that. Very difficult.

**Ms. McLeod:** For people who were opposed to your mother, what was the nature of their opposition?

**Ms. Fisher:** I'd have to say because my mom voted for gas taxes because that's how transportation is funded, with the gas tax. Most people don't realize that. They think it comes out of the big general fund. That's not the way it works. So every time gas taxes would be raised or something, they would blame her for taking money out of their pockets. I used to hear that all the time.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did it make you sort of cringe?

**Ms. Fisher:** It would make me angry.

**Ms. McLeod:** How did your mom deal with it?

**Ms. Fisher:** She didn't care. She knew she was right. I'd go to her all the time, and I'd say, "You know this person at my work, or wherever, who doesn't like you because of this." And she says, "Now wait a minute, they don't know what they're talking about. Here's why it has to come through the gas tax and da, da, da." She always showed me the truth. And then I'd just try to ignore them, but, boy, it got to me at times.

**Ms. McLeod:** She must have had a kind of shield that she wore that allowed her to do the work she did under criticism.

**Ms. Fisher:** Yes. She always ended up coming up with an intelligent reason for the thing she was doing. But a lot of those talk shows out there were full of crap. And a lot of people would listen to those. I don't even know the names of them. But it would fill people's heads with all kinds of garbage, and I'd hear all that stuff.

There was one of those guys, I think, who really was after her. I don't know who it was, but I remember hearing about it.

**Ms. McLeod:** But yet your mother was reelected nine times to go on to serve the Twenty-seventh District for twenty years.

**Ms. Fisher:** A lot of people liked her. There's people who believe that we're one people and we need to help each other in public this and public that. Then there are these people who just want to drive their own cars, who want to have their big houses and do their thing. There are people who care about the city, the state and the environment. But a lot of people nowadays don't.

**Ms. McLeod:** But those people who cared recognized that she cared and they maintained a majority.

The Twenty-seventh District has always been pretty much a Democratic stronghold. But within your mother's time, Tacoma went through some political difficulties. In the seventies, some years before your mom was elected to the House, some members of Tacoma's City Council were recalled.

**Ms. Fisher:** Yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** Can you tell me your mother's involvement in that and about what year that was happening?

**Ms. Fisher:** Sure. I'd have to say, and I can't remember exactly the year, but my parents were married because we ran the recall out of my dad's dental office.

**Ms. McLeod:** So that must have been in 1976 or so?

**Ms. Fisher:** I want to say '76. That's what I want to say, but I can't remember.

**Ms. McLeod:** Do you remember what the issue was?

**Ms. Fisher:** I remember working on it. I remember doing mailers and all kinds of stuff. It had to do with—I want to say corruption—but there was other stuff going on, too, right after that, with a sheriff that we had here. George Janovich. It was almost intermingled in my brain. I think he went to jail. Then there were people involved in the mafia and burning down the Top O' the Ocean restaurant. Oh, yes, it had to do with money. It was, what do they call it, federal racketeering. It was federal.

**Ms. McLeod:** I'm going to be interviewing people like Rep. Dennis Flannigan, now serving in you mom's former seat, and people who were around during that time. I think you mentioned Bob Evans

and Doris Evans, and all those people began working together during that era of the recall.

**Ms. Fisher:** That's when they all met, I think. It was during that recall. Mayor Bill Baarsma, he was there; a professor at UPS at the time.

**Ms. McLeod:** And that recall was done out of your father's dental office?

**Ms. Fisher:** It was a pretty big place back then, so we had one whole room. It wasn't in his dental office. He had a building that had different suites in it.

**Ms. McLeod:** That's a big deal for your parents to have taken that on. We're talking about some scary people.

**Ms. Fisher:** Exactly. And I think the George Janovich thing happened right after that.

**Ms. McLeod:** What would you hope that your mother is most remembered for in terms of her public contributions?

**Ms. Fisher:** Just that she did make a difference. If you look at the Narrows Bridge, that got there somehow. She did that. She was part of that. And that's a huge thing if you just sit back and look at it. I mean, it took a pretty strong, powerful person to do that. Yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** Are you in awe of your mother's strength and power?

**Ms. Fisher:** Absolutely. I wish I had some of it. I have some of it, but I wish I had it all.

**Ms. McLeod:** Thank you so much. You've done such a great job.

*End of interview*



*Jeannie Darneille is a State Senator for the 27th Legislative District. She was first elected to the State House in 2000 and served with Ruth, eventually becoming good friends after Ruth retired from the Legislature. During this interview Senator Darneille was still serving in the State House.*

**Ms. McLeod:** After you moved to Tacoma in '79, how did you begin your involvement in local politics and what events led to you to running for the House of Representatives?

**Ms. Darneille:** Good question. I had been involved in feminist issues prior to moving here, and one of my first positions of employment was with the YWCA here in town. Of course, the Y is notoriously political and, and involved with all kinds of good causes, one of which was sponsoring something called the Tacoma Women's Choir. I was singing in the bass section of the Tacoma Women's Choir. We did an awful lot of political fundraisers and other kinds of community events where we would perform. So that was actually one of my first forays into this area here, locally.

I then had the good fortune of going to a presentation, probably in what would have been '81, with a woman named Alberta Canada who's another whole subject that you ought to undertake, but she was a local community leader. She gave a presentation on the power of women in public policy. Impacting public policy. She challenged an audience of roughly six hundred, the majority of whom were women, to leave that place and go out and commit themselves to twenty hours of work on one issue. Not the shotgun approach, but the very focused approach. If solving the nuclear arms race was not doable in twenty hours, then to find something that was, whether it was walking around your block to find out if all the curbs were cut or finding out if kids could get to school safely, those kinds of things.

Well, I happened to leave that place and drive past a political campaign office and there was a parking space. I pulled in, went inside and said I'd like to

volunteer for twenty hours. This was the first part of October. So, I basically spent the last month before that campaign ended on the phone trying to motivate voters to get out and vote for Mike Lowry for the U.S. Senate.

So, in the context of that work though, I obviously put in many more than twenty hours, but I really met some phenomenal people, one of whom coincidentally was very good friends with Ruth. She was the co-chair of that campaign in Pierce County. Doris Evans was her name. So Doris really never let me get too far away from campaigning after that. She thought I was quite a plum. So I got involved with the party and became a precinct committee officer. Then I started attending central committee meetings and getting involved in that way.

So I was vice chair of the party in, I think it might have been '93, and I had started thinking about running for office myself when my mother became ill with breast cancer. So, I basically dropped everything in my life and just focused on that. She's now been deceased for eleven years. When I came back I had the opportunity to pick and choose what I might really be interested in picking up again. So I did get re-invigorated with the party, but I didn't run for a central committee position.

In my work, I am the director of a non-profit organization, and running for office and keeping your job is really only at the graciousness of your board of directors and the quality of your staff to carry on in your absence. I was very fortunate on both those angles to have a supportive board, and so I ran for office in 2000.

**Ms. McLeod:** What was that non-profit?

**Ms. Darneille:** I still direct the Pierce County AIDS Foundation. I've been doing that now for nearly eighteen years.

**Ms. McLeod:** You mentioned Doris Evans. To put it in context, wasn't she the wife of then Tacoma city councilman—was his name Bill or Bob Evans?

**Ms. Darneille:** That was Bob Evans. Doris is now deceased, but she was Bob's wife and had also been Ruth's legislative assistant during a few sessions down in Olympia, and was one of her dearest friends.

**Ms. McLeod:** One of the stories that I read is that Doris and Bob really worked on getting Ruth to run for the House. Do you recall when you first met Ruth and in what capacity? What were your early impressions of her?

**Ms. Darneille:** I first remember Ruth at a large meeting. It would have been, I'm sure, a Pierce County Democrats meeting or maybe a 27th District Democrats meeting. It would have been something like one of the caucuses. She was already a legislator by that time and struck me as being one tough lady. She was very admired. That's all I can remember.

**Ms. McLeod:** What about later on? I think in '85, when you were an aide for Senator Lorraine Wojahn (27th LD) in '85, Ruth had already entered the House of Representatives at that time. I know the Senate is separate from the House, but Ruth would have been with the Legislature just a couple years at that time. Did you find yourself interacting with Ruth during the time you were working for Senator Wojahn?

**Ms. Darneille:** I'll tell you something that happened that intervened. I actually moved about this time of year, during the fall of '84. I purchased a home in Tacoma's north end, near the University of Puget Sound, and Ruth lived right behind me in the apartments. So we shared an alley. When I went to work for Senator Wojahn, I already knew Ruth, at least in passing, and we nodded and said hello and those kinds of things.

But I remember going to work, almost on my first day, and asking the Senator, "When do you have your meetings with Representative Wang and Representative Fisher? Is that something you would like me to organize? Do you do that on a weekly basis?" And Senator Wojahn very quickly let me know that that was not something she was interested in doing. I was absolutely shocked. Of course, I was coming out of being a district activist, and I thought that was how it worked down there. I thought for sure my representatives and senator were talking to each other. So I was pretty blown away by that, and it's actually been instrumental in my own work, now for the last six years, in making sure that I don't make that same mistake, and to actually make time and be intentioned about talking with my colleagues.

**Ms. McLeod:** I noticed, reading your biography, that you'd been involved in the National Organization

for Women (NOW), if not still involved. And you're a member of Women In Government (WIG). I also noticed that the number of women since the time Ruth was in office in the House of Representatives, from '83 to 2003, nearly doubled in those twenty years. As I was researching, I found Tacoma News Tribune articles written in the mid-eighties that took note—in a way I don't think is meant to be sexist—that, wow, these women actually have a professional background that they're bringing their legislative work. There was almost a...

**Ms. Darneille:** Dismissiveness.

**Ms. McLeod:** Almost a total surprise that they might have this background.

**Ms. Darneille:** They still say that.

**Ms. McLeod:** And then the article went on to quote some female legislators who said, "We can work on a nonpartisan basis, maybe better than some of our male counterparts. We really want to get the job done. We can multitask and we can collaborate." I guess my question is how do you experience the dynamics of the influx of women in the House of Representatives, or in the Legislature in general?

**Ms. Darneille:** Washington has had such a high percentage of women legislators. We were first in the nation in the highest percentage of women serving of any Legislature in the country for many years. Now we're down third or fourth in that queue, and I think we're losing ground quite rapidly, in fact. So I think, in fact, that the Washington Legislature is almost—I won't say gender neutral because I think there always will be the person who is mildly surprised, as you described, or who is condescending and patronizing and even sexist. And there are people who exhibit that. Not to me more than once, because I'm rather confrontive of it. I would say, though, that most women legislators are not particularly confrontive of it and might not even define themselves as being feminist, nor did they come out of the feminist movement to run for office. In fact, that idea would probably be offensive to many of the women in the Legislature now.

I think Washington is losing ground. I think it's fairly neutral now. We certainly have a lot of women in very powerful positions now, but I don't think it's really made an issue of. In other words, I don't think

people hold women back, nor do I think women take advantage of the situation.

**Ms. McLeod:** Can you share any particular moments of Ruth that sort of illustrate the ‘tough broad’ in her, and in what ways do you think she impacted other legislators?

**Ms. Darneille:** Oh, gosh. I could probably tell you dozens of stories about the ‘tough broad.’ You’re right, you’re absolutely right. She did not cotton to fools of any gender. I think she was particularly concerned though about women who failed to make the grade for her, who failed to do their homework, or who felt that there was some need for utilizing stereotypically female wiles to get their way. When she made up her mind about somebody as either lacking in intelligence or lacking in smarts, she both let them know it and rarely changed her mind.

I’m pretty sure that Ruth didn’t particularly like me for a long time. There were times when if I were working in my backyard and Ruth came out to get in her car, I might dip into my house and she might scurry off to her car rather than have a discussion. I don’t know now, I never asked her directly what she thought of me at that time. Basically, in one of those conversations late in her life, I asked her if we could start from scratch, if she could let all that go aside. I didn’t ask her what it was, but she was not a particularly friendly person in the sense that she didn’t seek you out to create relationships.

That did bleed over into her work in the sense that she had very high expectations of people around here. When staff failed to make the grade in some way she was very confrontive of that. If you were incompetent in some way, she let you know it.

When I first went to the Legislature, in caucus meetings, in this case the House Democratic caucus—that would have been at that time when I was first elected; it was a tie, so there were forty-nine of us—we would go into the caucus room and I bravely sat next to Ruth in the caucus. Usually, it’s like a classroom where you get your seat. But oh, my gosh, Ruth—here she was a little, tiny person by comparison with most of the people in the room—and there were only six leather chairs with armrests. The others were these stackable chairs, very uncomfortable, unpadded. And so those six chairs were quite sought after. Well, Ruth had her chair, and anybody who sat in that chair found out very soon when she arrived

that they were out of that chair, and she was in it. I did make the mistake, as I say, of sitting next to her my first few caucus meetings and then I realized that she was not only unrelenting in her criticism of things going on in the caucus, but she was pretty loud about it. It wasn’t like having a little aside. It was like, “Does that woman even know how to wear a scarf?” Or, “Why doesn’t that guy stop dripping grease on his tie,” to “This is an incompetent person,” to “I hate this policy; what kind of a crazy person would think of that?”

**Ms. McLeod:** And the crazy person could be sitting there?

**Ms. Darneille:** Oh, my gosh, yes. Often, if not always, within earshot. So it was embarrassing, really, to sit next to her for a while. And then I realized, okay, these people were all used to her, and I’m the newbie here. Anyway, it was fine after that.

She was a very difficult person to talk with if you had parted ways on a decision or on a philosophy or on a particular issue. She and I definitely did part ways on the issue of the Narrows Bridge financing. She thought I had gone to the dark side, and even in her last days when we talked about that, her dander was up again that I had made the wrong decision.

**Ms. McLeod:** We should put that into context a little bit. That is something that fortunately for a researcher, for me, it’s really easy to find out about because it was widely publicized. So I’m going to give a little synopsis and you just break in if I say something incorrectly. At that time the issue of Tacoma Narrows second bridge had been a heated political debate probably since 1996, although the need for it and talks about it had been happening earlier, and one of the issues being Ruth supported public/private financing of the bridge, and Speaker Frank Chopp did not. At some point it passed through the Legislature—I should know the year—but it passed through as a public/privately financed bridge. But when you came on board, 2001, the issue had reached its peak, and there was a kind of political stalemate occurring where Speaker Chopp really wanted this to be public financed, and Ruth was still holding on. Not just Ruth, Mary Margaret Haugen, the Senator, was chairperson of Transportation in the Senate at that time. Ruth was chairperson of Transportation in the House. So when you say you had fallen over to the dark side,

can you explain what this issue had become to Ruth at this point?

**Ms. Darneille:** It definitely was a contest of wills between Ruth and Speaker Chopp. She felt she had many examples of successful public/private partnerships. And the way she crunched the numbers—I have no doubt that she worked very hard and she worked the staff very hard to provide her with the information she needed—but she felt so firmly that this was the only path to go. That is, it speeded up the process, that it answered some of the political challenges, because it involved private financing and therefore private profit, but also maybe sped up the whole process in a way that would be cheaper down the road in the long run.

**Ms. McLeod:** Because her argument was, if this is slowed down, if we go through public financing, government bidding process, every year, every delay adds more dollars?

**Ms. Darneille:** Right.

**Ms. McLeod:** So if we go with partly private funding, then the process is speeded up.

However, the argument against the public/private split is that contractors could profit a great deal—they can charge more money; it doesn't go out to competitive bid. So these are the arguments for and against.

**Ms. Darneille:** Correct. And the tolls that would be taken would have a different destination under both of those scenarios. So under the public/private partnership the tolls would all go into the pockets of the privates that built the bridge. Under the public scenario the tolls all go into the State Transportation Fund. So—I don't want to put words in Speaker Chopp's mouth—but what I felt at the time was that he was advocating for the state financing option because it meant that there was more accountability to the voters and the people paying the tolls, and besides this company that was contracting to build the bridge was based in London, and that this was actually money that would go out of the country. They could assign an amount to the tolls that didn't have any kind of legislative oversight. So they could decide, well, we're going to pay for this bridge in four years and set the tolls at fifteen dollars a passage. It would have been within their right to do under the structure of the contract that Ruth was advocating. So that was a big part of it as well as the purchasing of materials. There

were union issues as well—utilizing different kinds of labor and those kinds of things.

**Ms. McLeod:** So you came in as a freshman...

**Ms. Darneille:** I came in as a freshman, and I actually had known Pat Lantz probably much better than Ruth over the years. I had been active in City Club of Tacoma with Pat.

**Ms. McLeod:** Who is Pat Lantz?

**Ms. Darneille:** She's the representative from the 26th District on the other side of the bridge, and was the most vocal and passionate for the Speaker's position. In fact, if anything, the legislators from the 26th District still were not in any scenario going to win any kind of big concessions for their constituents who were going to be the major toll payers. And so there still are efforts to try and anticipate what kind of relief we can provide to her constituents. And she ultimately was the person who, with her constituents, convinced me that there needed to be more opportunity for dialogue throughout the course of the building and the implementation of the bridge. Two options.

I, for instance, wanted to pursue some sort of a toll relief for a senior citizen, let's say, who had to go to the doctor in Tacoma. There are no facilities in Gig Harbor. So, could we figure out a way to give that person relief if they were coming to Tacoma every day for radiation therapy, let's say. Could we figure out some way? Under Ruth's scenario, there could never have been any kind of discussion about that. It would have been out of the state's hands. So that was ultimately what caused me one day in caucus to stand up and weigh in on the issue in a public setting because I was too afraid to do it privately.

**Ms. McLeod:** This is in 2001?

**Ms. Darneille:** This is 2001.

**Ms. McLeod:** What was the experience like for you? Here Ruth was the senior, more respected, well-known legislator. She's been there at that point maybe seventeen years or thereabouts, and it's your first year, your first session. What was that like for you?

**Ms. Darneille:** You kind of do it with trepidation, but I guess I'm not unused to taking unpopular positions in my life, but it was uncomfortable. I knew it meant that whatever relationship Ruth and I had would be seriously impaired if not completely eradicated. But

having a position on something and having a caucus decision being formulated meant that everybody in the caucus needed to weigh in on the decision, and that even meant me. So while there was a great desire on my part not to fracture that relationship, I knew it would be a consequence.

**Ms. McLeod:** When you join the House as somebody's seatmate—in this case you're in Position Two, and Ruth is in Position One—and you're representing the same district, do you have discussions as to how you're going to represent your constituency and what committees you're going to work on? Is there any kind of negotiation? What was your early contact with Ruth like? It's unfortunate that the Narrows Bridge issue was right there at the beginning.

**Ms. Darneille:** That was an awful strange session as well because it was a tie, so she was actually not the chair, like the sole chair, of the Transportation Committee at the time; it was a co-chaired with Maryann Mitchell, a Republican from Federal Way. And it was also the year we had—because of the transportation issues, and I say that plural—we ended up with one hundred and sixty-three days of session that year, and we had an earthquake. So it was a very odd session from every angle.

**Ms. McLeod:** And also I read that there was like a one hundred and six million dollar shortfall in 2002, so you're leading up to that.

**Ms. Darneille:** Oh, yes, there were shortfalls for many years.

**Ms. McLeod:** So it was difficult and the earthquake on top of that.

**Ms. Darneille:** Yes. February 28th, 2001, we had an earthquake.

**Ms. McLeod:** So tell me about how your relationship works. Do you discuss other issues?

**Ms. Darneille:** I think some teams do. We did not. I think because of my coming out of human services work, there was some interest in health work; there was some natural inclination on my part to move in that direction. Most legislators are on at least three committees, and so during my first session—the time we were together in the Legislature—I was on Juvenile Justice and Family Law, I was the vice chair

of that. I was on Children and Family Services, and I was also on the Health Care Committee.

Now, Ruth was only on one committee. And to this day I know of no other legislator who has only served on one committee during a session. Usually, when you go down you're on those same committees for the whole two years of the biennium. So, Ruth and I co-served for two years, one biennium, and she had only been on the Transportation Committee solely for many years. She literally had either just mild interest or no interest in other issues. She was very, very focused, and she could not be more the antithesis of what my experience has been. I have no interest in being a committee chair because what I see happening, and Ruth is probably, in my mind, the teacher in this, that you become so interested and focused on your one area of responsibility. Of course you want to do a good job for your constituents, but when you're a committee chair you need to do a good job for everyone in the state and that is your prime focus, and it was for her, her single focus.

**Ms. McLeod:** So here she is on this one committee, and you're on these other committees. Does your staff talk? How does it work? How is Tacoma served by their two constituents if the two constituents aren't really relating to each other?

**Ms. Darneille:** That's a really good question. Ruth had excellent staff, I think, throughout her legislative career. In her final years in the Legislature, Jan Swenson was her legislative assistant, and Jan had many, many years under her belt working as a legislative assistant. Very competent, very knowledgeable, lives and works in Olympia, so she really had her finger on the pulse. She knew where all the skeletons were hidden and was very dynamic and professional and followed through a lot. So when a constituent would call with a problem, Jan would either handle it with or without Ruth's knowledge. Or she would call over to my staff, for instance, and say, "Did you also hear from this constituent? Do you want to handle it, should I handle it?" And I had a very seasoned person. In fact, Lorraine Wojahn's. When I worked in the Legislature, the woman who had been her regular legislative assistant was Evie White. I really begged her to come out of retirement and be my legislative assistant for at least my first year, so I could get my feet on the ground. So Evie came back, and Evie and

Jan had known each other forever so they did communicate very well.

**Ms. McLeod:** When Ruth retired in 2002, I guess we say she retired in 2003, were there retirement parties that you attended, or was that separate?

**Ms. Darneille:** No, I don't think I actually did attend parties. I think the people in the transportation industry really showed their appreciation to Ruth. Both the staff and the non-profits and the public entities and the private industries that were involved in transportation issues really appreciated all that focus and attention over the years.

**Ms. McLeod:** I guess what I'm curious about is the transition from your relationship in the House and as physically-close, but personally-distant, neighbors, to what becomes a very intimate relationship when she's about to die and her daughter, Joan, is calling people and saying, "My mother's sick." I guess one of my questions is, how did you find out she was ill? She retired at the end of 2002. She'd been named to the Transportation Commission by Governor Locke in 2004, and then she becomes ill. I don't actually even quite know when her diagnosis was, but you begin a journal in December of 2004, and she dies almost three months later to the day, February 21, 2005. When that transition occur, that you really become friends?

**Ms. Darneille:** After she left the Legislature those meetings in the alley were genuinely friendly at that time. She would often ask questions about things that were going on and would often tell me her opinion of how badly things were going. But, yes, I would say we were friendly without being friends during that timeframe. She actually called me. I would sometimes call—not often, but a few times—and ask, "Do you want to go to this event that's coming up?" And she always would decline. She pretty much saw herself as a retired person. She was out of public life. She was totally disgusted with so many things that to get her going in any kind of discussion really meant that you had to stand in the alley and just let it blast over you. So there was that.

But she did call me and let me know about her diagnosis, and she said that she would not have called me if her daughter had not forced her to. That her daughter wanted to have somebody in the neighborhood who was close by that she could call. Seriously,

she could not think of anybody close by. It wasn't that, "Gee, I wanted Jeannie to help me," it was like, "Oh, gosh, Jeannie's the only one." It was definitely begrudging on her part, her decision to call me.

**Ms. McLeod:** When was it that she called you?

**Ms. Darneille:** That would have been in early December. She had just had a couple of falls at the grocery store and that had concerned her.

**Ms. McLeod:** So she finally goes to the doctor. She didn't even have adequate insurance at the time, did she?

**Ms. Darneille:** Actually, let me back up a little bit, because they had her down and they were honoring her at the opening of the light rail in Tacoma (August 22, 2003). It was the very first day that the light rail ran, and we were all down at Freighthouse Square, which is where the big celebration was taking place. There were thousands of people, and she and Congressman Dicks took the inaugural ride on the light rail. I was in maybe the third car, the third swing. They had, at that time, three trains going, so I was in the third train. So by the time I left on mine, her train was just coming back into the station. By the time that I got back from my ride, I found out that she had fallen on the edge of the track and had twisted her ankle sufficiently so that they took her to the hospital and found out that she had broken her ankle.

Then she called me because she had no health insurance. She'd left the Legislature and she had nothing in place. She didn't do COBRA. It's like she didn't open those letters. She didn't care. So Josephine, here in my office, and I helped her actually sign up for Medicare. She'd never signed up for Medicare. She had huge penalties that she would have had to pay because she didn't sign up when she was sixty-five. So ultimately we got several things taken care of during that time. Home health aid. We got her hooked up with the area Agency on Aging and got her a case manager and all those kinds of things that needed to be in place that she had no knowledge of.

**Ms. McLeod:** And with your background in human health services you really were the right person.

**Ms. Darneille:** Yes. Exactly. So that's when everything sort of softened between us, was when she was first injured. When this situation came about with her illness, while it was not her choice to call me, it

wasn't like she was still really angry with me at that time. All that had passed. So I kept calling to find out if I could do something, and I think I bugged her and wore her down because finally she said, "Well, I guess you could bring up my mail every day if you would. I'll give you a key." The mailbox was two floors below her apartment, no elevator. So, that was the role that I took on.

**Ms. McLeod:** So, you started going over to Ruth's house when she's ill, bringing her mail. It's December 22, or so, when you began a journal of your time with Ruth. I've wondered, what prompted you to start writing that journal?

**Ms. Darneille:** I think from the very first night Ruth started telling me stories. I realized that I've reached that point in my life when, even with the best intentions of remembering something, I just don't have the brain cells any more to retain all kinds of information. So, I thought, well, I better start writing this down because clearly she's dying and maybe something that she says is going to be something nobody else besides me knows. So, I would come home, go visit with Ruth and then come back to the house—not every night because sometimes I was too tired, or something would intervene—but on a pretty regular basis I was able to sit down at the computer and type out little bullets of information that I had learned from Ruth that night. Many times I would be kicking myself around the block for not having written something down because I couldn't recall what it was that I thought was so impressive, or couldn't recall a detail that I had wanted to.

**Ms. McLeod:** Was she aware that you were keeping a journal?

**Ms. Darneille:** You know, I can't remember if I told her if I did. I probably did tell her because that would seem kind of disingenuous of me not to. But I can't recall having a conversation with her about it.

**Ms. McLeod:** For me, in my position, it's just amazing to be able to read your journal entries; it's really valuable in doing historical work. Did you think of it in a historical context, or was it more personal or both?

**Ms. Darneille:** I think it was more personal. I don't know Ruth's daughter very well, and I don't know her

son at all, but I guess I thought I might have something that they could value.

**Ms. McLeod:** Was the Legislature still in session then, at that time?

**Ms. Darneille:** Not in December. No. But it quickly went into session the second Monday in January as it always does, so that did change the length of our talks and the topic of our talks very often.

**Ms. McLeod:** I ask that because in your journal you write about giving Ruth the legislative day in review, and you also mention that she was watching TVW almost every night, which documents the work of the Legislature. So, I'm curious about what the conversations revolved around and what her interests were in terms of the legislative work going on.

**Ms. Darneille:** I either would find her watching TVW or some sports program. It was really rare to find her watching anything but one of those two. I think she was such a junkie for news, and it had been such an important part of her life. Some of the issues we were discussing were ones about which she still had a great deal of passion, and she always had an opinion about virtually everything, whether it was the pomp and circumstance of the day or something interesting in a Transportation Committee meeting or something. She knew some things, a lot of things actually, that I didn't know because while I'm in Appropriations Committee there are six other committees going on, so it's not that TVW always covers the same committees. So, she often had things to tell me.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did she attempt to advise you for the future or make sure certain things were going to happen? Was there any imparting of wisdom to you?

**Ms. Darneille:** Yes, often. But they were often on the subject of people. How to work with certain people or who to stay away from, or "don't be caught in the snare even if it sounds good," you know.

**Ms. McLeod:** It seems that those kind of strategic suggestions could only come from someone who had been in the Legislature, because probably part of what your work is, and Ruth's work was, being strategic in order to get bills that you want to see passed, passed.

**Ms. Darneille:** Absolutely.

**Ms. McLeod:** Or bills you'd like to see defeated, defeated. Right?

**Ms. Darneille:** Yes. I was actually very interested in her opinion about people because it really is a world of relationship building, and she really surprised me with some of her opinions. Just when I would think that would not be the kind of topic that she would like to have a bill about, or that would not be the kind of person that she would have a relationship with, she'd come out with some story about a date long ago and a relationship long ago or a shared experience with someone who was still in the field either as a lobbyist or a member of the Legislature. More often than not she would either just crack up about it—she thought it was a funny story—or she would be disgusted in some way with something that happened.

**Ms. McLeod:** You had mentioned earlier in the interview about your own split over the Second Narrows Bridge public/private funding partnership and funding for the bridge, and also I read in your journal that she went back to a time even before you had joined the House where the then Speaker of the House, Frank Chopp, was trying to get her taken off as Transportation Committee chair. And so I wondered about the ways in which this issue still resonated with her, because I believe the Narrows Bridge bill that passed in 2002 included the opposite funding option of the bill that she had proposed. So I wondered what her comments might have been?

**Ms. Darneille:** That vote precipitated her decision to leave the Legislature, so it was a very pivotal experience for her. She felt she'd used up her arsenal and it was very damaging, she felt, to her career.

**Ms. McLeod:** And her political power?

**Ms. Darneille:** And her political power. Absolutely.

**Ms. McLeod:** Interesting. So did she feel—the word is leaving my mind—I want to say impotent, that she could not, after that point, move the heavy bills through that she might have needed to move through, or what did she think?

**Ms. Darneille:** I just think she felt she knew this issue, she knew what was right, and to be rebuffed from her goal just resigned her, I think, to the fact that she would not be able to move things forward as she wanted them to move forward. She also was a little tired of the personalities. I think Ruth, as gruff as she

was, needed some good relationships around her and a lot of her old standby, deep friendships had ended because folks had died or been impaired in some way and she'd lost a lot of her good friends. I don't think she really had many people to turn to.

But again, this sort of came about in the realization of her regard for some people that surprised me because I hadn't seen her in relationship with them. That really became true the day that I took to her a video tape that the House media crew had put together where they had invited people to the floor during one of the lunch recesses or something, and invited them to say a few words to Ruth. By and large it was unscripted. People got in front of the camera and I guess one end of the continuum was me. I sort of broke down and got real weepy right from the very first moment of it all the way through to people who were telling funny stories. And I took it to her that night and, of course, I had been watching some of the folks filming their tidbits to Ruth and had actually watched the tape. Actually, the media staff and I sat down with me and we watched it together, just to make sure that they hadn't left something in that she might find offensive. It ended up everything was great. So I took it to her but I didn't tell her I'd already watched it, and she said, "Oh, would you please stay and watch this with me?" I was really touched by that. And then as the video unfolded, she just was so tickled by it. She commented about every single person and we paused and started again, and I'm sure she watched it again that night. In fact, I think she told me she had watched it again. People telling inside stories and remembering experiences with Ruth that really demonstrated that she had quite a sense of humor and quite a relationship with these folks.

**Ms. McLeod:** Do you have any special remembrances of watching that with her and some of the comments that she made, or the comments that they made? Especially anything related to her humor? I know she was very funny.

**Ms. Darneille:** I think, in my journal, I referenced the story with George Walk. George was a junior House member from the Twenty-fifth District. He's probably only fifty-five now and he was elected, I think, when he was in his twenties. He had been president of the Grange out in the Puyallup Valley, and just a nice, young guy. She ended up taking a trip with

him—I think it was to the Southwest—to a conference. When they got there, he admitted to her that he didn't know who Georgia O'Keefe was, and she was just aghast that he didn't know who Georgia O'Keefe was, and so she trotted him off, against his will, to see some Georgia O'Keefe paintings. He was recalling this story in his speech in front of the camera that day—how they were supposed to be at this conference and she didn't care, but that he will never forget that day as the day that someone shared something with him that really meant a lot to her.

Art was just incredibly important to Ruth. This is also something I didn't know before visiting her home, which I had really never been in prior to the night I went up there for the first time to take her mail. It was wall-to-wall art. I mean every part of every wall was art. If it wasn't a bookshelf with one of thousands of books on it, it was a piece of art. She really had an amazing collection, a lot of which had been given to her over the years. She did have a couple of Georgia O'Keefe prints and she really, really enjoyed southwest art, and that was one thing we discovered about each other. I actually collect southwest art, but she'd never been in my home either. So we shared a lot and that was one of the experiences that was shared on the tape that she just giggled about. She called him kid, I remember that. She called George Walk 'kid.'

**Ms. McLeod:** How old was he at the time?

**Ms. Darneille:** At the time he probably was in his late twenties or early thirties, something like that.

**Ms. McLeod:** She was probably in her late fifties?

**Ms. Darneille:** Forties or fifties, yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** What other ways did your knowledge of Ruth change as you were with her in those final three months? You said you went to her apartment and you saw all this art, and I think that you mentioned, in your journal entries, about her love for reading and just how astounding it was that the place was packed with books. What were some other things that you learned about her as a person that you didn't know before?

**Ms. Darneille:** I think I mentioned as well the sports aspect. This was really surprising to me because I had had no idea whatsoever that she was a sports nut. It came about fairly early in our discussions after the

session had started because she asked me what my bills were that session, and so I started telling her what topic each of my bills covered. Then I said, "But, of course, probably my biggest one is my minor league stadium financing bill." I just stopped at the end of the sentence because—none of us like to be criticized and she'd be really quick to do that on occasion—I fully expected her to tell me that that was a waste of time, but her response really was amazing. She started laughing and she said, "Good for you. Good for you." And I said, "Ruth, I'm astounded. I just didn't expect that." And she said, "Haven't I ever told you that I was the scorekeeper for the Tacoma team? What was that, like fifty years ago?" When they first opened Cheney Stadium, which would have been like 1946 or 1947, someplace in there, they had people out at the back. It was a manual system of flipping the numbers over so that they showed out to the stadium and she was the person back there flipping the numbers.

**Ms. McLeod:** Wow!

**Ms. Darneille:** And she said she loved to go to sports games with her dad and that that was a really special thing and that she just loved sports of all kinds. So we'd sit there and we'd watch tennis and we'd watch... If there had been bowling on, I think she would have watched it.

**Ms. McLeod:** Are you a sports fan as well?

**Ms. Darneille:** I'm more of a baseball fan. I definitely am a baseball fan. So that was something we had in common, but of course baseball season wasn't happening at the time that we were having our talks, so we didn't have any big arguments about great plays or anything. Oh, we watched ice skating. Lots of ice skating.

**Ms. McLeod:** That's a different kind of sport to watch. I was thinking that perhaps she liked the high tension of the competitive sports, the team sports, and that it somehow matched her work in the Legislature. But ice skating is quite artful.

**Ms. Darneille:** Oh, definitely. Definitely. But she liked it from the physicality of it. The technique and the strength. She was quite a critic.

**Ms. McLeod:** So she had comments about sports as well?

**Ms. Darneille:** Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** I get the sense that she always had an opinion.

**Ms. Darneille:** Oh, yes. That would be right.

**Ms. McLeod:** In regard to your perceptions of Ruth, how do you think her personal history and who she was prior to politics fit into her political motivations and persuasions and aspirations? Did you get more of a sense of that once you were spending time with her?

**Ms. Darneille:** I think she really started in politics when a group of folks became so disgusted with the city elected officials here in Tacoma, and they mounted a recall campaign and Ruth was at the front of that. Yes. That is farther back in history than I know specifically, but Dennis Flannigan who's my seatmate now in the House actually was quite active in that effort with Ruth. He's known her much longer than I. But she and her husband had gotten involved with that campaign and they were successful and with that she was very active in the party and after, I think it was after attending a Democratic National Convention, she ran for office. She had been actually a member of the planning commission as I recall, the shoreline planning commission, and so became very knowledgeable about water and land use issues and made a name for herself in that realm and then ran for the Legislature.

**Ms. McLeod:** From what I understand, the way she operated, it's her forthrightness that made her a unique legislator. I wondered if there are any stories, or are there any observations you have of her, that demonstrate her uniqueness as a legislator in the way she made things happen?

**Ms. Darneille:** Ruth didn't follow a lot of the rules. She cut to the chase in ways that most people don't. They're usually a little differently diplomatic. But she also didn't waste her time on things that she didn't think had merit. She didn't socialize to a great degree with her colleagues. She was business, business, business on a lot of occasions. That's certainly how I knew her when we were sharing seats in the Legislature. Very business oriented. But she also was quick to refer people to other people. She didn't want to sit and talk about something. She did not make appointments like most legislators do, which would be that somebody calls or comes in and wants to have

an appointment and barring just not having any time most people will meet with most people, and she didn't. She didn't. She didn't meet with constituents. She just was really busy.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did she have a good guard at the gate, so to speak?

**Ms. Darneille:** Yes, she did.

**Ms. McLeod:** Who was that person?

**Ms. Darneille:** Jan Swenson was the person in later years who was her gatekeeper. She did a good job.

**Ms. McLeod:** When you say that she didn't observe the rules, can you give me any examples? Are you talking about parliamentary procedure or legislative procedure or what do you mean?

**Ms. Darneille:** No, no, no. There is so much attention in Olympia about using the time you're there to accomplish your goals with bills or whatever, but never let a moment go by when you can't improve your chances for being reelected. And that's really an annoying reality for people who are in swing districts. They are working all the time on sort of that combination, moving their agenda forward, getting reelected. Very calculated. Well, she didn't care. She didn't. She worked hard at what she was doing because it was something she felt passionate about and knowledgeable about. The issue about being reelected was really way back on the burner for her. In fact, I only know it entered her mind once, and that was actually when I decided to run. She called me up and she said, "Jeannie, are you running against me?" And I said, "Good God, no! I'm running in the open seat." "Okay. I was just checking."

**Ms. McLeod:** Oh, my goodness. That must have been a bit of a shock.

**Ms. Darneille:** It made me feel good that she even thought I might be a threat. But at least that put in my mind that that might have been her motivation. But she just absolutely didn't want to have to mount a campaign, I'm sure.

**Ms. McLeod:** And it's also, I guess, because in the Legislature you're turning over every two years, right? So you're campaigning like you said, it's always simultaneous.

**Ms. Darneille:** Yes. It's awful. You can't collect money and do the kind of overt stuff during the legislative session. That's against our ethical policies. But it certainly is not without thought for literally dozens of legislators that what they do today will end up on a hit piece against them or they can use it in a promotional piece about themselves. I honestly have never over the years remembered seeing much of a campaign from Ruth. She had one sign.

**Ms. McLeod:** Really? One sign that she just kept reusing?

**Ms. Darneille:** Yes. And I'm actually trying that technique this year myself. My husband's trying to keep me down to one sign, and I've got it out.

**Ms. McLeod:** Recycling is a good thing. You know, I keep imagining Ruth in the Legislature and every once in a while being very quick-witted, her voice rising above others and saying something that's just so acerbic and funny in the moment, and I don't even know if that's true. I've created this mythology of Ruth in my head. Are there any moments where she just said something that you wish you could have said or you know you couldn't have, but you're glad she did?

**Ms. Darneille:** Oh, yes. She was a person who would have her editorial or comment or her peanut gallery comment from the sidelines often about things that were being discussed in caucus or the people who were being brought up as topics. Her last two years in the Legislature included the year we had the earthquake so our caucus environment changed during that time. But I do recall very well, and I think I told you about the chair in caucus, how that was her seat, but the people who tended to be around Ruth over in that corner of the room were folks she called 'the boys,' and they loved her. They loved her. They included Aaron Reardon (38th LD), Brian Hatfield (19th LD), Erik Poulsen (34th LD) and a couple of others, but those are the ones who stand out in my mind now. These guys were always joking around and being loud and being inappropriate, and she was right there in the thick of it with them. Anyway, they loved her and I don't know exactly how she felt about them, but I know she loved the process of being brash and loud.

**Ms. McLeod:** You mentioned a little bit in your journal about a time when David Postman (Seattle Times) was interviewing her, frantically writing. What is it that you think that she found so compelling about

those kinds of situations where people are hanging on her every word?

**Ms. Darneille:** You have to imagine, too, the scene, which is where she has a cigarette too, because any kind of place where Ruth could be smoking, she would be smoking. So you have to kind of imagine this very thin woman—because she was always thin and frail looking, kind of fragile, diminutive, though tall—with this cigarette hanging there. So she always looked sort of like a tough newspaper broad or something. But I think she enjoyed very much being sought after for her opinion on things.

**Ms. McLeod:** Was she pretty good with the Press in terms of giving that?

**Ms. Darneille:** Oh, yes. Yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** No hesitancy there?

**Ms. Darneille:** Oh, no. She was always good for a quote, I think. Good for an opinion, because like I said she always had an opinion about everything. She was a newspaper person's dream.

**Ms. McLeod:** You mentioned, in your journal, going through her things and deciding who they should go to. So she got the news at some point that she was really terminally ill, and she was not going to make it. Did her demeanor change in terms of how she thought about the world or did anything shift that you noticed?

**Ms. Darneille:** I must say, she did not know she was close to dying.

**Ms. McLeod:** Oh, she never did?

**Ms. Darneille:** No. I think because it really happened so incredibly quickly. She was diagnosed just at Christmas time and was gone by the twenty-first of February. So it was really a very short end-stage. It was only precipitated by her lack of ability to breathe. She lost consciousness a couple of times. She was diagnosed with chronic pulmonary obstructive disease, COPD, disorder or disease, and she didn't know what that was.

She was also probably one of the few legislators who had a laptop computer and never turned it on. Never went on the Internet, never did anything like that. So I did some research for her. I ran some information out in my house and took it over to her on that disease, and on treatment. A lot of it was around

biofeedback, and it definitely involved quitting smoking and was pretty frank in the science of what she was facing. But even with that, I don't think until we got the diagnosis of the lung cancer did we think it was... Certainly that she thought it was terminal and she felt very fortunate that she was assigned a doctor who ended up being a friend of mine. He is a great guy, John Van Buskirk, and he actually did a house call. He just lives a couple blocks away and did a house call for her so she wouldn't have to come into the doctor's office. He was very gentle with her, but I don't really think she at all knew it was imminent.

We actually never got to the day of deciding who got what and putting names on things. And it's really one of the things that I look back and I think, boy, I wish that I had somehow pressed that because I just know there were things that she wanted to give to people, but I didn't have anything in writing and certainly did not have her signature on anything, and I would have done that with her if we'd had more time.

**Ms. McLeod:** She was named to the Transportation Commission by Governor Locke. Did she, do you know, have time to serve on it before she became ill?

**Ms. Darneille:** I think she may have gone to a few meetings, not many.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did she talk to you about that at all, or was there unfinished business or were there certain issues she was going to attack?

**Ms. Darneille:** I don't really recall. I remember we were kind of in a wait-and-see about the new secretary. She liked him, Doug McDonald, and thought he was straightforward and was looking forward to working with him.

**Ms. McLeod:** That's too bad that she couldn't have done that. She seemed to have a lot of knowledge. Is there anything else that you really would like preserved in terms of your time with Ruth?

**Ms. Darneille:** I think what I felt most honored to know were some of her feelings about her family, her growing up and her great losses in her life.

**Ms. McLeod:** Like her son?

**Ms. Darneille:** Like her son's death.

**Ms. McLeod:** Sam?

**Ms. Darneille:** Yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** He died when he was how old, five?

**Ms. Darneille:** Four and one half.

**Ms. McLeod:** Was that something she hadn't talked about much with anyone before, did you feel?

**Ms. Darneille:** Absolutely. Absolutely. Most people, upon reading my journal, had no idea, no idea.

**Ms. McLeod:** Were you aware of that when she was telling you?

**Ms. Darneille:** No.

**Ms. McLeod:** Why do you think that came out at that moment?

**Ms. Darneille:** My dad had died in November, six weeks before Ruth's diagnosis, and I suppose I was processing something about my dad's death, and she told me about her son.

**Ms. McLeod:** He had died somehow tragically, right?

**Ms. Darneille:** It was in a garage. I think it was just two boys playing in a toy box.

**Ms. McLeod:** And he suffocated.

**Ms. Darneille:** Yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** That's really terrible. How do you think that impacted her? It seems like too obvious of a question to ask.

**Ms. Darneille:** I think she felt a tremendous amount of guilt, and I don't think that ever was resolved for her. And it wasn't just guilt about Sam, it was guilt about her other children. I think she just was incredibly depressed following his death, yet she had to take care of this baby and...

**Ms. McLeod:** Steven?

**Ms. Darneille:** He was very, very young and he was a sick baby, too.

**Ms. McLeod:** He had asthma, did he?

**Ms. Darneille:** Yes. He's a sick adult. I didn't know why he didn't come to visit his mom until one night she said, "I don't think I'll ever see Steven again because he's got asthma, and I smoke and he can't come in this apartment." So we got her down to five or six cigarettes a day. She'd turn off the oxygen to light up a cigarette.

**Ms. McLeod:** Wow!

**Ms. Darneille:** I know it scared the heck out of me being over there a few times.

**Ms. McLeod:** Yes. Well, it's good that she knew how that worked. That she understood the mechanics of that.

**Ms. Darneille:** Yes. But I don't think her family was very warm and touchy.

**Ms. McLeod:** You mentioned, in your journal, about her relationship with her grandmother who was a Mennonite, and she had greeted her at the door with the words...

**Ms. Darneille:** Something like, "Alcohol and divorce," something like that, "are the pain of our society."

**Ms. McLeod:** Yes, exactly. It cracked me up, but it also gives me insight to Ruth as well. She was quite close to that grandmother, I think you mentioned. Did she live in Yakima? I want to say Yakima.

**Ms. Darneille:** Yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** Is there anything else that you want to add that you remember?

**Ms. Darneille:** I'll say that there are people in the transportation community who dearly, dearly loved her. When she retired, a group of them purchased a Dale Chihuly bowl for her that she threw things in as she walked by. Everything had a function in her house if it was on a counter, but she had some lovely, lovely things. Another group commissioned a painting for her of the Union Station in downtown Tacoma that was just an amazing painting. I just marveled, when I went into her apartment, at these lovely awards that she had. People don't have to give that kind of level of award to somebody like Ruth. She was a pretty simple gal, but obviously other people knew her well enough to know how she appreciated fine art and they really went out of their way to bring it to her, to take it to her in that way.

**Ms. McLeod:** Thank you, Jeannie, I think you've done a great job today.

**Ms. Darneille:** I remain very thankful I had that time with her.

**Ms. McLeod:** Yes. I'm really glad you had that time, too. You have insight not anybody else can have, so it's really helped us out as well.



*Helen Sommers served 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. She's a member of the Democratic Party and represented Seattle's Queen Anne neighborhood.*

**Ms. McLeod:** You were elected to the House of Representatives in '72 and Ruth joined you ten years later in '83 following her many years of involvement in Tacoma politics as well as involvement with Washington's Democratic Central Committee. When, and in what context, did you meet Ruth? What were your first impressions?

**Ms. Sommers:** I think I met Ruth as she was thinking about running for the Legislature. I may have met her a little bit before that, but didn't really get to know her. But it was clear that she was outstanding as a candidate, and she won, and she won handily. The characteristics that I think stand out are she's very clear spoken, self-assured, and independent. And she had a very good political background. She had done a lot of work for the Democratic Party in Pierce County.

**Ms. McLeod:** Can you describe the era in terms of women who were politicians?

**Ms. Sommers:** Very good. Happy to. When I joined the Legislature the number of women in the House went from six to twelve. There were a number of others from around the state, and we doubled the number. There were none in the Senate at that time. But we were an active group. There were some women who had been elected earlier who had chairmanships of committees. So there was some step toward leadership.

But that was the time of the feminist movement. I was an active member of NOW, the National Organization for Women. There was a lot of change insofar as women were concerned and the activism that developed at that time. So I think that my election, and that of others, really grew out of that movement.

**Ms. McLeod:** In 1999, two years before Ruth retired from the Legislature, Governor Locke announced that the Washington State Legislature had made history by having the highest number of female legislators in the U.S., sixty women, approximately forty-one percent. In relationship to Ruth, do you think that Ruth or other women in the Legislature ever experienced a kind of glass ceiling that they had to shatter in order to be taken seriously in their roles? How would you describe the attitude towards female legislators during the early years compared to today?

**Ms. Sommers:** I would say the attitude was mixed, reflecting society in general. Women were not in the strongest chair positions, for example. They did chair committees, but they were not the major chairmanships, at least not when we started. And I think the Legislature was reflecting society. It was a similar situation that we were facing then. So, yes, there was some sort of a ceiling, lower expectations and fewer opportunities. But then, Ruth, herself, chaired a committee when she was in her second term, and so did I. So there were opportunities.

**Ms. McLeod:** In what ways did women contribute to the bipartisan effort in the Legislature, and did you see such efforts from Ruth in particular?

**Ms. Sommers:** I think Ruth Fisher was a good voice for working on a bipartisan basis. Of course, she was interested, and a strong leader, in the Transportation Committee. Transportation issues tend to be more bipartisan. Not always, but they tend to be. And that committee works on a more bipartisan basis. You see, I think there's a record of transportation budgets being passed with both parties strongly participating. That's less true when we're talking about the operating budget.

**Ms. McLeod:** Why is that true?

**Ms. Sommers:** The transportation leadership and those who are participating want more transportation. It's a clearer, simpler goal. Bridges and highways are very important, and safety on highways is very important.

I do want to add that Ruth was one of the first strong voices for transit. She did talk a lot about transit, and she tried to bolster transit. There's not as much broad support for transit as there is for trans-

portation. Just to give you some examples, look at eastern Washington. We put a lot of money into the highways in eastern Washington where there's not that much population, but everybody needs the highway whether you're coming from east or west. So I think it's easier to bring support in from all sides on that type of issue.

**Ms. McLeod:** Had any other women chaired the Transportation Committee prior to Ruth?

**Ms. Sommers:** Not that I know of.

**Ms. McLeod:** When you're talking transit issues that it's a traditionally male-dominated field. So here's Ruth, this woman who comes from the Twenty-seventh District, from Pierce County, and she makes her way on the Transportation Committee immediately, and then makes her way to becoming the chair of the Transportation Committee. What qualities enabled Ruth to grow and maintain her power and her authority in the arena of transportation?

**Ms. Sommers:** Remember, she's from Pierce County and—who would have been Speaker then, Brian Ebersole—so she probably had a link that way. But also I think she stood out as someone who was particularly interested in transportation and would be a good leader there.

**Ms. McLeod:** Right. I think you're referring to the era when a group of leaders in the Legislature became known as the "Pierce County Mafia." Brian Ebersole was Speaker from '93-94, during the time Ruth was Transportation Chair, and before that, when Ruth entered the Legislature, Wayne Ehlers, also from Pierce County, had been Speaker.

**Ms. Sommers:** Yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** Governor Booth Gardner was there during that time also, from '85-93. Do you think certain actions were able to occur because of these relationships? These relationships between politicians who were all from Pierce County?

**Ms. Sommers:** I don't think that was a major reason why Ruth Fisher would be named, appointed and recommended as head of Transportation, but I think it had a role.

**Ms. McLeod:** What was your relationship to Ruth on a personal, professional level? I do know that Ruth held you in high esteem.

**Ms. Sommers:** I think we shared a trait in that we both looked at things from more of a policy than a partisan or political way. That was probably a liaison of philosophy and modus operandi and so on. We were fairly independent, and weren't loath or hesitant in criticizing leadership or showing some dissatisfaction there.

**Ms. McLeod:** Under what circumstances and on what issues did you work together?

**Ms. Sommers:** I was never on Transportation, and she was not on Appropriations or Ways and Means as we called it then, so I think it was that type of personality trait that probably was a closer link than policy links.

**Ms. McLeod:** Would you call yourselves pragmatists?

**Ms. Sommers:** Oh, no. We weren't practical. We thought we were doing what was right.

**Ms. McLeod:** In a comment Ruth made about herself in a 2001 interview with Denny Heck on TVW's Inside Olympia, she said, "I'm not too good at the politics, but I'm pretty good at getting the job done."

**Ms. Sommers:** Perfect. Perfect description. There needs to be some grasp of the need to be political. And not only that, it's also working with your colleagues. You can call that political or you can call it savvy leadership or compromise, because you have to compromise, you have to do some of that. When you're so focused on thinking of what you want to do and thinking it's right, you might not have as much of that savoir faire as you should have.

**Ms. McLeod:** In terms of Ruth's role in the Democratic caucus can you give me a sense about Ruth's demeanor within those meetings? Where she might have sat? How other people regarded her?

**Ms. Sommers:** She had her chair in our caucus room. She was outspoken, clear spoken, and expressed her opinions pretty strongly. But also she went along with the group in recognition that you have to pull together sometime, you have to compromise, and you don't get exactly what you would have preferred. She was well able to handle that.

**Ms. McLeod:** Can you tell me about Ruth's relationship with various individuals? What about her relationship to Speaker Wayne Ehlers, for example?

**Ms. Sommers:** I think Ruth and I shared some of this experience. The Speaker wants a lot of control—not all of them, some handle it differently or better than others. Ruth wasn't the kind of person who had to be called into the Speaker's office who would have said, "Look, I want you to do such-and-such." That wouldn't work. So, the relationship with Ehlers might have been better than some of the others.

**Ms. McLeod:** In regard to Ruth speaking her mind, Ruth speaking up, do you recall her making speeches on the floor, and, if so, what was that like?

**Ms. Sommers:** I particularly recall her style. When she had to speak as chair of the committee, and maybe prime sponsor on a major piece of legislation, and of course on the transportation budget, she prepared her remarks and she was very good at it. She was articulate, to the point, not flowery, but she always had humor and she could get a laugh. And when you can make people laugh, you know you're winning. You're convincing. She was very skilled at that.

**Ms. McLeod:** How did others regard her when she was speaking? Were there smiles and a lot of bipartisan support for Ruth Fisher?

**Ms. Sommers:** I think some people really enjoyed her personality and her clear speaking and her humor. She might have had some new members on her committee who were a little bit in awe of her, which is appropriate, too.

**Ms. McLeod:** Do you think anyone feared her, the freshmen?

**Ms. Sommers:** No. If they did, they got over that. But they might be a little cautious.

**Ms. McLeod:** As part of Governor Gregoire's comments during Ruth's memorial service, she describes going to the Democratic caucus when she was the Attorney General and delivering an impassioned speech on a bill that had to do with violent predators. She said, "You know, the Democratic caucus is typically very rowdy," but when she gave her serious speech, there was silence. When she finished, she said she could have heard a pin drop. Then there's this woman's voice in the back of this room full of legislators that says, "You know, you're pretty tough for a girl."

**Ms. Sommers:** (laughter) Yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** Is that really par for the course? Is that something Ruth would do?

**Ms. Sommers:** Yes. That's a Ruthism.

**Ms. McLeod:** This may be another Ruthism. Ruth broke her hip in 1985 and had surgery, and I think two weeks later she was back on the floor. Ruth, I've been told, didn't always take care of herself. Was this incident emblematic in some way of her tenacity in terms of getting the job done? What came first in Ruth's life?

**Ms. Sommers:** Well, I don't know about not taking care of herself. I've always known her to be quite slender, but I just think she was really slender probably all of her life. So a broken hip was going to stop her or keep her away? No. This wasn't her character.

**Ms. McLeod:** What did adversity do to Ruth Fisher? How did she respond to it?

**Ms. Sommers:** When you're chairing a committee in the Legislature you have a lot to deal with. I'm not sure I'd always use the word adversity, but challenges and differences of opinion and conflict, and she certainly could handle that.

**Ms. McLeod:** In what ways did you see her handle that, how? Was it deflection or how does someone handle those challenges?

**Ms. Sommers:** Sometimes with humor. Other times moaning and groaning and complaining.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did she moan and groan and complain to you, did you commiserate?



**Ms. Sommers:** Yes, and her griping was brief but poignant and pointed.

**Ms. McLeod:** Meaning she would name some names?

**Ms. Sommers:** She'd say what she thought, and that would be it.

**Ms. McLeod:** According to Ruth's biography, she attended the University of Puget Sound, but she didn't graduate. Her daughter, Joan, told me that her mother had begun to study political science but quit to marry and manage her husband's dental practice. This probably took place before you knew her, but yet she became a person who was really well respected and widely admired for understanding one of the state's most complicated issues, transportation. Do you have any insights, or how do you think that she gained her knowledge about such issues and what was her form of edification?

**Ms. Sommers:** I don't know how much work she did on transportation in Pierce County when she was part of the political scene there. But certainly Pierce County would have had transportation issues. It's entirely possible that she got hooked on it there. And you know transportation can be highly localized. Somebody needs a road fixed, somebody needs a road widened, somebody needs a bridge, etcetera, etcetera.

What she did that was really outstanding and a standout was the issue of transit. She was an early voice for transit, a very early voice for transit and a strong voice. And there weren't many, so she understood that part of transportation. It wasn't just highways.

**Ms. McLeod:** Looking at the work Ruth and others did, the transportation budget pretty separate and distinct from the General Fund, that's it's largely dependent upon the state gas tax, formerly the motor vehicle excise tax. But also limited by the state's Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which mandates that gas tax revenues must be spent on highways. In what ways were the challenges of funding transportation projects, bridges, roads, transit, different from or similar to other state budget issues?

**Ms. Sommers:** Sometimes they're flush, and sometimes they're not. I think the issues are clearer. We've had a lot of bridge problems here. We've had ships ram a bridge in West Seattle; we've had the Hood

Canal Bridge partly blow away in a windstorm. We had the same thing on the 520 Bridge. That's a very direct responsibility there, so you can focus. And I think in that sense, it's simpler. They always need more funding, and the ferry system, and I think she was a strong supporter of the ferry system, which does require additional funding, and so that's always an issue. And the tolls that they collect are also an issue. It was in the press even again recently. So I think all of that would have been a strong challenge.

**Ms. McLeod:** In 1999 State Initiative 695 slashed the automobile excise tax revenue for transportation, leaving a one-million dollar budget hole. Can you describe Ruth's response and what was the immediate impact upon projects in 1999 and future projects.

**Ms. Sommers:** They had to cut back, so the plans had to be slashed. We're a state with a strong tendency towards initiatives and they are sometimes drafted without much of an overall look. We've been proud of our initiative process, but frankly, in some cases it's just gotten way out of control, and this was one of them. We just had another that attempt to wipe out a tax for education [I-920] just this past couple of days. That wipeout did not happen, I believe, because it was earmarked for education.

**Ms. McLeod:** When Joe King became Speaker, he and Governor Gardner wanted to see growth management legislation by the end of the 1990 session, after making it a priority in 1989. Ruth's growth management planning as related to transportation had already been at the center of the process and much of the work had been completed or was already in process. What's your perspective on the Growth Management Act and Ruth's involvement.

**Ms. Sommers:** I think the interesting part here is the organization. There were several women who formed a group that sort of ganged up and told Joe King, letting him know that they really wanted a voice in this Growth Management Act. And I believe that land use and construction and so on—whether you could build or not and what the county land use statutes were—was part of Ruth's background from Pierce County.

**Ms. McLeod:** So she had a little bit of insight into that. What was the reaction by others in the House or in the Senate, or even in the press, to see this group of women, the six committee chairs that Speaker

King called the “Steel Magnolias”, take on growth management?

**Ms. Sommers:** I think people enjoyed seeing these women take on Speaker Joe King. And he could handle that well. But they did have their impact. I think maybe he, and maybe a couple of other people from the Senate, might have had their ideas that they had the legislation resolved among themselves. These women, I believe, dedicated time to taking a look at this and seeing how they thought it should go and then influencing that piece of legislation. And they did.

There were several of them. Ruth was one of them. Mary Margaret Haugen [D-10]....

**Ms. McLeod:** And Jennifer Belcher [D-22], Maria Cantwell [D-44], Busse Nutley [D-49], and Nancy Rust [D-1], quite a group.

**Ms. Sommers:** They were knowledgeable, bright and they had a lot of push power.

**Ms. McLeod:** Earlier you mentioned Ruth’s involvement with bridges, such as the Narrows Bridge. Ruth was the primary sponsor for a law—signed by Governor Lowry during the 1993 session—that allowed for the creation of a public/private partnership for six major highway and bridge projects that would be paid for with tolls. In 2004 only one of those projects, the second Narrows Bridge, moved forward, but not with the funding Ruth originally intended. So what is your sense of the public/private financing, the pros and cons, and what were the legislative issues that kept this form of funding, as related transportation, from being realized?

**Ms. Sommers:** I think this was one of the ideas that went forward when it was clear to just about everybody who looked at it that the cost for some of these major transportations investments were beyond our gas tax ability. She developed this, and she probably had some staff helping. And there was private interest in it. Why some builders would be willing to do that, there could be any number of reasons. First, they hoped to get some toll money back, and I think there are bridges and tunnels in the world that do pay for themselves with tolls. So, they were involved in building huge additional employment and contract potential.

Now, Speaker Chopp, I think, philosophically, didn’t like the idea of private money, so he and Ruth did have strong differences about that. I would say it

was one of the more significant conflicts. I’d forgotten about the referendum issue, but I think she felt that she was run over on some of those things.

**Ms. McLeod:** My understanding was that Frank Chopp, as you just mentioned, did not support a private/public partnership. He wanted more government control of these projects and his differences with Ruth over the idea of how this should happen were pretty widely publicized.

**Ms. Sommers:** I think this is a classic case of Speaker Chopp’s philosophy. He didn’t want Democrats to be voting on taxes, and Ruth Fisher’s philosophy was that it was our responsibility and we should be taking these steps and taking the votes ourselves. So in the one case, it’s a political decision. But every leader will make some decisions along those lines, there’s no doubt about it, because obviously they want to keep their members. And then there’ll be the philosophically determined legislators—and she certainly was one of them—so she felt, I think, very strongly about that.

**Ms. McLeod:** I’m not sure, but I think in regard to this public/private partnership issue, those who advocate for public/private partnership do so because they feel that things may move more swiftly if they don’t have to put it out to bid. And in the end, that may save delay, which saves money. But on the opposite side...

**Ms. Sommers:** You don’t have a bid process.

**Ms. McLeod:** Exactly. And as you mentioned, Speaker Chopp didn’t want Democrats voting for taxes. Is that because when a politician votes on taxes, and it’s not put out to the voter to decide, they suddenly put themselves in jeopardy for re-election, or why is it?

**Ms. Sommers:** Yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** That’s the short answer.

**Ms. Sommers:** Because tax votes are the fodder for political attack in elections. Now the Democrats tend not to do that because they vote more taxes than the Republicans, but for the Republicans, that’s what these campaigns are frequently run on: “You took a tax vote. You voted to increase the people’s taxes.”

**Ms. McLeod:** So this conflict is representative of, as you mentioned, very different philosophies between Rep. Fisher and the Speaker. On one hand, Frank

Chopp is being very strategic in terms of the party and keeping the strength of the party first and foremost. Then we have Ruth over here saying, this is how we get this job done.

**Ms. Sommers:** That's the conflict.

**Ms. McLeod:** Ruth was reelected to her position nine times, enabling her to serve twenty years in the House, yet she didn't seek out a leadership position beyond committee chair. Why do you suppose that Ruth did not aspire to higher office?

**Ms. Sommers:** Well, I think she had a major responsibility and she was at the head of the decision making body in the House in Transportation, which was an area she was very much interested in. She had the

opportunity to exercise this leadership. She had the expertise, and it fit her. And it was high priority. She had impact; she had clout.

**Ms. McLeod:** As a lasting thought, what are the things you see in this state, in regard to transportation or other issues that bring to mind Ruth Fisher?

**Ms. Sommers:** What are we going to do with the [Alaskan Way] Viaduct? How are we going to get the money; when are we going to get moving? How are we going to handle the 520 Bridge? And, of course, there are many local transportation issues.

**Ms. McLeod:** And if Ruth were here?

**Ms. Sommers:** She'd be right in the middle of it.



*Dennis Flannigan, a democrat, served as with Ruth in the State House representing the 27<sup>th</sup> Legislative District. He was born and raised in Tacoma, and attended Western Washington University but never graduated. He was active in the civil rights movements and taught university courses and*

*was a longtime friend and colleague of Ruth. This interview took place on November 13, 2006.*

**Ms. McLeod:** And how long have you been serving in the House, in Ruth's former seat?

**Mr. Flannigan:** I'll begin my fifth year in 2007, so I've just been reelected. I began in '03. Elected in 2002. Anyway, I've been in there four years.

**Ms. McLeod:** Tell me about the era in which Ruth began her political work.

**Mr. Flannigan:** Yes. In 1964 I went down to Mississippi as a civil rights worker for Freedom Summer [Mississippi Freedom Summer Project]. Interestingly enough, just about two months ago I got to introduce Bob Moses—who was the center of the movement in Mississippi—at a “Race and Pedagogy” conference at the University of Puget Sound. I was a student at the University of Puget Sound when I went to the South.

I came back in '65 to a series of civil rights issues, one of which was open housing legislation in Pierce County in the City of Tacoma. There were racial covenants that stated a home could not be sold to African Americans in certain districts. There was an effort to overturn that. At that point, only one realtor came out on the side of opening the covenants. His name was Ken Heiman, quite a fellow. The election overturned the covenants, but it was the time in which people mobilized almost less by party than by issue. And the issues of civil rights were the significant ones at that moment. By about 1968 the women's movement and the anti-war and some other things were involved as well.

I did not know Ruth until I got back from the South in '65. At that point there was a group in Tacoma

called ACT, Action Committee for Tacoma. It was strangely enough a group of what you might now call moderate Republicans, and I was a member—so maybe it included a few liberal Democrats—but it was mostly young people, and young would mean twenty-five to forty, probably at this point. It was people who had recently finished college, who had been inspired by Kennedy speeches, the two Kennedys, as well as Dr. King and other things, and they had begun to want to be a part of local politics.

Somewhere in that maze and mixture of people who remain friends was Ruth Fisher and a couple of other women. I'll describe their roles as I saw them, but another was Lucille Hurst who's into her nineties now and continues to be a phenomenal person in the city. There was also Donna Gilman, who later became Donna Carlson. My comment, in a sense, is about Ruth, Donna, Lucille and a Republican woman named Ellen Pinto. The remark is that in those days they did not have careers, but had enormous talents. And those talents tended to find social outlet, at least the people I found. I'm sure there were people running garden clubs and other things, too. But these folks were all about what I'd really call “progressive politics.” They were about fifty-fifty Democrat and Republican as I think of those four women, one of whom later was a firm Democrat but also ran a Republican campaign at some point.

I'd come back as a civil rights worker and had begun to try and figure out how to do things in my own community. First, I got married; we had a child, and I learned to function in a variety of ways and stay active. I went to everything I could think of. In that process these women became mentors for myself and some others who wondered how do you create progressive political, issue-based change in this community. Some of them had been active in 1952, back when the Tacoma charter was changed to the city manager form of government we have now. There'd been quite a bit of early corruption is probably the kindest word. And so in that effort they were, in some cases, not left over from that process, but began in that process.

Ruth Fisher and her husband Bill's was a place where fundraisers would be held.

**Ms. McLeod:** At their home?

**Mr. Flannigan:** At their home overlooking the Narrows. He was a dentist and is a dentist—I don't know if he's practicing now.

**Ms. McLeod:** He is.

**Mr. Flannigan:** Bill was also a great chef and installed basically a furnace with a place for three Chinese woks that would blow flames up to the top of the ceiling. And so that would be the house of choice where Bill would stir-fry and Ruth would welcome guests. Ruth was an insider's insider before I met her.

Mike Lowry would be at every one of those. Mike Lowry was kind of an Arafat-looking American politico, as he would probably admit, too, at that point. And Metcalf would come, too, Jim Metcalf. My point being that she could draw from Seattle, and I don't know anybody else who had enough Democratic chits in Tacoma to have a fundraiser. And the fundraisers weren't always for Democrats. In some judicial races they were for remarkable good jurists. I remember her holding one for Don Thompson—he lost at that point—but he later became a superior court judge, and really was a Republican and stays a Republican, but became, in my mind, one of the best of the jurists on the Pierce County Superior Court.

Now remember, I'm twenty-seven or -eight, and I'm beginning to think about the meaning of being active in politics, but not thinking about being an elected official. And in the midst of that, there was a countervailing conservative group of folks who were gaining the power in the city. They had begun under Mayor Rasmussen and a handful of others to have a majority on the city council aimed at, in our minds, evil, probably. But I think it was just another worldview, as we continue to push for civil rights and push for progressive education, whatever the issues of the day were. With Ruth, going back to this Action Committee for Tacoma, I was a part of that. I don't know if Ruth was in it or out of it, but she was certainly aware of it. At one point ACT wanted to field a candidate for the city council, and as people milled around nobody wanted to run. I was certainly the most liberal of the members generally there, at least publicly, and out of the blue I said, "Well, I'll run."

**Ms. McLeod:** And you were twenty-seven?

**Mr. Flannigan:** Twenty-eight. And in looking around on how to do that, I called on Ruth and Donna Gilman and Helen Pinto and Lucille Hurst as well as

others to ask, what is a campaign? I'm a kid who'd basically not completed college, stayed there a long time, got tired and went down to the South, came back, got married and was working in social services and was not inept, but not confident. I learned to write a memo by looking at somebody else's memo. "Oh, that's a memo." And Ruth became part of my campaign committee, and that's where Ruth and I also had a split in one sense. Ruth's belief was that you doorbelled every doorbell and then you doorbelled it again. My belief was that doorbelling was real good, but not next to my genius for marketing and advertising. A friend of mine created the best political campaign. He later went on to do Nike ads. I had all these powerful talents, and we exploded on the scene. There was also a black candidate who later became mayor in Tacoma, Harold Moss, and we wound up running at the same time, which would have been in 1970. So I was thirty at that point. I ran in '72 again for another race.

In that 1970 effort we tried to unseat these conservatives. Ruth's efforts were to go out every day. As she says, go every day, doorbell every day, get the people, and all of this made sense except in the end I lost one of those two races by four-hundred and fifty-one votes, and Ruth was mad at me for a long, long time because that was a vote and one-half per precinct at that point. And if I had just shaved my beard, if I'd just done this and that and the other thing.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did you have long hair at the time?

**Mr. Flannigan:** I had long hair prior and after and a complete beard when I did run, but I did cut my hair somewhat. I have Jerry Garcia photos, with hair, which I cut to run. And then I had what people would now say is a distinguished looking beard. But at the time, any beard was not distinguished so people would say, gee, you lost the senior vote or you lost this vote. In fact my father died in 1972, just as I was about to file. And even then my mother came and said, "Dad wants you to shave before you come to visit him in the hospital," which was my mother's hope for me.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did you do it? Did you shave?

**Mr. Flannigan:** No.

**Ms. McLeod:** And did you win in 1972?

**Mr. Flannigan:** No. I lost both these races. The city council because there was a moderate who had the job, a conservative who wanted the job and me, a liberal who wanted the job. My error was getting in a race that had three candidates, so I placed third in that race, all of us very close, and the conservative won.

**Ms. McLeod:** It's like Ralph Nader pulling votes away from Al Gore.

**Mr. Flannigan:** Yes. And that brought this majority to the city council. It was after that that what's called the recall effort began as we watched. They didn't want—maybe they were right—our Urban Renewal money, they didn't want Model Cities money, a whole host of kind of the projects of the LBJ world of “war on poverty” and those sorts of things.

**Ms. McLeod:** I had a question about some of the people you've mentioned. I know Mike Lowry went on to become governor in '93. Wasn't he also a representative in Congress?

**Mr. Flannigan:** Yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** And Jim Metcalf, what did he do?

**Mr. Flannigan:** Jim Metcalf was originally a public relations person working the city of Tacoma and a newspaperman before that. He left that and went down and became the head of the Association of Counties, and then left that to become a lobbyist in transportation issues. During the recall, the first meeting ever was in my home.

**Ms. McLeod:** Yes. I had read that piece from Jim Metcalf. When Ruth died he wrote a piece about Ruth, not an obituary but kind of a tribute. It was published about a week after Ruth died. Maybe I'll just read it. Jim Metcalf wrote:

*“In 1970 a few of us met at a small rental home on North Tacoma Avenue of Dennis Flannigan. We were trying to figure out how to keep anti-government ideologues who were sympathizers, if not outright members of the John Birch Society, from destroying our city government. We eventually succeeded in recalling a majority of city council. It was the beginning of a thirty-five year relationship with one of the greatest public servants Tacoma and Washington State have had.”*

So, now tell me about that meeting that happened at your house.

**Mr. Flannigan:** I hope that someone will say something like that when I pass. That's a fair tribute to Ruth. Gordy Johnston was a person who eventually replaced Slim Rasmussen as the mayor of the city, and so he was one of the people who would probably be there. There was a guy named Jerry Vaughn who's now in Portland. Bill Baarsma certainly was there. I'm trying desperately to remember who we gathered, but it was the usual suspects, and I would guess that Donna Gilman would have been there and Jo Heiman, and I think Ken Heiman was probably still alive then. Probably Harold Moss was at that meeting. That would be my guess. Ron Thompson was active as a Republican attorney, and he was active in the recall movement. There were parallel efforts going on. Radio KAYE was a conservative Puyallup radio station that had begun to be much like Rush Limbaugh is now. My personnel file from the state was leaked to them and they'd read that on the air. Some of these same people involved in the recall began taping everything the station broadcasted. As far as I know, it is the only station ever pulled off the air because of their mixing politics, religion and defamation. And that effort was also a part of this. There was a lot of synergy about this kind of Birch-like politics and how we had been duped or not duped and got into it.

**Ms. McLeod:** You had mentioned that there had been somewhat of a history of corruption. In my research, I came across these issues, and this might be jumping ahead in terms of Tacoma's history, but there was something about a crooked sheriff, George Janovich.

**Mr. Flannigan:** Right.

**Ms. McLeod:** And then there were reports of episodes of cronyism happening in the city of Tacoma government. You had mentioned a history of corruption. I wonder if you can give a sense of what that was.

**Mr. Flannigan:** A little bit. The significant corruption preceded 1952. The recall was based on people's failure to exercise the responsibility that they had been elected to. It's pretty much what you need to get a recall. Let's see, there was Fred Dean who eventually escaped town then. After he lost an election for city council he ran a pharmacy and eventually was

exposed for trading pharmaceuticals for drugs and perhaps sex. At least that's what the paper said.

**Ms. McLeod:** He was a councilman?

**Mr. Flannigan:** He was a councilman. Not when that happened. Those things happened later. There was John O'Leary, a fellow who beat me, and a fellow named Gerry Bott was a decent kind of blue-collar conservative who had neither luster nor shame. They were not corrupt as they were just politically trying to tear government down. In a sense, it was the small government vs. big government, and their failure to do some things, at least, that made the recall sustainable. And then when it was passed, it changed the policies.

The Janovich stuff was county, county sheriff. And Janovich was a guy who basically took a three-thousand dollar bribe and did six years in federal prison (1980 – 1986). I don't know quite why he did it. The corruption in the sheriff's office was not, in my opinion, so significant as he did that for very little. He didn't get much, and there wasn't much given.

Tacoma was also apparently—and I think this is true—where the Mafia had its substantial base in the region. There were some people there, homes can be pointed at and the whole nine yards. I have names but I don't know that they're all hearsay, but they're probably true. So there was kind of nightclub sort of world, that kind of corruption.

**Ms. McLeod:** Can you tell, regarding the era we were discussing, what Ruth's feelings were about the issues of the day?

**Mr. Flannigan:** Again, the war in Vietnam, dead set against it from the moment. Watergate, like all Democrats, she probably laughed at the absurdity of it, but I don't recall that. Torn up by JFK, by the death and I think it was a mark in this nation. I don't know about RFK, can't remember what her sentiments. They were probably supportive of RFK in that she wanted a winner and tended to be practical.

**Ms. McLeod:** Regarding the election, did you go to the Democratic convention in '68? Were you there?

**Mr. Flannigan:** I was not there. Baarsma was there. I think Carol Larson, I think City Council member Barbara Bichsel because they talk about being there during that session. And that would be the place to get those best things out of that.

**Ms. McLeod:** And the problem, of course, is that RFK is shot, and you lost your candidate, and then there were all these feelings about the war in Vietnam and all these things going on at the same time. So, there were these political protests, and it was a really tumultuous convention.

**Mr. Flannigan:** Right. And middle America's frightened of protestors, and maybe they should be. My life had been very much a part of those protests and protests in San Francisco and elsewhere. And it's interesting. You watch the break in the dam in our own nation in the last few years. It just happened in this last election that the clinging to the right to America's righteousness is very hard to give away. It's interesting, but those who predict that wars are not good and that we've made errors in both Vietnam and here, are often criticized in the moment. Ruth would be one of these people who are ridiculed at the moment, ridiculed right up to the moment that the whole world comes to hold the same view, and then forgotten. When we look back at this war forty years from today, I suspect that someone will graciously say if it weren't for those who stood against the war one by one, who knows what God would have wrought on this earth. But they will be forgotten, and we will honor the soldiers and a few politicians.

**Ms. McLeod:** It's interesting for me to imagine Ruth, this person I never met, as, like you said, "an insider's, insider." At one time, she lived in one of those wealthy homes where she and her husband made these great dinners and hosted fundraisers, but yet she goes to the 1968 convention. She goes up into the park in Chicago with, as the story is told, an expletive written on her forehead—and she's protesting. She's not just keeping clean and putting money in what she thinks are good places. She's a very boots-on-the-ground woman.

**Mr. Flannigan:** Yes. Yes. And one other thing, just in a sense that in the early days when all of these meetings were being held at Ruth and Bill's home, Bill and Ruth were not getting along. At least that would be everybody's observation. Bill had a heart for these issues, but his interest was in cooking. He also had an interest in what I'd call novelty medicine. So he would be doing those sorts of things. Around the recall issue, when I lost in 1972 to a fellow named Doc Adams—I took on an incumbent Democrat in

a primary and was narrowly defeated in that—my wife said, “I think we’ve had enough politics. People come around, they want to be around a politician...” This was about the time the women’s movement was certainly more formidable than it had been before in my life, and the idea of baking biscuits seemed to be little enough opportunity to enjoy my company with two-hundred people in the building. And so I got, not out of politics, but I withdrew in a pretty serious sense. So, in the recall, I was a supporter. The first meeting convened in my house because we did a lot of that sort of thing. Actually, I had the first meeting in my house of that when Gordon Johnston decided to run for mayor, who became then the mayor who ousted Slim Rasmussen. And when Jim McDermott wanted to run for governor many years ago, before he was ever in Olympia, the first meeting about that was at my home, too. But in terms of the day-to-day work, Ruth and others and Jim Metcalf were very capable and I was kind of behind the scenes when you needed to doorbell or so. I’m not the person on that one too much.

**Ms. McLeod:** I want to ask you one other follow-up question in relation to the recall. I’m imagining that the campaign included letter writing or a kind of PR campaign. Is that what it entailed?

**Mr. Flannigan:** In a recall, in essence, you petition the court that these folks are not doing their jobs. If you have the recall petition before you—you get enough signatures and the judge says yes—that can go to a vote. And so then it becomes a campaign like any campaign in which you knock on doors and you create materials and throw the bastards out or keep the bastards in, or whatever happens to be. And the election was held, and I can’t remember whether they were gone immediately or they completed their terms or were they gone in twenty-one minutes. That part I don’t know. But they were actually gone because there were appointments to replace them. So some people were clearly recalled. My memory tells me they were recalled one at a time, some maybe stayed and some did not.

**Ms. McLeod:** At what point, during these activities, did Ruth join the Pierce County Planning Commission? I know she was there as a commissioner for nine years, and I know she contributed a great deal toward the Growth Management Act, which

was passed in 1990, ’91, when she was chair of the Transportation Committee. I know that, prior to that, there was an attempt for Pierce County to come up with a comprehensive land use package, which I think was defeated by voters in referendum.

**Mr. Flannigan:** Right.

**Ms. McLeod:** Do you remember any of this?

**Mr. Flannigan:** A little bit. Ruth was active. She was active in the Saving-the-Farmlands effort. The biggest reason I remember is I used to write political advertising, and I wrote the line which they never used but I always loved, which was “Give Peas a Chance.”

**Ms. McLeod:** That was the “give-peace-a-chance” era. That was a great play on it. It was the seventies after all.

**Mr. Flannigan:** I came to the county council in 1988 after Ruth was off the Planning Commission and had moved on—and county government is not of much interest to a Tacoman; who has the primary responsibility is the city’s government, with the exception of the courts. Remember, Ruth lived outside the city limits of Tacoma at that time, and so she was active in that sort of thing—but I do know that farmland preservation was one of her hot buttons. And she saw, before most, the effects. I think Jane Jacobs’ book, Death and Life of Great American Cities had many of us thinking at that time about urban sprawl and about the cost of letting land become overrun. To the specifics, I’m sure that experience took her to the growth management interest when she got to the Legislature. Where I saw it visit me was when I was the chairman of the county council when we passed growth management after the Legislature had required each county to create.

**Ms. McLeod:** Oh, yes. There was that local piece that the counties had to take responsibility for their own development.

**Mr. Flannigan:** Right. And much of that work had been laid out by this effort to pass a countywide growth management act. I don’t remember what it was called exactly at that moment. Formidable work was done, and some would tell you that if you went back and read that legislation it probably would have been better for Pierce County had it passed. And those who were able to stop it probably wished that in hindsight they had been on the other side of it. I’m talking

about people who do development and realized that they set the county back some period of time. It was the view when I came to the County Council that we would be unable to pass a land-management bill unless the state mandated that we needed to do it. There's a general view that if something is defeated that's major, you're six to ten years at best from getting it back on the ballot in a real way, and that one had been defeated pretty significantly. But there was wonderful work done on it, and it did lead to Pierce County having a good crew of people working for the county at that point who could step in when growth management came along.

**Ms. McLeod:** I imagine all this work was happening during the time she was on the Pierce County Planning Commission—mid to late 70's—because she served nine years.

**Mr. Flannigan:** I would say that's very likely because I came on the County Council in '88, so as you go back nine years, in a sense. What year was she elected, do you remember?

**Ms. McLeod:** 1982. She started in '83.

**Mr. Flannigan:** '82. Yes, so it's probably about 1971 that she began all this.

**Ms. McLeod:** Right. What I'm thinking about is all the other environmental legislation that had begun to happen in the state and in the nation at that time. The Department of Ecology was formed in 1970. Shoreline Management, I think, came through in '71 as initiative I think, after these other parts, which created the Department of Ecology had been passed under Governor Dan Evans. Also the EPA came along in '70 as well.

**Mr. Flannigan:** That's the whole ecological movement, now the conservation movement. But at that moment there was the belief that we're about to erase every smokestack in America and be healthy.

**Ms. McLeod:** Let's talk about the "Aroma of Tacoma." What was Tacoma known for during that time?

**Mr. Flannigan:** When I was in high school in 1956, I was in a class on creative writing, and I remember writing a poem about the aroma of Tacoma. The point being that in 1956 those who drove through Tacoma or lived in Tacoma would almost self-identify, and the

odors were bad. Why were they bad? The Saint Regis, the Simpson Mill, had enormous pulp smell. There's a rendering plant, Hi-Grade Meats or something, that was down on the tide flats. The smelter itself put out odiferous pungencies as well as arsenic and stuff. And then just the general combustion of other things. And Tacoma, if you look at it, the water, Commencement Bay is kind of a valley. So stuff stayed in there. You could still see the smog application of all of that on occasion. So it was this great embarrassment and the easy rhyme was the aroma of Tacoma. I can't remember the poem.

**Ms. McLeod:** Oh, I would love it if you could recite it, I really would. You have those five fingers in that Tacoma/Commencement Bay waterway on which industries are built, like the Blair Waterway, the Thea Foss, the Middle Waterway, and the Hylebos. I think Occidental Chemical was, at one point, down there, too.

**Mr. Flannigan:** Yes. Hooker Chemical. And lots of lumber companies, in a sense. There was a lot of green millwork there and all that. In the flats that are now tide flats, at one time there were one thousand acres of wetlands, and now there are something like nine. There were three acres left when they got it back to nine. So all of the things that would absorb all of that in one way or the other, much of that, had been taken out by the time all of this began.

**Ms. McLeod:** Do you remember Ruth's attitudes towards environmental issues or things like that she'd been involved in? You had mentioned that she was working on saving the farmland.

**Mr. Flannigan:** A couple things I can comment on. One, Ruth was an elitist in the sense of politics and she was a very thin, severe looking woman sometimes. The enormous laugh and the quick sense of humor was not easily available to everybody. If you listened to much of it, even in retrospect, you can see the cynicism and the anger that is underneath most humor. And in Ruth's case there were kind of—in my opinion—two levels of conversations she had about politics. One was with those who'd been through the wars, who saw things, who could stand above it and participate in it. So, a quick one-liner about anybody, anyplace. In the black community it used to be called 'doing the dozens,' but it's, in essence, trading trash talk with people who can stand up to it. Not that Ruth

consciously thought that way, but Ruth loved the folks, and Jim Metcalf had a love of the people who had no holds barred about politics. And Denny Heck is an example. There's a bunch of people around, and they don't bring it to their stump speeches, but when you're in the room with those folks, it's a pleasure.

**Ms. McLeod:** Denny Heck. He had a leadership position in the Democratic Party in the House of Representatives, right?

**Mr. Flannigan:** Right. Chief Clerk. And then he later on was chief of staff for, I think, Gardner.

**Ms. McLeod:** When you were talking about the comprehensive land use package, you had mentioned there were a lot of good folks from Pierce County who'd done a lot of work, who got into place and were able to make some things happen. I just wanted to go back to that. Because I think you may be referring to the era when Booth Gardner who'd been a commissioner of Tacoma, was Governor of the State.

**Mr. Flannigan:** Not a commissioner. Gardner began as county exec. He was the first county exec after the change in the form of government in Pierce County.

**Ms. McLeod:** And then I think Ruth's seatmate, Art Wang might have been chair of Appropriations for the House. All these folks from Pierce County in positions of power who, Ruth included, together became known as the Pierce County Mafia.

**Mr. Flannigan:** Right. Now all of those were Mafia members in the sense that I tend to think of the legislators as the Pierce County mafia, whether it be Ted Bottiger (H-28, H-29, S-2) Dan Grimm (H-25) or George Walk (H-25) on the Transportation Committee.

**Ms. McLeod:** And Brian Ebersole?

**Mr. Flannigan:** Ebersole came a little later, but if you go back you'll find that Pierce County elected all Democrats in those days. So, right now we're—take away this election—probably four-sevenths, even now, probably, four-sevenths Democrats and the rest Republicans. The elections have been very close. So when there was the Pierce County Mafia, there was a split in King County. The Republicans were emerging in King County and in Seattle they're still strong Democrats, so there they didn't always have a bound, tight one-party. I think there was a lot of talent in

the people who were members of the Pierce County Mafia, as they're called, but fundamentally it was the result of a solid block of Democrats when Democrats were in the majority and they could get things done in their own county. And it'll be probably helpful this year for Pierce County that we've got some more Democrats coming.

My view of it is that when you began to see Pierce County's influence, it was not because good people weren't elected—some Republicans have been great—but because they were then bound by their party and we were bound by our party to certain things.

Lorraine Wojahn was there. Senator Wojahn, if you want to meet a force, if you wanted one person to stop a piece of legislation. In my opinion, Lorraine Wojahn, three years after she dies, would be more effective than almost anybody else. She was such a fierce fighter, and Ruth was a fierce fighter. And that idea of over-my-dead-body politics has waned in some ways as you're having to negotiate far more than you used to.

**Ms. McLeod:** I guess that we should follow up with just a little mention of what were the things that happened as a result of these strong Democrats who were rising up, especially from Pierce County and elsewhere. What were the things that happened to Tacoma? What development? What changed?

**Mr. Flannigan:** Some specific things included that the Union Station came to life. Union Station was the old railroad station. It was a beautiful old building where the railroads used to drop their folks off. Then when it was in decay for a long, long time—Young Tim Strege at that time wound up launching this Save-our-Station effort, of which Ruth and other people became members and managed to turn around. The Feds put their courthouse there and you got Congressman Norm Dicks involved. Norm Dicks has always got to be seen as a part of the Mafia, maybe the head, in the sense that he's such a formidable legislator.

**Ms. McLeod:** Who got some federal monies.

**Mr. Flannigan:** Yes. And he cared a lot about Pierce County. That led to Lorraine Wojahn wanting that Historical Museum to not only stay in Tacoma but to be rekindled. So the state Historical Museum is now on Pacific Avenue. But there would be no University

of Washington Tacoma branch, I don't think, without Brian Ebersole's determination that it would go there. There would probably be no merger of the community colleges and the technical colleges into a college system. The technical college at Bates was a Tacoma high school. It was part of the Tacoma high school system. So, in a pissing match of some sort that I don't know about, he wrenched it from the school district and put it into that light.

**Ms. McLeod:** And he was Speaker of the House at one time and then he went on to become mayor of Tacoma, or was it vice versa?

**Mr. Flannigan:** Speaker of the House, became mayor, but he also was the president of Bates Technical College after he was mayor. He had a lot of good support there.

**Ms. McLeod:** So there was a renaissance?

**Mr. Flannigan:** There was a renaissance. George Walk is a delightful man, works for the county, and George could tell you how much Puyallup and how much transportation got in the broadest of senses. But they were united. They did meet regularly, and they knew what Pierce County wanted.

**Ms. McLeod:** And needed, physically.

**Mr. Flannigan:** Yes. But every county needs it in one sense. But the renaissance, in my opinion, that is Tacoma now—the early Pittsburgh and the current Pittsburgh, as a comparison, I really think has been created by the University of Washington in Tacoma.

There's a book, *Seeing Seattle*, by Roger Sale, on why Seattle and not Tacoma? And he argues in some ways there that someone donated six hundred and forty acres and said, 'You can have the University of Washington here, I'll give you the land.' I think the gentrification of a community—for good and bad, but let's assume whatever it means now: the renaissance is a gentrification—is basically how do you attract a thinking middle class? It isn't: How do you have more mill hands? It's how do you have people who want their leisure time to include the arts, too? Who wants leisure time? You want the universities. You want a public university. The university needs to attract good faculty. The faculty need to say, at some point, that "we need a research division." At some point the research division says, "Why don't we start

a small company; we just invented chairs or wheels," or whatever it is.

**Ms. McLeod:** And that seems to be what Ruth's vision was.

**Mr. Flannigan:** I think she saw that. Exactly. She knew there wasn't an engine that made cities great and that the engine wasn't the me-too engine of second cities. And I think Tacoma stumbled or came upon the opportunity to ask itself, do they become the bedroom of King County or do they find an identity? And I think we're at a new moment, and that's the moment of transition from all of this energy that got us to this moment right now. At the same time we don't have enough tourism to have a base that's paving the city with money, so what are we going to do? How's the Port going to be a part of this? How's the Thea Foss Waterway? So there are battles going on now, such as do we stop gentrification as the Port of Tacoma might want, because they're afraid of giving up Port project space for condos. In my view, which is, if we don't have a thriving downtown that is a place you can have a residence if you decide to move here, then this will all atrophy again.

**Ms. McLeod:** I'm going to end up going backwards in time here again to get to the next question. There was an interview that was just delightful with Denny Heck [on TVW's Inside Olympia].

But Ruth gives this quote, "I like the idea of being a kingmaker a little more than a legislator." This comes to mind because you'd mentioned Norm Dicks. He mentions during Ruth's memorial that when he was running for his congressional seat, I think for the Sixth District, he had to first be interviewed by Ruth. He had to cut the mustard with Ruth Fisher. Let's put it that way. So he came to be interviewed by her.

Then, when I was interviewing Joan, Ruth's daughter, she said, "You know, some of these things just come to the surface," and she opened a folder that had a letter from U.S. Senator Warren Magnuson to Ruth, asking for her review and opinion. The letter was written in the early seventies, I think. Ruth wasn't even in political office at that time, how did she get to be so important? Do you have any insight or can you help explain that to me?

**Mr. Flannigan:** I can help a little, but not completely. But I can give you a parallel. It's a woman named Dawn Lucien who is about Ruth's age, a little

younger, and she's still in Tacoma. She's absolutely alert, and Ruth and Dawn had similar power. Dawn was Norm Dicks' first chief of staff out here. She was one of the five closest friends of Hubert Humphrey. He called her some evenings when he was Vice President and, in a sense, said, "Here's what's happening." She was one of his absolute confidants.

My point being that these two Tacomans, I think, were born with this confidence. They had this political confidence. I suspect it started out because they're old enough to have been in the pits of political action when Jackson (Senator Henry M. Jackson) was getting elected and when Maggie (Senator Magnuson) was climbing... Well, he'd already been there. When Ruth died, how old was she?

**Ms. McLeod:** She was born in 1925 and she died February 21, 2005. Seventy-nine when she died.

**Mr. Flannigan:** So, she's at least 14 years older than I am. That 14 years is a significant time, having been a part of the Truman/Dewey race. She voted for Truman and Stevenson, whereas Kennedy was my voting possibility. I guess what I'm saying is they built their framework of having given not only good work but good assessment, good strategy, both Dawn Lucien and she in that period of time. And again, how they got there is before I was even engaged in politics. Why Ruth? And why did Lowry come all the way over for a little fundraiser for a judge, or a little fundraiser for a dentist, Flannigan, and that sort of thing. There were some others who came, too.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did these fundraisers become a who's who? Like it's the place to be and be seen, in a way, if you're a politician?

**Mr. Flannigan:** Well, it was a time of progressive political fundraisers. I would have fundraisers with as many as two hundred people in my home. That was one of the reasons my wife said, "What in the hell are we doing here?"

**Ms. McLeod:** Did you just have that little rental home Metcalf wrote about, the one where you had the first recall meeting?

**Mr. Flannigan:** It wasn't quite as small as he said, but it was a three-bedroom rental. It was a time of political activity. There was the recall. I had meetings about radio KAYE and how do you get rid of this radio station? I had meetings about running for Park

Board. One candidate who we—best thing we never did—which was we were going to go get everybody who was named after a tree, Jim Fir and Dick Laurel and whatever, and all of our endorsements would be either park animals or trees.

**Ms. McLeod:** That's a PR ploy.

**Mr. Flannigan:** That was me. I was in the business. I still think it's a great idea, but it was a lot of work. First you had to find them and second you had to convince them. But my main point is that Ruth was one of the few that had preceded us—those of us who came along during civil rights—and it's in that preceding that she and others had built what I would call party loyalties and relationships. I came along, certainly a Democrat, but I voted for Dan Evans. I voted for the person. So, we were issue-centered at that point. And I think you found that these yellow-dog Democrats, of which there were a few of them, also had very insightful minds. And she had that. The joy of knowing her was that she would just tell you, "That's a bunch of shit." And most people, you know...

**Ms. McLeod:** Dance around it?

**Mr. Flannigan:** Move around. Yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** I know that Ruth's passions, evidenced by the committees she worked on and the legislation she sponsored, were transit and growth management. She spent twenty years on the Transportation Committee, the entire time she was in the House. And she was also involved in establishing Sound Transit, uniting the Department of Highways and Department of Transportation, helping to craft and push through the

Growth Management Act. But having known Ruth for thirty-five years, do you have insight to the roots of these interests and her dedication to these causes, specifically? She could have gone, for example, toward health and human services in some ways, but she didn't.

**Mr. Flannigan:** It wasn't her bag. She cared about that issue. That's interesting, because until you said that I didn't have a very clear reflection. I came along as a warm-and-fuzzy. [State Representative] Jeannie Darneille (LD 27<sup>th</sup>) and a series of others, and we embraced the person. Ruth, in a way, embraced the kingmaking and she certainly helped me on some

things in that sense. But she tended to embrace the machinations of politics. So moving humans, transporting humans between Seattle and Tacoma and that sort of thing—this is all speculation—was easier to deal with, in public, than to have to be battling for the homeless or a food program or something for which you tend to be down there throwing coleslaw on the plate and doing things. I think Ruth liked those things which brought cerebral activity and not so much passionate... That's not the word, but where the zealots were about systems, not zealots about every-child-deserves-a-thing. Those are things we all agree on, but you can't necessarily go with what that means. I guess to be clear, let me say, you didn't see Ruth in the food line, you saw her on the protest line, so to speak. I think her interest in transportation and in growth management was about the large, systemic changes that could be made if you put your mind and put your energies to it. I know when I met her she would say, "I don't ever want to be a legislator. I don't ever want to run for office. That's for people like you." And even when she was asked to run, how that came to pass I can't remember now, but it was even a surprise at that time because Ruth liked deflating politicians. She liked stabbing the pomposity of my craft and the hubris. And while she was filled with it herself in a different sort of way, she also knew that was true and could laugh at it. So it was a surprise. And then it was a surprise she stayed as long as she did. The surprise was not that she worked hard, but she worked so focused. What you're really honoring is this focused person.

**Ms. McLeod:** You took over Ruth's seat in the House. When you did, or even before you entered the House, when you were running, did she give you advice?

**Mr. Flannigan:** First, she didn't support me. She supported another candidate. I didn't know that I was going to be running, and she'd already given her support to another candidate.

**Ms. McLeod:** You mean upon her retirement? Did you run after her retirement, after you knew she was going to retire?

**Mr. Flannigan:** Yes. After she retired.

**Ms. McLeod:** And then you ran, and she didn't support you?

**Mr. Flannigan:** She did not support me. A fellow named Bill LaBorde had already been given... First, I don't think people thought I was going to run. Second, she had given her word to Bill LaBorde before that and Jeannie Darneille, who's the one who asked me to run, had called Ruth and said, "Gosh, there's some really good news. Dennis is going to run." And she was not as pumped up, and it turned out she was supporting Bill LaBorde. We remained friends.

**Ms. McLeod:** Once she gave her support to someone and committed it, is it the problem that if someone else came along she'd like to support, she couldn't transfer that support? Or was it that she felt Bill LaBorde was the person she thought would win and would be good?

**Mr. Flannigan:** He was big on transportation. That was his effort, and on environmental issues. He was a lobbyist down there. A nice young man. Hard worker. Had done a lot of stuff.

**Ms. McLeod:** You said some things about Ruth running for the House, which I think a lot of people echoed. She, herself, did not think she would ever run and then suddenly she was running in '82. She didn't at least have an inclination or interest in running. But she says in an interview she wanted to be a kingmaker, not a legislator. There are a few folks who didn't think she'd stay in as long as she did, but I wanted to ask you, do you remember why she decided to run?

**Mr. Flannigan:** I don't know. But I would not be surprised if she and Bill were breaking up, if people still needed to make a living. They probably needed health insurance. I just know that, unless Ruth was left a million dollars by Bill or something like that, I have no idea whatever the settlement was in their life. But I know that if you've been dipped in political paint and something happens, that might be where you go. I think when you come to the Legislature it's easy to fall in love with it. There's a bully pulpit. Ruth was very funny, very sharp, very cynical, very critically astute. And as a forum for a wit—since I think of myself as a wit—one does not pass the microphone up.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did you ever get to hear any of her speeches on the floor? I know you weren't there at the time.

**Mr. Flannigan:** No. But I've heard about some that were real wing-dings. I know enemies she's made because she told me. I called her, or she called me right after I won, and she gave me some advice about some people. Don't trust So-and-so, and So-and-so. She said spend the first few years sitting in the back watching and seeing what happens. She said that's the advice that had been given to her, and that's what she did.

**Ms. McLeod:** I saw her freshman year seating chart. She sat in the back, next to Jerry Ellis, in the very back next to the stairs.

**Mr. Flannigan:** I've been in the back row every year I've been there.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did you feel, when she ran and won, that she was going to stay? That she had the makings to be the kind of politician who would stay and would be re-elected?

**Mr. Flannigan:** You ought to stay a while. Nobody's going to let you run for just two years, so somewhere there was some kind of commitment. The general commitment in people's mind is, I think, ten years. That should be enough to where they got their money out of me, so to speak. I think if Ruth hadn't loved it she would have left it, though. Maybe that's what I would say. Some people who don't love it stay in it. It's the thing they cling to for whatever reason. I think Ruth would have had no fear as long as her economics were okay. I don't know what that was. I think she fell in love. I mean, her house was somewhat like my house. It was just kind of a total mess with books everywhere. Ruth lived for progressive politics, for ideas, for combat. The Legislature is the home of combat and, believe it or not, good minds. People overlook that. It is even interesting, when we hire a legislative assistant, the quality we can get for thirty-five thousand dollars a year. Many people want a strong support staff: "Just make sure I'm on time." In my circumstances I find you can get enormous talent because power is compelling. And I think Ruth loved the battles. The big freshman class came in with her, and the collegial nature of those relationships is pretty powerful. I know people who came quite a bit after and felt that Ruth treated them terribly.

**Ms. McLeod:** In that freshman class was Gary Locke who became Governor, Mary Margaret Haugen, who

left the House for the State Senate. And Jennifer Belcher was in that class, I think?

**Mr. Flannigan:** It rings a bell. And I think wasn't Helen Sommers close by?

**Ms. McLeod:** Oh, no, she had joined the House in '72. She was ahead.

**Mr. Flannigan:** That much? That's right. But they were take-care-of business-ers.

And Sally Walker who was a Republican. And they were in love with smoking, both Sally and Ruth. Sally came to work with me on the county council, and I got in a whole bunch of hell because I asked her not to smoke in the building—which was a no-smoking building—as the chair. And didn't perhaps do it as gracefully as I probably should have in hindsight, but she and Ruth were like that. Why were they like that? Because they went out on smoke breaks with each other. Their politics were like this, but their friendship was like that. Real politicians don't care what your views are, they care that they hold them. They measure people not by whether they're right or left in the end, but is that the substance of the person? Because there are in politics, as in writing, as in everything, people who are holding what they think they're supposed to hold. Ruth believed in that. Sally believed. And if you look at Ruth's friends, they will all be people who believed. She wasn't afraid of the arguments.

I think even with Norm Dicks, she disagreed with Norm on Vietnam and a whole bunch of policy. It's interesting. The implication of Norm's remarks is that she endorsed him the first time. It might be because of her relationship with Magnuson, but I know she struggled with Norm's politics about military things and about Boeing for a long time. But they became, just as described, these fierce friends, and that was probably around her needs in transportation, as she came to see his talents.

**Ms. McLeod:** So it's somewhat strategic. You learn to be somewhat strategic in politics. You have ideals, but do you think that's what that expresses? You have these ideals but you also have these needs to get these things done?

**Mr. Flannigan:** Absolutely. Utopia is at worst described as a heaven, where all you do is sing. And at best where everybody gets along on Earth and everyone who'd been on Earth knows it doesn't work. So I think idealism is the reason you remain and

retain hope, and reality is what you can extract that includes hope.

**Ms. McLeod:** I like that statement. I'm fishing for Ruth Fisher stories—these moments best illustrate Ruth as exactly who she is. I'm going to read you back a quote that you gave in *The Seattle Times* shortly after Ruth's death, just a couple days. At least it was published a couple days after Ruth's death. You said:

*"She had an acerbic wit and an absolute impatience with the delay of government. She pushed on it every day she was here to get about the public's business... There is so little directness in American politics, those who do it are compelling characters on the scene, and she was one such person."*

When you were saying these words, what were the stories about Ruth that came to mind? Did you have a specific memory?

**Mr. Flannigan:** It's interesting hearing that back. It's not a bad quote, as they call them. And it's only got one little piece of flab as I heard it back. And that is...

**Ms. McLeod:** You're going to edit yourself?

**Mr. Flannigan:** No, but, "she pushed on it every day she was there to get about the public's business." I don't know about the public's business, but it sounded so good at the time. Well, two things. When there was no place where you'd go, Ruth and I would be somewhere because we were politicians, and she'd be asked to speak. Ruth would look at her notes, throw them down and say, "Well, here's what's going on." And, it was absolutely at the core of her belief about what was going on because we only bring our own eyes, and it would upset people and it would inspire smiles, and people would be mad she said it. It's, in a sense, like when the head of Transportation has a staff person who keeps going to meetings and is blunt; they often want to rein them in. The great staff, the great directors, I imagine, would say, "I know I'd like to rein him in but he's often right, and I have to listen to that as well." So it was that. Plus we would sit at the tables together and Ruth and I are both—Ruth was and I am—very deft at spotting and remarking in a clever way about the pomposity, the bullshit, the lies, the soft underbelly of political careers, political actions. Ruth could hardly abide any of it. Even

less so than I. I give a lot of people a great deal of room, personally. People come to me and say, "I'm a Democrat, I'm a Republican, and I couldn't stand you when you came in, but you've been straight with me, and I'm going to vote for you." Candor almost doesn't exist in the profession. It doesn't mean there isn't candor in this kind of interview, or there isn't candor among politicians, but people are twisted by the spin-doctor mentality. I come out of the spin-doctor world. I can spin pretty goddamn well. And I won't do it, and I don't like it. I will often be clever in how I set up the truth. Ruth might have been more blunt in the sense of blurting. This probably shouldn't be on the record, it's not about Ruth, it's about what I think of the gift she had, and, to a degree, my own gift. That is, you can't get anywhere if two lies are in the room trying to find the truth. And Ruth's candor let the other person, in my opinion—because I believe it happens for me as well—let the other person release their truth. Whereas you both come in with postures, you cannot get anywhere. And almost everybody in elected or unelected political life finds themselves without the courage or wit or insight to realize you've got to get down to it.

Transportation's all screwed up in this state. And it was screwed up through Ruth's watch as well as the watches that have followed. Not because the people haven't challenged themselves, but because pretty soon people say, "We can't ask for another tax," and someone else will say, "We really ought to name that road thing after So-and-so because that will get us four votes on the other side." And pretty soon the obligation to move people and freight have run away from the body.

**Ms. McLeod:** I wonder, because I know you're on the Transportation Committee and you just brought up transportation, if the evidence of Ruth's work, the legislation that she sponsored and the things that she's done and the bridges that she's built more or less. And is there evidence that she shaped a kind of path that you're on right now in doing transportation work? I wonder what her impact has been.

**Mr. Flannigan:** Good question. I've actually thought a little bit about it. The significant parts of it are that she was beloved by most transportation staff. That doesn't mean she was easy to be around, but the fierce nature of her commitment to transportation, wanting to solve it, was largely admired. And most people

who work in transportation come out of some love of public transportation, too. The highway people often fiercely believe it, but they usually don't try to see if they can get a job there when you can go to the private sector and put those roads down. And most people came out of Democratic governors and so that became the inside staff.

She had a good relationship with Mary Margaret (Mary Margaret Haugen, H-10, S-10) which was handy, so they could battle, but mostly they could pull together and have their own battles of will.

**Ms. McLeod:** Senator Mary Margaret Haugen, once a representative for the Tenth District, now a senator, who, at the time they were in the House, supported Ruth on issues like the public/private financing of Tacoma Narrows Bridge. Also, she worked in growth management, actually closely with Ruth because Mary Margaret was chairing the Committee on Local Government at the time. And that was such a big piece of the Growth Management Act. Ruth's piece was big, too.

**Mr. Flannigan:** Right. All that stuff. And remember people come in classes. You still remember who was in your freshman class. The second part of it is that the Legislature changes rapidly. There's about twenty percent change each election. So we're now three elections into my career, and I replaced her, so that might be a sixty percent turnover by retirement, attrition, defeat, more Democrats winning and replacing Republicans. So probably more than fifty percent of the House members are not the same members who rode with Ruth. They don't know what Ruth left, except for the rarest of circumstances. Think back four years and to any legislator that you can think of and of something that they did that they owned and now, who knows where it is? So Ed Murray (43<sup>rd</sup> LD) was part of Ruth's thing.

**Ms. McLeod:** And he replaced Ruth as Chair of Transportation?

**Mr. Flannigan:** Current chair now leaving. And so he and Ruth agreed quite a bit, but he, again, began to alter it. Ruth was a fierce defender of the commission, the Transportation commissioners; Ed was an opponent of it. Meaning, he thought it ought to be under the governor.

**Ms. McLeod:** Because the Transportation commissioners, prior to 2005, selected the head of the commission, the Secretary of Transportation.

**Mr. Flannigan:** Yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** And there were a lot of other people who wanted the Governor to name that person. So you're saying that Ed Murray wanted the Governor to have that power?

**Mr. Flannigan:** Yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** And Ruth had wanted the opposite?

**Mr. Flannigan:** Yes. Right. So you see these significant changes. She leaves and there's kind of an erosion. And I think in transportation the crisis of biennial funding means that large systemic directions are eroded by our inability to commit the next Legislature to follow where we go, so people are afraid to plan out twenty years. They'll build a bridge that'll survive fifty years. But planning twenty years out for what next should come on line in each of those twenty years, we don't do that very well. So what has to be falling down. You see a viaduct and a bridge that are now under.

**Ms. McLeod:** The Alaskan Way Viaduct. Which bridge are you talking about?

**Mr. Flannigan:** 520 and spans. Until the earthquake, there was no worry about the viaduct and suddenly that has a life. And 520 gets a life. Three years ago I never heard about 520 as a crisis. So these crises arise. So I think growth management is a more sustaining measure because it affects the laws for a longer period of time.

**Ms. McLeod:** You mean a more sustaining measure of Ruth's legacy?

**Mr. Flannigan:** Yes. That the transportation, which in a way she lost what she wanted on the Narrows Bridge, and that's probably why she left the Legislature. That's certainly what everybody says. I'm sure it is. She hated Frank, and he may have hated her. And I probably arrived wary of Frank. And Frank is an enormously effective, very difficult to read, Speaker. I've had two Speakers tell me that they think he's the best that the state has ever had. Two former Speakers.

**Ms. McLeod:** Yes, and he's been able to swing Democratic control of the House.

**Mr. Flannigan:** Yes. And we now have a super majority. That's frightening.

**Ms. McLeod:** Can you leave us with a little then-and-now regarding Ruth Fisher and her legacy? As in, "pre Ruth Fisher, this did not exist, now this exists."

**Mr. Flannigan:** I would say that Ruth Fisher was a bridge between the old-time Democrats of the fifties and the progressive Democrats that began to emerge with civil rights and women's issues. The progressives were the people out of the civil rights movement and out of the women's movement and a variety of social movements. And Ruth had those values that had been active with just being a yellow-dog Democrat, and whatever that means. So we went to her for some guidance of how to be politically organized or active. She probably learned from us that you could do things inside civil rights that she probably thought would maybe have to be delayed longer, I don't know.

When I came into the party—mostly young Turks when I was young—Turks thought the world was just filled with hacks. And the exceptions were Ruth and Donna Gilman, and there were a small number of exceptions. Even people who I learned later were very talented, able politicians, I had just put into the hack-sack. So Ruth rescued the hack-sack a little bit and bridged that.

So I'll give you the Tacoma side of it. Ruth brought Sound Transit. She brought the idea that a coordinated corridor of transportation beyond highways was essential. And I think that that's still part of the mantra of the Democrats in transportation as well as in Olympia. Her willingness to ridicule—might be the right word, but maybe not—increased in the last few years. She didn't tolerate weakness or tolerate fools. I think she sometimes didn't any longer recognize talent at that moment because Frank had ridden on top of the Narrows. I just know some people who felt ridiculed by Ruth who would not give them one kind word, nor did they ever feel they got one from Ruth Fisher. I think she was probably worn out and snapping at the heels of the horses.

**Ms. McLeod:** We were talking about the end of Ruth's career, but I wanted to talk about your involve-

ment at the beginning of her career, because we missed that, I think.

**Mr. Flannigan:** Well, a lot of things in Ruth's early campaigns were different when she was trying to be elected instead of just coasting. She wouldn't even put out signs in the end. Two years ago I didn't put any out; I put a few out this time. But in her first campaign, I created her advertising, marketing. And I've always been happy with the line, which was, "Giving politics a good name," and a subhead just says, "Ruth Fisher." And I think that we did. We gave politics a good name.

**Ms. McLeod:** That's great. Was that part of her signage, or was that more like banners or ads?

**Mr. Flannigan:** This is an ad campaign that I did.

**Ms. McLeod:** That's great. What was her feeling about signage and ads and campaigns in themselves? What did she think about it?

**Mr. Flannigan:** She quit using signs, quit putting things up. Basically said, "I'm a Democrat in a district that votes seventy percent Democratic." And she also, from what I understand, kind of just kept her campaign contributions as chair of Transportation. This is probably where she and Frank may have fallen out because he likes a lot of that money to go into trying to elect other Democrats, and she didn't contribute to that.

**Ms. McLeod:** Oh, he wanted them for a general fund? What are the other options for campaign money, and what did she do with hers?

**Mr. Flannigan:** You put it in a non-campaign fund and it can be then given to the Party or given to charities. If the governor's going to take a trip to China, and you'd like to go along on that, then you could use it for that sort of government work. You're going to have to check these figures, but she had something like, at one time, fifty-seven thousand dollars in there. I know at the end she gave money to charities.

**Ms. McLeod:** As a representative, you can designate where that money goes?

**Mr. Flannigan:** Yes. And this is just—I know you've interviewed Jeannie Darneille—but I know that Ruth didn't have charities that she had selected herself. It was a discussion with Jeannie that brought her to those ideas.

**Ms. McLeod:** That's interesting. Anything else you want to add or remember today?

**Mr. Flannigan:** Ruth Fisher was, as they keep saying about us, one of a kind. We are all one of a kind, but Ruth Fisher honored the courage of politics. Oregon Senator Wayne Morris supposedly said, "Hold office like you're never going to run again and run like you've never held office." And I think Ruth Fisher did that. You could not get her to bite her tongue to protect herself, and that's the best you can get in this business.

**Ms. McLeod:** But the thing is, she served in the House for twenty years.

**Mr. Flannigan:** I think that's the way to success, but most are afraid of it. The other thing is she was never in a swing district. And I'm not either, and I'm not quite sure how challenged my courage would be if I needed seven votes each time to put me over the fifty percent. I would hope I would say the same things.

**Ms. McLeod:** Thank you so much.

**Mr. Flannigan:** Thank you. This has been fun.



*Beverly Callaghan was Ruth's longtime legislative assistant. This interview took place on December 7, 2006.*

**Ms. McLeod:** What kind of work had you been doing prior to working in the House for Ruth? What were you doing at the time?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Just bookkeeping. My last job before I retired was with a beer distributor, and that's where I retired from.

**Ms. McLeod:** So you had retired. How did you end up working for Ruth Fisher as her legislative aide? Is that the correct title?

**Ms. Callaghan:** They changed the title every year.

**Ms. McLeod:** Okay.

**Ms. Callaghan:** I bumped into Ruth several times, wrote her a sympathy note when she fell and broke her leg after she entered the Legislature. She voted in the precinct where I worked, Lowell Elementary School, and she stopped by one day and said, "How would you like to come to Olympia to work for me?" I was delighted at the idea. I was very bored. But then I slipped in the snow and broke my pelvis and my arm and I was still recovering. So I called Ruth, and I was heartbroken. I said, "I just can't come to work for you." And she said, "Well, let's see. Can you walk?" "Yes." "Your legs and your arms work?" "Yes. My left arm." "Well, come on down, and we'll see what we can do." That's Ruth. That's Ruth always. Ruth never interviewed or anything like that. She got an idea and she thought, "I think we'd get along." And so we did.

**Ms. McLeod:** That's amazing. I just assumed there would have been a real interview.

**Ms. Callaghan:** No. Not Ruth.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did you know the circumstances of her fall? I had read somewhere that she had fallen and broken a hip in 1985, and she was in Olympia working, regardless. Is that the time you wrote her the note and said you were sorry?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did you come on board in 1985?

**Ms. Callaghan:** No. It took another year because at that time Doris [Evans] worked for her. And that was a hullabaloo. Doris's grammar was impossible, and the kids that worked up there told me that Ruth would be working until nine or ten at night rewriting letters because Doris's were awful. And they almost broke up their friendship, but they finally did make up before Doris died, and I'm glad because they were very good friends. But Doris was not an aide or a secretary or anything. She'd never done anything like that.

**Ms. McLeod:** My sense is that the two of them shared political common interests, from their days working on political issues in Tacoma, long before Ruth thought about entering the House.

**Ms. Callaghan:** Yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** And they thought they could go in there as partners. That Doris might even advise her.

**Ms. Callaghan:** Yes. And Doris couldn't be a partner. Ruth was not going to be a legislator and have a partner. She needed someone just to sit at the outside desk.

**Ms. McLeod:** Right. Describe for me what a legislative aide does. Maybe I shouldn't even ask in general about the work of a legislative aide. Describe for me what you did in working for Ruth. What your role was?

**Ms. Callaghan:** That's probably a better way to put it because what Ruth asked of an aide was different than any of the others. Most legislative aides help a little in writing bills. Ruth, I don't think, even wrote her own bills. Each department had a group downstairs that did the work. Ruth had a transportation staff who did most of hers. She'd say, "I want a bill on such-and-such," and they would write it for her downstairs.

I was her people person. And as she sat in the Legislature, she got her ideas for bills. She traveled around the country where she really got the interest in transportation. She traveled around the country to see, to visit all these places that the bus services. Her dad had driven the trolley.

**Ms. McLeod:** He'd been a mechanic, too, hadn't he?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Yes. And she used to ride with her dad. She was very proud of her dad. So she was very interested in bus service for the city. And she also was interested in bridges and roads. Just a kind of a total infrastructure that would keep the whole state going. And she traveled a lot.

**Ms. McLeod:** Do you remember where she traveled?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Canada, especially in Quebec. And California. And in some parts of the eastern part of the United States where they had a lot of toll roads and things of that sort. She was interested in toll roads because that was the only way we were going to get some roads. That is all I really remember at the moment. But her summers were when she traveled a lot.

**Ms. McLeod:** So when the Legislature wasn't in session she was traveling?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did you also make travel arrangements for her and things like that?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Yes. That I could do. Very little else because Ruth was a very independent woman. I would like to say first of all about Ruth is that she had presence. That is how you would describe Ruth, any place or any time you saw her. You saw Ruth and you noticed her wherever she was and whatever she was doing. And that's why I was so thrilled to go to work for her.

She also was the kind of a person who would say, "Beverly, will you come in here?" And the first couple of years I'd be thinking, "Oh, my God, what did I do now?" And I'd go in and she would say, "You know what I heard today?" And it would be just campus gossip, that's all. It would be just something that just would tickle both of us half to death. We would just sit in her office, and I'd choke over her cigarette, and we'd laugh. She soon found out that her jokes appealed to me, and my jokes appealed to her, and we

would laugh when we'd get together. So we had a lot of stuff in common like that.

**Ms. McLeod:** When you said that you were her people person, that she needed a people person out front, what aspect of your work dealt with being a people person? What did that mean?

**Ms. Callaghan:** That meant she'd let me know pretty fast that she didn't want to talk to this person. She wanted me to talk to them. I would write all her letters, communicate with them. If there was someone on the phone who needed a long conversation, I would do it. She seldom had time or patience to carry on a long conversation with anyone. I would do that.

**Ms. McLeod:** So you did the hand-holding when you needed to?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Yes. That's probably describes it best, hand-holding. I remember one of the times when the women who were on welfare with children came up there, trying to make us see that the important thing they did was staying home with their kids. And Ruth didn't want to talk to them at all. And so I would have maybe ten of them hanging around my desk, telling me their stories of their staying home with their kids. Bringing their kids for me to see. And I was the cookie lady, too, by the way.

**Ms. McLeod:** You were a cookie lady?

**Ms. Callaghan:** I was the cookie lady. I always had a big jar of cookies on my desk. So, you could imagine the welfare women and their kids ate my cookies.

**Ms. McLeod:** And why were they coming to visit a state legislator?

**Ms. Callaghan:** There was one time of the year when they would be talking about the budget for them. So, these women had an organization and would come up to lobby at that time of year.

Incidentally, the people she would not see at all, and she would not even accept a rose, were the pro-life people. She had nothing to do with the pro-lifers. She had many miscarriages and she had one little boy who locked himself in a toy box and died. And she had absolutely no patience with those people. And they would put a rose on her desk, and she would tear it up and put it in my wastebasket. When Ruth didn't have any patience, as I said before, she had *no* patience. That was all there was to it. She would have

nothing to do with them. And sometimes it embarrassed me. And that's where I was a people person, because then I could sympathize with those people.

**Ms. McLeod:** When you sat at that desk outside Ruth's office, and you were the go-between between a legislator and all these other people who were calling, how did you know whom she did and didn't need to talk to? How did you learn the issues? How did you get all that so quickly?

**Ms. Callaghan:** I just knew who the lobbyists were on transportation matters, and I knew to put those through right away. And if they weren't transportation people, I didn't. And she would say to me, if So-and-so calls, I want to talk to them. But I soon learned who the lobbyists were who she could get information from. And that was mainly what she was interested in, getting information from these people. It wasn't that they lobbied to get something from her. Ruth got information from the lobbyists. I don't think they ever got anything from Ruth. She just wasn't that kind. But she got a hell of a lot from them.

**Ms. McLeod:** Can you give me an example of what sort of valuable information Ruth could get from a lobbyist? Do you remember?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Where we needed a bridge and how you built it and how much it was going to cost. How a road was falling apart and how you needed to work on it and what the cost was going to be. You could usually get all that information from the lobbyists. She could get enough information from those people so she could go to [Speaker] Frank Chopp, for example—she got along well with [Speaker] Joe King, but not Chopp—and give them the information so she could get that in the budget, and get as much as she possibly could in the budget that year for her bridges. This bridge out there now was her baby.

**Ms. McLeod:** Are you referring to the Narrows Bridge? The Second Narrows Bridge?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Yes, that was her baby.

**Ms. McLeod:** Do you remember how invested she was in making sure the second bridge was built?

**Ms. Callaghan:** She was probably invested in the Narrows Bridge for three or four years. A year would fall behind, and another year would fall behind, and

thank goodness that before she died they were building the bridge. They had dedicated the first part.

I didn't realize, until she sat down and explained it to me—those bridges should last for a hundred years as far as I was concerned—that the [First Tacoma Narrows] bridge was fragile, and she thought we were going to need to have two bridges. Going over the bridge, as she was saying, we were taking a chance with lives. She always knew we were going to have two bridges, although she didn't have much backing in that for a while. It was just a couple of years before she died that she began to feel secure about this. They were working on it, but she was getting the backing she needed and the secure feeling she needed. But it was at that time when she had her quarrel with [Speaker] Frank Chopp [regarding funding for the bridge] when she realized she had cancer, and she quit, and went home and locked herself in her apartment and nobody saw her, nobody talked to her.

**Ms. McLeod:** You mentioned that, while she served in the House, there were certain people she wouldn't speak to, but she would speak to certain lobbyists. Not all, but some. I know from talking to other people that you're right; when there was someone Ruth didn't want to communicate with she wouldn't communicate with them. How did she exercise that?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Very rudely. Very abrupt. If there was someone she felt she had no real communication with, she felt they were jackasses, she'd be rude.

**Ms. McLeod:** Can you tell me what Ruth's relationship was with the press? If those were phone calls she would be likely to take? Were there particular reporters or particular papers that she liked better than others?

**Ms. Callaghan:** She'd take Peter Callaghan [Bev Callaghan's son] and Joe Turner's calls [reporters for The Tacoma News Tribune]. I don't think she was as anxious to take the Seattle calls. She'd take The Olympian's calls, some of them, but there was one reporter up there whose name I don't recall, an asinine creature. She wouldn't take his calls at all.

**Ms. McLeod:** From The Olympian?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Yes. But she felt she owed returning the calls to her constituents, and she felt a great loyalty to Pierce County first.

**Ms. McLeod:** When you said Ruth felt loyalty to her constituents, did she reach them through the press? Is that why she would take the calls from the press?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Yes. But it surprised me to learn that she was very shy with people. Here's one example: Ruth said, "Beverly"—never "Bev"—"I bumped into a lady last night who thanked me for my letter. What'd I say?" I had to think about it for a second, "Oh, that's the one you sent to the little boy from Bellarmine [Preparatory School, Tacoma Catholic High School] and said he was an extremely bright little boy and you wished we could clone him." And after I had sent the letter I thought, "Oh, God, Catholic. 'Clone?' What did I do?" But apparently the mother liked it. And Ruth said, "Oh, okay," and went back into her office. So, on occasion she would ask me what I had written those people.

She liked to wisecrack in her letters to the press, and that she would do. That way she could communicate with her constituents and make them laugh, too. That was important to Ruth that they laugh.

**Ms. McLeod:** How important do you think humor was to Ruth? People have talked to me about her speeches on the Floor where she often used comedy. Why do you think she used comedy and to what effect?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Because she hoped these people would realize that this was fact besides being comedy. That she hoped they were bright enough to see that. Did you hear about when she introduced a bill that would stop people from wearing the state flag on the seat of their pants?

**Ms. McLeod:** No. Nobody told me about this. What are you talking about?

**Ms. Callaghan:** I don't know how it started, but they [golfers] were wearing the flag, the state flag, on the seat of their pants when they played golf. It just infuriated a lot of people, but not Ruth. She didn't care. They could wear anything as far as she was concerned. Who cared whether they wore that. But they asked for a law, so she introduced a law. That was when she was on the Constitution, Elections, and Ethics committee.

**Ms. McLeod:** What was this law she introduced?

**Ms. Callaghan:** She introduced a law that no one could wear an image of the flag on the seat of their

pants. And I swear to God the statement she had introducing the law was no bigger than that, and it was so funny.

**Ms. McLeod:** Like one inch?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** A one-inch paragraph?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Yes. That was the way Ruth dealt with that. Another one of Ruth's little gizmos was at the end of the session when they've got all these awfully small, boring laws. She and two or three of the guys who smoked would sit in the back of the Chamber smoking cigarettes. They each hid their favorite book inside their bill book so no one could see what they were reading. The votes on these laws were almost always "Ayes," so they didn't have to pay too close attention.

**Ms. McLeod:** You were quoted in a Seattle Times article shortly after Ruth died, commenting that Ruth didn't put up with any nonsense and she couldn't stand a phony. Did she ever find phonies in the Legislature, and did she let them know?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Yes, she did. One of the phonies was a guy who had the office next to Ruth's. His aide was next to me. He was from northern Washington where they have all the people who are very, very conservative. And so he would write letters to please them, make speeches to please them. But Ruth didn't believe that stuff at all. And she came by his desk one day and he had a letter lying on his desk waiting for mailing. And he had written that he absolutely did not believe in divorce, and it was against God's will. Oh, it was awful, and Ruth stood there and read it and then picked up a pen and wrote across it, "This is B.S." And both his aide and I, of course, cracked up. His aide didn't mind rewriting that letter at all because she had felt the same way. And he explained that he couldn't say what he thought, he had to say what they wanted to hear. And Ruth felt that was just awful. I mean, you were elected supposedly on what you thought, and if voters didn't like what you thought, then they elected somebody else. That's the way it should be. And that's what she considered a real phony. And there were several others whose names I can't remember. She wouldn't have much to do with them. In fact, as she got toward the last, she wouldn't even sign on their bills.

**Ms. McLeod:** On the other side of that, what did other legislators think of Ruth? How did people react to Ruth and what did they think of her?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Great respect. I know I got a lot of respect there because I worked for her. The aides all respected her, and I think most of the legislators did, too. They often wondered why she didn't go over to the Senate, but she never wanted to. She liked the casualness of the House.

**Ms. McLeod:** I wondered that as well, because she seemed really well respected, and she was the chair of one of the most important committees, the Transportation Committee, which wasn't an easy committee to chair. It seems if you're looking at a legislator's career, they might do ten years in the House and move on, but she stayed. Why did you say that she stayed? She liked the casualness?

**Ms. Callaghan:** She just felt that the Senate was too formal and thought too much of themselves. She liked the casualness and the fact that they usually started the bills, and she just liked it. Of course, Ruth being the kind who liked to laugh over things, she would like the House better because it was funnier and she could do funny things.

**Ms. McLeod:** What would you describe as the main themes of Ruth's career as a Representative, and what kind of work did you take on in order to help her reach those goals?

**Ms. Callaghan:** I don't really think I took on a lot to help her reach those goals. I think Ruth had help downstairs [transportation staff] for those goals. I helped her by making her constituents like her so she always got elected. Never, never left a letter unanswered. And that's about the only thing I could do. I'd try a little bit of humor if I thought I could use humor. That was where I could help her, and I could be really nice to the people who came to the desk.

**Ms. McLeod:** What are some of the stories Ruth shared with you about her political experiences prior to joining the House?

**Ms. Callaghan:** I have so many.

**Ms. McLeod:** The 1968 Democratic National Convention?

**Ms. Callaghan:** The one in Chicago. Ruth had said she didn't believe in God, and I don't think she

believed in the Ten Commandments, but she greatly believed in the Amendments to the Constitution. She believed very strongly in those. It was part of Ruth's being. She watched from her window at the hotel what was going on downstairs, and she was utterly appalled. And then they told them to stay in their rooms and not to go down. Ruth went around, to hell with that, she goes around downstairs with "F-- You" written across her forehead, wandering around with all the cops downstairs. "Just try to beat on me." And that's Ruth. That's Ruth.

**Ms. McLeod:** That is a great story.

**Ms. Callaghan:** And she never forgot that. She never forgot that occasion and how appalled she was to see what they were doing. And of course, she hated Nixon and the man who was the mayor of Chicago.

**Ms. McLeod:** Mayor Daley?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Daley. She hated Daley and of course she would always remember that. And it was Daley's cops who were beating up the demonstrators.

**Ms. McLeod:** Right. I've spoken to folks who said Ruth was active even in Tacoma protesting against the Vietnam War. What were you about to say?

**Ms. Callaghan:** I'd liked to have been with her those last two years. I'd like to have been working for her, and I'd like for her to have been still working down there. When she left there, I talked to her and saw the bitterness she held toward [Speaker] Frank Chopp. And I got more of that information from Carol Larson [long-time friend who helped care for Ruth when she was dying]. I talked to Ruth a couple of times before she died. I said the best time I ever had was working for her. She said, "Well, that's sweet of you." Ruth wouldn't say that to anyone. I asked her if she hurt, and she said, "It hurts like hell, Bev." That was the first time she ever called me Bev. But she had refused to go to a doctor or let anyone touch her to help her. But she had told me many times when I worked for her that she had tried everything she knew to stop, but nothing had ever helped her. Nothing at all.

**Ms. McLeod:** You mean to stop smoking?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Yes. And she knew that it was the smoking that had done it; that was doing her in. She wanted so badly to see this bridge finished.

**Ms. McLeod:** I guess we should mention the context of her disagreement with Speaker Frank Chopp. You can tell me if I'm wrong and interject what you remember, but from what I've read and from what other people have told me, there was a disagreement in the way this bridge should be funded. Ruth had introduced a bill [HB 1006], I think—what year was it—1993, regarding public/private partnership of bridges so it would be partly funded by the government and partly private enterprise. And [Speaker] Frank Chopp, according to several news articles and various people I've talked with did not want that source of funding. So they had quite a disagreement over that, and a kind of political stalemate. Do you recall that?

**Ms. Callaghan:** I do know only that for a couple of years before I left there, she wanted public/private partnership. She had seen public/private partnerships in California. They worked well there, and she and what's-her-name...

**Ms. McLeod:** I think it was Representative [now Senator] Mary Margaret Haugen who supported public/private partnership at the time.

**Ms. Callaghan:** Yes. They had decided that would work and they were working for that and Chopp just wasn't going for it. Now, I didn't realize that was a break up then, but I know that she wanted that more than anything else. She felt that it was the only thing that would work. The funds we had, nothing else was going to work for us. Yes, I think that would be it. And Ruth wouldn't take any guff. She was probably screaming at him. And Frank wasn't the kind who took a woman's screaming at him.



**Ms. McLeod:** Ruth had been a state committee-woman in the Democratic Party, often times hosting fundraisers for those who went on to become state leaders, like Congressman Norm Dicks. And I also know she had a good relationship with Senator Warren Magnuson. Do you have any insight as to how those early relationships maybe proved to be an asset for her as a legislator?

**Ms. Callaghan:** I'm sure they probably did, although at that time I didn't know her that well. I'm pretty sure that [Rep. George] Walk, when he knew he was going to step down and take the job at the county, had suggested her as chair of the Transportation Committee.

**Ms. McLeod:** You're talking about George Walk the Representative from the 25th District who preceded Ruth as Chair of the House Transportation Committee?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Yes, and he had wanted her to replace him, and he did a hell of a good job, too. George Walk was good at his job.

**Ms. McLeod:** There was something that people talked about quite a bit, and that is this thing called the Pierce County Mafia. I wondered how aware were you of the Pierce County Mafia within the Legislature. And I guess I should mention some names of individuals that might have composed the Pierce County Mafia. Those were people who were from Pierce County who found themselves in positions of power in Olympia. So I guess we can go down the list. Governor Booth Gardner; Wayne Ehlers who was Speaker from 1983 to 1986; George Walk is one of them; Representative Art Wang, from the Twenty-seventh District, who chaired Appropriations at one point; Ruth chaired Transportation; Representative Brian Ebersole [Speaker from 1993-1995], who went on to become mayor of Tacoma. How did you see the relationship, or did you notice the relationship between these Pierce County folks in the Legislature? How, from your perspective, did that work?

**Ms. Callaghan:** It was spreading out so they were going to other places by the time I got there. So George had come down here [to Tacoma]. Brian Ebersole left to become mayor of Tacoma. And Ruth mentioned how they all worked together, but any real knowledge about it I don't have because they were...

**Ms. McLeod:** They were sort of dispersing?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Yes. But they had done a darn good job to start with, those who were there. They had started really, really putting the Legislature together where it was kind of a mess. It was the Democrats and the Democrats were doing well until we lost control and they weren't very happy about that.

**Ms. McLeod:** Were you there when they lost control in '95?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Yes. We got stuck down in a little office by the office supplies where the Republican committees were. Then they ate my cookies.

**Ms. McLeod:** The Republicans ate your cookies?

**Ms. Callaghan:** The Republicans ate my cookies.

**Ms. McLeod:** And you let this happen?

**Ms. Callaghan:** And I let them. In fact, they were quite nice people. Most of them lost their jobs as soon as we took over again. They weren't nice to them.

**Ms. McLeod:** What year did you leave Ruth?

**Ms. Callaghan:** I left when I was eighty. That's eight years ago.

**Ms. McLeod:** Okay. So 1998.

**Ms. Callaghan:** I was sick with epilepsy, and I had to get out of there. My six kids were hauling me around to the doctors and stuff like that.

**Ms. McLeod:** That's too bad. You really enjoyed the work, didn't you?

**Ms. Callaghan:** I loved it. Best job I ever had. I probably wouldn't have liked it nearly as much if it had been anyone but Ruth, but she was such a nut. And she could make you laugh over almost anything. "Beverly, will you come in here?" Oh, God! But then it got to the point where I was having trouble breathing in her office. And it was always such a relief when they'd call her to the Floor and I could go out and laugh and breathe again.

**Ms. McLeod:** She smoked, too, so that wouldn't be easy for you. But she smoked in her office, right?

**Ms. Callaghan:** "This office belongs to Pierce County. If they're going to take me out of here, they can take me out with chains on my hands."

**Ms. McLeod:** So since it belonged to Pierce County, she could smoke there.

**Ms. Callaghan:** Yes. And I had smoked very heavily.

**Ms. McLeod:** Oh, you had.

**Ms. Callaghan:** Up until maybe ten years before I went up there. I had quit, but Ruth just couldn't. She was going to go down to where the canyon is and you can ride down on a mule.

**Ms. McLeod:** The Grand Canyon.

**Ms. Callaghan:** And, you couldn't smoke if you were going on this tour. And she had to quit smoking for six weeks, and she did.

**Ms. McLeod:** Really?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Yes. And started again as soon as she got back. It's such a shame that something that was so pleasurable to so many people is a killer.

**Ms. McLeod:** I haven't talked to enough people about mass transit and what Ruth has done for light rail. But I know that in '87, which would have been a couple of years after you arrived there, she sponsored a House bill. I think it was House Bill 1035, and House Bill 1034 to establish a rail development commission, which eventually led to the creation of Sound Transit. How important was light rail, or getting mass transit, to Ruth?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Very important. Because she still talked light rail when I was up there. As a matter of fact, where she is now she's still probably saying we've got to make light rail. It was always important. It was, I suppose, money that dropped it.

**Ms. McLeod:** She really struggled with issues of funding. The issue of the gas tax, the initiatives, such as I-695, the 1999 Tim Eyman initiative to repeal the motor excise tax. How did she feel about the fact that she was losing funding?

**Ms. Callaghan:** It angered her and mostly it didn't make sense to her because she felt that we should know we had to fund [transportation projects], and it was silly not to increase the gas tax and not to increase this and that because we needed it. We had to have it. She could never see just dropping that stuff when we really needed it.

The important thing to her was to set up bridges, roads and all of that. Then we'd go on to growth man-

agement. Oh, light rail was very important in there, too. She had plans that were way into the future.

I left in 1998, when I was eighty. She said, "I didn't know you were eighty years old." And I said, "You didn't ask me." She said, "No, I didn't, did I?" She was younger than I was. She was about eight years younger than I was.

**Ms. McLeod:** Were you one of the older legislative aides, or were there others your age?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Yes, I was the oldest at the time I left. There was one older than I by about five or six years.

**Ms. McLeod:** That's incredible. There is one other question I want to ask here. In 1987—I think you might remember this—Ruth sponsored a bill which led to needing police protection at her home. And the bill was House Bill 161, a law requiring the use of motorcycle helmets. Ruth was the prime sponsor, and it was signed into law by Governor Booth Gardner. I wonder if you remember this bill, and if you remember motorcyclists who objected to the bill? What that situation was?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Oh, they were mad. She would not talk to them. It was a couple years after that that I found out that she had guards at her home. They (motorcyclists) would come up there and stand around my desk. Very smelly men. I was a little scared of them. I'm not surprised that Ruth was. And I would just listen to them silently. But our guards were put on defense, too. Pretty soon they'd come and kind of shove them out. And that went on for two or three years before they finally passed the bill.

**Ms. McLeod:** Oh, really? So your guards, the capitol guards, would come and kind of shoo the guys away?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Very, very delicately. I wasn't so perturbed about their being there. I was just relieved when they left. I wouldn't even realize that the State Patrol had been there where they usually weren't until Ruth told me that, yes, she had a state guard.

**Ms. McLeod:** Were these motorcycle gang kind of guys? How many filled your office?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Ruth wouldn't let them in her office. I might have six or seven at a time hanging around my desk. If you've been up there at all, you realize

our desk and our area was very small and we didn't have much space.

**Ms. McLeod:** Like how big of a space?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Maybe as big as this, but not quite.

**Ms. McLeod:** So maybe ten by twelve, or something?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Yes. So they'd be kind of hanging over into the next office. And a couple, maybe three of the younger men who were aides would hang close because I was too dumb to know that I was in any danger. And I don't think I really was, and I don't think Ruth really was. I think we just thought we were.

**Ms. McLeod:** I guess you've told me a lot about the different ways that Ruth was funny and comical. I know she was a hard-nosed person like you said and she could also be funny. But I think you mentioned in the interview that she sometimes pulled pranks on fellow legislators and I wondered if you remember any of those incidents?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Yes, there were pranks, but I can't remember any of them off hand. I'd hear somebody roar after her as she came down the hall and know that she'd done something. Dropped something on their desk or something like that, but I can't remember any specific thing.

**Ms. McLeod:** People have told me that Ruth was very much prepared for speaking on the House floor. I wonder, can you describe in what ways she'd prepare for her day's work in the Legislature?

**Ms. Callaghan:** She would never show any of it. There'd never be anything on her desk or anything of that sort. She didn't believe in showing any sign that she was making a speech, and it should never be a long speech. I really don't know. She didn't sit in her room a lot, so I think if she did any preparing, she did it at home. Because she certainly knew what she was talking about. I listened to a few of her speeches and they were excellent. So I just have a feeling she prepared them at home and she never, seldom, got to work ahead of me in the morning.

**Ms. McLeod:** What time did you show up to work?

**Ms. Callaghan:** That's another funny story. I got there at eight-thirty and she would get there about

nine. I remember the time when the Republicans were in charge, this man had decided that we should show up at eight because that was when the legislators came, and Ruth should be there, too. There was a group hanging around my desk, just hanging around it, and just very angry about this because after all they'd made their daily plans and everything to leave and get there at eight-thirty. It was just too much. Finally Ruth showed up at her door—I knew she was in there, I had been just listening—and she said, “I don't know what you guys do, but Beverly comes to work when I tell her to, and I tell her to come to work any damn time she pleases.”

**Ms. McLeod:** That's great. You said that you saw her give some speeches. Were there particular days that you knew that were going to be more exciting in the Legislature, and did you go down and watch?

**Ms. Callaghan:** No. It's funny. I never went down and watched. I listened over the speakers.

**Ms. McLeod:** The P.A. They had a speaker system? Oh, I didn't realize that. You could hear what was going on?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Yes. I felt my job was to hang on the phone and be at the desk. And actually Ruth had fewer people hanging around her desk or on the phone than many others because in Pierce County, or her particular district, they were quite pleased with the job she did. And I didn't have as much mail as a lot of other people did.

**Ms. McLeod:** Oh, so when they're pleased with you they don't communicate as much?

**Ms. Callaghan:** That's right.

**Ms. McLeod:** Were there specific times when the phones would start ringing off the hook? What were those issues?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Yes. There were always what we call “peak” issues. Always we had the times when they were angry about birth control and things like that. And every year there was a peak issue. I can't remember offhand what some of them were. There were things that they liked, but there were things they just hated and then the phones would just light up. There were sometimes when you'd come to work in the morning and there'd be twelve phones, twelve calls on the phone waiting for you to answer. But it

never seemed as much for Ruth as it did for the others. I soon learned that they trusted her. I might let her answer one call and then the news would go around, well, Ruth says that, and then there wouldn't be as many more. But I think it was that way with all the Representatives who had been there a long time. They trusted them.

**Ms. McLeod:** She'd been there for twenty years. In what other ways did Ruth go to great lengths to communicate what she was doing with her constituents? Were there other things that you worked on to get the news out to her constituents?

**Ms. Callaghan:** A few. I would make newsletters, but very few compared to the others. If there was something that she felt that they should all know then she'd do a newsletter, and I would send it out to her constituents. But everyone else would be doing ten to twelve a year—that's an exaggeration, they'd be doing three or four a year—but not Ruth. She just didn't seem to do it.

**Ms. McLeod:** Why do you think she kept getting re-elected for nine terms?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Because they knew her in the county. She was in charge of the recall committee for the City Council, and she was active in the Arts Commission and a few things like that in the county. And they had gotten to trust her, I think, before she left the county. They elected her because she worked on things in the county, and she just was trusted. Remember when they had that whole bunch of people who were impeached in the county?

**Ms. McLeod:** Right. When they had the recall of the Tacoma's City Council in the seventies?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Yes. She was very important to that. And that was something that was very important to the people. I had so much respect for her, and she was so ethical, and she was doing such a good job, I didn't want to have to quit, the little I could do helping her. And I didn't want her to die because and the great deal she was doing. If only [Speaker] Frank Chopp had kept his nose out of it, because what they were doing really was right, but I think that was one of the times when he had just gone wrong.

**Ms. McLeod:** Over the Narrows Bridge funding?

**Ms. Callaghan:** Yes. They would certainly have made it a little faster, but not necessarily. You look at that bridge, and it's beautiful. I have a daughter who lives on the other side, and I'm not going to like the fact that we have to pay more money, but we're showing that it's going. And Ruth was a woman who could do a man's job.

Something else I liked about her was the fact that she had clothes that she had bought thirty years ago and was still wearing and they looked great. She never threw them away. They were always just in the best of shape. She didn't like to wear earrings, so her mother's earrings she wore as little brooches. And she was elegant.

**Ms. McLeod:** Ruth's long-time friend from Tacoma, Carol Larson, told me that Ruth was very invested in clothes, that Ruth liked to have nice clothes. So I imagine those thirty-year-old things she was wearing were of good quality when she bought them.

**Ms. Callaghan:** You bet, and Carol and I talked about her a lot when we found out she was dying and Carol was taking care of her, and I was in the wheel-

chair then. Denis [Callaghan, Bev Callaghan's son] said he'd take me over there if I wanted him to, but I figured I'd be more trouble than anything else.

We knew so much about what she was, and Carol wouldn't take any crap from Ruth who was handing it out very much at that time. Ruth just couldn't see that she was dying. She had so much more to give. She had just been appointed on the Transportation Commission.

**Ms. McLeod:** She had been named to the state Transportation Commission by Governor Locke in 2004.

**Ms. Callaghan:** Yes. And she wanted to do that so much. She wanted to stay with that.

**Ms. McLeod:** But she did do a lot in her amount of time.

**Ms. Callaghan:** She did. Yes. I wish they'd named the (Narrows) bridge after her.

**Ms. McLeod:** Yes. Me too. Thank you so much.

**Ms. Callaghan:** You're welcome.



*State Senator Ed Murray represents Seattle's Capitol Hill neighborhood. He is a native to Washington and served as an aide to Seattle City Councilmember and worked as a campaign manager before joining the Legislature as a Representative in 1995. Senator Murray served on the House Transportation*

*Committee with Ruth. This interview took place on July 10, 2007.*

**Ms. McLeod:** Can you tell me when you met Representative Ruth Fisher, in what context, and what, if you could recall, was your first impression?

**Mr. Murray:** Sure, I was appointed in November. So it was probably sometime in November when we had a caucus meeting. We were about to sit down around tables, and Ruth Fisher came up to me, introduced herself to me, and said, "Don't listen to a thing that Frank Chopp says." Of course, I didn't know who she was, and Frank was my seatmate, and I said, "Frank Chopp is my seatmate." And she said, "God, do I feel sorry for you," and then she walked off.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did you ask after her, "Who was that woman?"

**Mr. Murray:** Oh, yes. I did find out. Ruth sat in front of me on the House floor for my entire time in the House. She left before I left the House. We spent a lot of time talking because, on the floor, you're there for hours and hours and hours, day after day, and there's a lot of down time. So I got to know a lot about her personally at that point. Ruth is only one of two legislators that have my home number. There are two numbers, one I use for legislative business in the House, and then the home number. She's the only one who has ever used it. She would call me once a week for years. My partner would inevitably answer the phone, and Ruth would never say "Hello" and "How are you," she would just say, "Is Ed there?" And that was it.

**Ms. McLeod:** What was she calling to talk to you about?

**Mr. Murray:** She would call to talk about various transportation or legislative items and to gossip about politics. And then Ruth and I shared a love of books. If you saw her apartment, or if you looked in my basement, where my office is, we have books piled to the ceiling. So we were always trading books back and forth, talking about books. If she just read a book, she would call me up and tell me if it was a good book.

**Ms. McLeod:** For someone who never had an opportunity to meet Ruth Fisher, how would you characterize her as a person, and what made her unique as a person and as a legislator?

**Mr. Murray:** Well, first Ruth was very, very smart, and she was also very, very politically astute, which made her an excellent legislator. Most people liked her a lot. Her wit, even when sometimes it could be a bit cutting, was always very appreciated on the floor or in caucus. In the time I knew her, she was an older woman and came across as sort of a salty and tough. As you got to know her, other aspects would come out, including a lot of personal pain in her life, a lot of personal loss in her life. She was of a generation where women her age didn't get to the places that she was, and it was something I think always amazed her, that she could be one of the most powerful people in the state Legislature.

**Ms. McLeod:** When you joined the Legislature in '96, Ruth was co-chairing the Transportation Committee with Karen Schmidt....

**Mr. Murray:** No, the co-chairmanship came later.

**Ms. McLeod:** Oh right, I'm sorry.

**Mr. Murray:** Karen Schmidt was actually the chair of the committee. The first thing I became aware of is that chair and the ranking minority member casually sit next to each other. Yet, Ruth sat at the far end, as far away as she could, from Karen. She and Karen had an intense political battle going on. Their friendship developed later.

As the leadership issue and the public-private partnership on the Narrows Bridge continued to boil, the two—Ruth and Karen—began to bridge their gap and work together. I don't know what the reason was for the animosity that had gone on. Others who were on the committee before I was would have to tell you that.

**Ms. McLeod:** Ok, so there are a couple things you mentioned that I needed to follow up on. Ruth was the primary sponsor of the public-private partnership bill (Public-Private Initiatives Transportation Act), passed in the '93 session, that allowed for a form of funding that was going to fund six transportation projects that were needed in the state at the time.

**Mr. Murray:** Right.

**Ms. McLeod:** So, could you tell me what that means and, also, what was the opposition to that form of funding?

**Mr. Murray:** Well public-private partnerships are not a form of privatization; they're partnerships, where the private sector uses its own money so the public sector doesn't have to build what is almost always a transportation structure. They're very common worldwide: Great Britain, France, other European countries, India. It's a very common practice. An example: build a bridge, there's a toll on the bridge, the toll money goes to the private company who builds the bridge and operates and maintains the bridge for X number of years, thirty or forty years, whatever. Often it's a way for the state not to have to use its own bonding capacity or its own taxes. They're not used in the country very often. And they've had problems in this country, and they've had problems in other countries, but mostly they've been successful in other countries. When the bill originally passed—which was before I was serving in the Legislature—labor, everybody supported it. A group of people led by a new legislator, who was my seatmate, Frank Chopp—who, within a very short period of time became minority leader and then co-Speaker and Speaker—were strongly opposed to these projects because of the belief it was a public purpose being used for a private gain. Because of this, Ruth and Frank had a philosophical or an ideological problem with it. The fight to stop these projects was pretty ugly. All, except for one, the Narrows Bridge, were stopped. Today the Narrows Bridge is not a classic public-private partnership. It is more private participation than usual, but it was radically, radically changed.

**Ms. McLeod:** So this is happening at the time you were entering the Legislature?

**Mr. Murray:** When I came in, yes, the issue was very volatile.

**Ms. McLeod:** And Karen Schmidt was leading the Transportation Committee.

**Mr. Murray:** Right.

**Ms. McLeod:** I could be wrong, but it sounds like the Narrows Bridge issue brought Ruth and Karen together, did it?

**Mr. Murray:** It appeared to, but I didn't know either one of them at that time, very well. And I think there are others there who were intimately involved in the tension between them who you should talk to.

**Ms. McLeod:** The House was split in '99—how did the co-chairmanship function politically? What were the political advantages to a co-chairmanship of a committee, if there were any, or what was difficult about it?

**Mr. Murray:** Well, in our system of government, we are not set up like European governments for coalition government. Co-chairmanships and co-majorities, in our system of government, don't work well. And, in '99, it didn't work well. It didn't work well, even when it worked well. You need somebody in the majority, and you need somebody making decisions. This was further complicated by the fact that a rule was decided, that I think everyone now realizes that it was a mistake, that basically one Speaker couldn't move without the other Speaker. That made it possible for one side to veto the other side. It also gave the Speakers all the power, and, quite honestly, damaged the institution.

**Ms. McLeod:** Ruth and Karen have admitted to having faked arguments on the House floor in order to garner to support for one side or the other.

**Mr. Murray:** Sure, you do that all the time.

**Ms. McLeod:** So tell me how that works, how you may have observed that working.

**Mr. Murray:** I don't know what a particular issue is, but I don't recall a particular issue at this point. But you know there are extremes on both sides of both parties, and the extremes sometimes resemble each other more than they resemble the rest of the Legislature. Sometimes they, particularly Karen Schmidt's Republican Caucus, can start to kill a bill. So Ruth might have had to look like she wasn't really for the bill, talked it down a little bit, or given a

lame endorsement of the bill on the floor as a way to silence the extremes.

**Ms. McLeod:** Oh, I see.

**Mr. Murray:** What I don't know is they may have been playing with the Speakers. I don't think Karen's Speaker had any more confidence in her than Ruth had from her Speaker.

**Ms. McLeod:** So you're talking about Clyde Ballard at this time?

**Mr. Murray:** Yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** And Speaker Frank Chopp. They were co-Speakers at the time.

**Mr. Murray:** Right.

**Ms. McLeod:** I once heard, and I don't know if you know this, that actually Clyde Ballard and Ruth had a strong relationship for a Democrat and Republican in their positions, but I don't really know.

**Mr. Murray:** Well, you know they may have. Ruth was one who could separate policy from personality, so that helped. The other thing is, you know, a lot of transportation issues are not partisan. And so, I think Ruth and Karen had their most strenuous partisan arguments around Sound Transit, Ruth supportive of it and Karen's opposition to it. When Karen was chair in the early years, and someone would refer to Sound Transit, she would say, "We don't use those words in this committee room." And Ruth is one of the creators, godmothers of Sound Transit.

**Ms. McLeod:** She's sometimes called "the mother of Sound Transit."

**Mr. Murray:** Yes. So there were the ideological differences, but Ruth could usually keep the personalities different.

**Ms. McLeod:** What's interesting is that sometimes it seems like there's a paradox. Ruth was politically astute. She remained in the Legislature for those twenty years in the House. But there was this other side of her, where you knew when you were on the wrong side.

**Mr. Murray:** Oh, yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** So, when you talk about walking into the committee room, and Ruth is at one end and Karen is at the other, understanding that the ranking

minority usually would sit next to the chair, I can't help but wonder how that worked for her politically? It just doesn't seem like that could work to her favor.

**Mr. Murray:** Well, there were several things that went on. First of all, when the Republicans took over after the '94 election, their numbers were so large that Ruth wasn't going to matter a lot anyway. Secondly, Republicans had no interest in the minority, and Karen was among the people who had no interest in the minority. So that was Karen's initial attitude, and I think as time went on, she got over her role as a powerful chair of a huge majority on the Transportation Committee. Karen was a moderate, for the most part, and had troubles controlling her own mostly right-wing caucus on the committee. So that dynamic of working with the minority just wasn't there. As time went on Karen moved in a much more, I won't say bi-partisan way, she reached out more. Personally, Karen and Maryann Mitchell and Ruth Fisher and I were all friends. So, as time went on, I really enjoyed Karen. None of this is a personal criticism; this is politics. We could send jokes back and forth about each other, making fun of various, you know, whacked out members on either side in a very non-partisan approach.

**Ms. McLeod:** After Karen left the House in 1999, Maryann Mitchell, whom you just mentioned, took over as co-chair, and I think Karen joined the Freight Mobility Strategic Investment Board.

**Mr. Murray:** Right.

**Ms. McLeod:** So what were the differences in Maryann Mitchell and Ruth's relationship compared to Karen and Ruth?

**Mr. Murray:** First of all, Maryann Mitchell was an easier personality to work with in general. She truly was a moderate-to-liberal Republican. And she had been my co-chair on Capital Budget. She then left Capital Budget to become co-chair of Transportation. So I had a long working personal relationship with her, and she was a wonderfully big-hearted individual. She could not control her committee; she could not get her caucus to support her as we tried to put a transportation tax package together. She was undermined again and again by her own Republicans when she would reach an agreement with the Senate Democrats and Republicans, and with Ruth. Ruth, I think, had nothing but a lot of compassion and pain

for Maryann Mitchell's really difficult situation. If, at times, Ruth was unfairly treated by her own leadership, Maryann Mitchell was treated reprehensibly by the Republicans every time she tried to reach agreement on things. And then she got sick.

**Ms. McLeod:** Also, you're talking about a pretty tumultuous year, 1999, and a pretty tumultuous era for transportation. You had Tim Eyman's Initiative 695, gas tax problems left and right. So, I do want to get to those things and not just stay on the surface of them. But before we go there, can I ask you, having chaired Capital Budget, and later chairing Transportation, what made the Transportation Committee different and unique from other committees? Why is it popular, and why is it hard to control your caucus sometimes?

**Mr. Murray:** Well, actually Transportation is not a popular committee.

**Ms. McLeod:** Oh, it's not?

**Mr. Murray:** It's considered extremely boring. And for the most part transportation issues are extremely tedious. People want on it because there's a potential of money for projects in their districts. But it is never, except for those few of us who are transportation junkies, it is never people's first choice.

**Ms. McLeod:** Really?

**Mr. Murray:** What makes it unique, actually, in the nation, is that most transportation committees are just policy committees; they don't control the budget. That makes it uniquely powerful. It was usually considered a bi-partisan committee. But then a series of things happened. The Republicans didn't support a gas tax in the nineties. In the past gas taxes had received bi-partisan support. Karen Schmidt had the rug pulled out from under her by her own party. Then they put on a huge bonding referendum on the ballot, which passed.

**Ms. McLeod:** Referendum 49?

**Mr. Murray:** Yes, Referendum 49. Then Tim Eyman's Initiative 695 happened. That blew transportation up. From that point on, transportation became an extremely partisan issue because it was turned into an issue of taxes and why aren't we getting our roads fixed. It went on until '03 when we were finally able to bust through that.

**Ms. McLeod:** We've been talking about 1999, but I wonder if we can back up a bit and talk about some of the other transportation issues and bills you may have some knowledge about. I'm not certain what you know about Sound Transit, but I have some questions for you.

**Mr. Murray:** Sure you can ask me, although Sound Transit happened before I joined the House.

**Ms. McLeod:** How significant was Sound Transit legislation, the passage of ESHB 1825, to the economic and environmental viability of Puget Sound region in the state? How do you think Ruth was able to achieve that goal?

**Mr. Murray:** The significance is this state, and this region, simply has not been able to put together a significant mass transit or rapid transit plan. With this bill, she did it. It took two efforts to pass it, but often it takes elected officials several times to win, so that wasn't unusual. It ran into huge problems, including the tunnel that went through Capitol Hill, which turned out to be a large cost overrun. In Olympia, Ruth was the protector of Sound Transit as its problems would happen. As people tried to change it, she was the one who protected it.

**Ms. McLeod:** Do you think that there were any regional or local transportation issues that impacted people's attitudes about Sound Transit, such as the issue of the Seattle monorail, or other struggling transportation projects?

**Mr. Murray:** Well, yes, although that all happened post her time there. Then there was Referendum 51, which Ruth wanted us to take to vote in Olympia, and Frank Chopp did not. It went out to the ballot, and it failed by twenty points.

**Ms. McLeod:** It was a tax increase.

**Mr. Murray:** It was a nine-cent a gallon gas tax increases for transportation. Ruth lost that battle, which she felt we needed to do in Olympia. Ruth proposed her own regional transportation district that failed, and we got RTID [Regional Transportation Investment District], which is what the Republicans in the Senate wanted. RTID is a roads-heavy package.

**Ms. McLeod:** You mentioned that Referendum 51 should have been taken care of in Olympia, could you go back to that?

**Mr. Murray:** Ruth was right. Referendum 51 is a vote that should have taken place in Olympia. When we took the nine-and-half-cent vote in Olympia, it was challenged by an initiative. We won, and I think that we won because we had done our work and people are not going to turn down projects that have already received their funding. I think people should have listened to Ruth.

**Ms. McLeod:** In what ways do the needs for regional mass transit, which impacts the Puget Sound area more than the east side of the state, complicate funding issues?

**Mr. Murray:** It always complicates funding issues; there's always the argument—an argument that I don't think pencils out—that transit is more expensive than roads. People argue that we're building all this transit, but we aren't building the roads we need, and roads are cheaper and they move more cars. This is an age-old argument in Olympia. To some extent, we put it to bed in the '03 session when we finally started to step away from roads versus transit and finally started to do the two things together.

**Ms. McLeod:** What prompted the change in thinking?

**Mr. Murray:** The majority had changed. The failure of Referendum 51 was a huge message that if both sides didn't work together, nothing would move forward. The transportation politics of "no" meant mutually assured destruction.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did you feel that when you entered the Legislature and started working on transportation issues, that the word, "multimodal," was becoming adopted into more common usage, as no longer a new term, as it was when Ruth began using it in the Legislature?

**Mr. Murray:** Yes. But the problem is that it's almost as if we had been more progressive up until that point. We'd been more progressive with putting money into bus service, which was the state's traditional role, to plan for passenger ferry and other forms of transit. There had been the vote for Sound Transit, by the Legislature, in the early nineties. So, suddenly with the change of majorities, committee hearing after committee hearing was about how bad the bus services were.

Initiative 695 ripped out all the state money to local transit services. So it was a long haul back, and Ruth, fortunately, was there for some of the brightest days of building a state role in transit—more money for transit, for buses, more money for passenger ferries, the creation of Sound Transit. Then she was there to watch a combination of the Republicans, the road warriors, and Tim Eyman start to dismantle that very system.

**Ms. McLeod:** Can you explain what Initiative 695 did to the motor vehicle excise tax? Then, what did it do to the state transportation budget?

**Mr. Murray:** Well the motor vehicle excise tax was created in the twenties, or the thirties, in lieu of an income tax. It was agreed that it would pay for certain things, fire and police was one, and transportation was the other. The gas tax in the state is restricted by our state constitution to be used only for roads.

**Ms. McLeod:** You're referring to the Eighteenth Amendment?

**Mr. Murray:** Right, the Eighteenth Amendment to the state constitution. So it was the motor vehicle excise tax that helped, in part, to pay for operating our ferry system. It was also our source for helping out bus services, our commitment to the Amtrak trains, and a large part of it went into roads as well as the state patrol.

Karen Schmidt, Ruth Fisher, and Maryann Mitchell—all of whom either chaired or co-chaired the House Committee on Transportation—had to oversee the dismantling and the cutting back of just dozens and dozens of programs in transportation.

**Ms. McLeod:** When Initiative 695 went on the ballot, Ruth was quoted as saying something to the effect of, "If 695 passes, I'm quitting." Of course, she continued on in the Legislature for four more years. But I wonder, did you ever ask each other, or talk amongst yourselves, "What are we going to do if thing passes?"

**Mr. Murray:** Some of us suggested that maybe we should look at the scale and the method for calculating the motor vehicle excise tax on cars as a way of circumventing Tim Eyman. Karen Schmidt and Ruth Fisher did not seem interested in that. They viewed it, rightfully in some ways, as we do not have enough money as it is; we haven't raised the gas tax, so we should not cut the MVET. Why should we be the ones

who turn around and start changing the formula that cuts more money. So there was some discussion on the part of some of us to try and look at this, but we were the new people.

**Ms. McLeod:** 1999 seems like it was a hard year.

**Mr. Murray:** Yes, it was pretty, pretty bad.

**Ms. McLeod:** I want to bring up something else that happened in '99 because this has come up in other interviews as well. The dissolution of the Legislative Transportation Committee began in 1999. Can you explain the function of this committee and then the reason for the dissolution?

**Mr. Murray:** The Legislative Transportation Committee was created decades and decades earlier, and the makeup of it gave the House a majority. The House chair was always chair of the LTC, if I'm remembering this correctly.

**Ms. McLeod:** The numbers on the committee were twelve, House, and eleven, Senate.

**Mr. Murray:** So the Senate had felt, for a significant amount of time that they didn't have equal representation, and that was a problem. The LTC was a separate state agency. The chair of LTC, who was the chair of House Transportation, was the head of that agency and had a separate budget. The staff was separate from the other non-partisan staff, controlled not by the Speaker of House and the Senate Majority Leader and their counterparts in the minority but controlled by the Transportation chair. The staff was the staff to both the House and the Senate committees. The staff had a very close relationship with the department. The advantages of this organization were a lot of coordination among various transportation entities. The LTC conducted research and went on study trips around the state and, to some extent, around the country. That research and study is certainly helpful for allowing people to understand how things work and how things don't work. The down side of it was that there wasn't a lot of separation of powers. The House and Senate needed their own separate staff. House and Senate staff should not be controlled by a separate agency. A legislator should not be the head of a state agency, which was the case for the LTC. There was not a lot of independent analysis going on between the department and the LTC in my evaluation.

**Ms. McLeod:** There were articles published about potential improprieties. Karen Schmidt owned a travel agency, and because legislators were booking LTC-related travel through that agency, that issue went to the legislative ethics committee. There were no charges, and she was cleared from any wrongdoing. It was just, at least initially, that the outward appearance was in question, according to news reports at the time.

**Mr. Murray:** There was some ability—I believe it was like four or five hundred or a thousand dollars the chair had at their disposal—to use for contracts and other transportation purposes. I actually was the last chair of LTC, and my first act was to turn every penny over because I didn't personally want to have access to that type of money.

**Ms. McLeod:** Why not?

**Mr. Murray:** In a state as small as this—and in the world of Olympia, which is very small, in some ways incestuous—it's very easy for someone to say that someone's doing favors for somebody else. And I actually, again, believed it was a confusion of executive and legislative responsibilities. It was my role as a legislator to determine how to appropriate funds. It was not my role as the legislature to decide who got money, that is an executive function.

**Ms. McLeod:** Right. So just so I'm clear on this, this dissolution occurred between '99 and 2003, when you took over as chair. In '99 they separated the staff, so that the Senate had their own staff, and the House had their own?

**Mr. Murray:** Right.

**Ms. McLeod:** Then, in 2003, you shipped the committee up to the Office of Program Research?

**Mr. Murray:** We integrated our staff. We integrated our House staff in '03 into the Office of Program Research staff, and the Senate went through a similar change. I don't know when they went through their change. And we closed down the funds. Then we dissolved LTC.

**Ms. McLeod:** And there's still a Joint Transportation Committee.

**Mr. Murray:** There is.

**Ms. McLeod:** But that committee deals with policy, right?

**Mr. Murray:** It's policy. The official voting members are the two chairs and the two ranking members, and any member of either committee can participate. But it is not controlled by one house versus the other house.

**Ms. McLeod:** As the dissolution began to happen, how did that impact Ruth, and then how did that impact their relationship between the Senate and the House?

**Mr. Murray:** Well, I think it generally improved the relationship between the Senate and the House. It took a bone of contention out of the way. I think it helped staff. I can only speak for the House at that point. Our non-partisan House staff, through the Office of Program Research, is one of the most professional groups of people in Olympia. They have a lot of respect. Actually, I think staff people believe they are viewed with more respect because they had been integrated into OPR.

**Ms. McLeod:** Oh, I see. I was only able to interview one staff person that would be Gene Baxstrom.

**Mr. Murray:** Good.

**Ms. McLeod:** Brilliant man.

**Mr. Murray:** Gene is really brilliant.

**Ms. McLeod:** You mentioned that there were problems with the Republicans, I think it was '98, '99, in raising the gas tax, and that there was some tension between Karen Schmidt and her caucus. I wondered if you remembered Dale Foreman and the era where, according to news reports, he basically told the Republicans, "Nobody can take a tax vote." I wonder if you can recall the internal politics of why this was so contentious.

**Mr. Murray:** Well, there was Dale Foreman, and Jim West in the Senate. Jim West basically did a job on Eugene Prince, who was Senate Republican Chair of Transportation, and stood in his way. It's always easier to get a transportation tax voted out of the Senate than it is the House.

**Mr. Murray:** But Dale Foreman was an influential guy who everyone in the Republican Party thought was going to be governor at that time. And Karen Schmidt took a very bi-partisan, traditional approach to transportation, which is, we pass these things and we pass them with a bipartisan vote. Jim West and

Dale Foreman undermined their transportation leadership and killed those gas tax increases. Instead, we put a large bonding measure on the ballot, increasing our debt.

**Ms. McLeod:** Was that Referendum 49?

**Mr. Murray:** Referendum 49. And it passed in November of 1998, which was a great thing. You had all this debt, but eventually the debt has to be paid off, and it uses up your tax money.

**Ms. McLeod:** But the other thing that happened in '98 was that the state, under Governor Locke, created a Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation.

**Mr. Murray:** Right.

**Ms. McLeod:** The commission identified nearly fifty billion in transportation investment needs throughout the state. Could tell me your participation with the commission and how Ruth and other legislators capitalized on the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation.

**Mr. Murray:** Ruth had a very significant role. Actually I got appointed because Ruth asked that I be the appointee for the House, which is something I really appreciated. The committee was somewhat dominated by business people. There were labor people and environmentalists there and legislators, but business dominated. Initially, it was not grounded in reality. Ruth was very, very instrumental in grounding it in reality. She was dedicated to teaching people why elected officials make the decisions they do, what is politically viable with the voters, what is politically viable in the Legislature as far as funding proposals, project proposals. She stood up along with me in saying that there has to be a non-roads component to this report. The Blue Ribbon Commission tended to be very road-centric. But Ruth did a great job—in her very matter-of-fact, outspoken, very funny presentations—educating these people.

**Ms. McLeod:** You talked a little bit about the Narrows Bridge and the public-private partnership. This is a historic moment, at present, because the bridge is finally about to open on July 15th. There's to be a big celebration, and people will be allowed to walk the length of the bridge prior to opening it to traffic. Can you tell me what has been your involvement with the 2nd Narrows Bridge and related issues?

**Mr. Murray:** Well, I was a new legislator, and it was an issue that I did not work on. Initially, I wasn't involved because I was not on the committee. The bill that created it, the public-private partnership bill, happened before I came. Then when I realized that my seatmate, Frank Chopp from the Forty-third District was really, really opposed to the financing proposal, I made a freshman decision, and decided that this was an issue that I was not going to step in the middle of.

**Ms. McLeod:** Yes, it was already playing out, or had played out by that time. Did Ruth ever talk to you about it?

**Mr. Murray:** Oh yes, we talked often about it.

**Ms. McLeod:** And what were her feelings?

**Mr. Murray:** Well, I think that she believed that she had not been respected in her role as both the chair or the minority lead on transportation. She felt that the process itself had not been respected. Ruth really believed in the Legislature as an institution.

**Ms. McLeod:** Can you tell me, on another issue, what were some of the big backlog issues—some of which were identified by the Blue Ribbon Commission—that Ruth didn't get to in her time that she might have wanted to get to?

**Mr. Murray:** Her alley. She used to always mention her alley with the potholes.

**Ms. McLeod:** As opposed to such projects as repairing the 520 Bridge and the Alaskan Way Viaduct....

**Mr. Murray:** Nobody knew the projects in the state as well as she knew the projects. Ruth could list off bridges and roads and intersections off the top of her head. She knew that the infrastructure was aging, and she knew that something had to be done. She knew that there were bridges that absolutely needed to be replaced, which is one of the reasons she strongly thought the way to do that was the public-private partnership. She knew, from living in Tacoma, that the Port of Tacoma, for example, was having all sorts of problems moving its goods from eastern Washington to the Port because of the traffic congestion.

**Ms. McLeod:** It wasn't only an issue of moving people.

**Mr. Murray:** Oh yes, she understood the movement of goods, the freight part, as well as she understood

any part of it. I know that her original vision had been that the state would have been a financial partner with Sound Transit, and I think that is actually reflected in the early documents and probably even in the bill.

**Ms. McLeod:** Maybe that was part of the struggle?

**Mr. Murray:** Yes, it absolutely was part of our struggles. It got to the point the argument shifted from the state being a partner to preventing the state from doing harm to Sound Transit. That's sort of the role she found herself in.

**Ms. McLeod:** You mentioned the aging infrastructure and all those transportation projects. When voters defeated Referendum 51 on November 5, 2002, which would have raised the gas tax by nine cents a gallon, it seems that was a vote that, had it gone the other way, could have funded some of those most crucial transportation projects. Had it passed, it would have produced 7.8 million over ten years, seventy percent would have gone for state highways, major repairs and improvement going to ferries, public transit, rail and local governments. It almost sounds like you were trying to catch up after Initiative 695.

**Mr. Murray:** Yes, but people were trying to catch up from more than 695. We hadn't done a big gas tax increase in some time. The Legislature had done a small increase in the early nineties. I wasn't there for that, but we were way behind. There were problems, though, with the list. That list never addressed the Viaduct, and it really didn't address 520. So there were problems with Referendum 51, both because it was sent to the voters, but there were also problems with the project list.

**Ms. McLeod:** I sometimes worry someone is going to read this thirty years from now and not know what you're talking about. Can you explain what the Alaskan Way Viaduct is, why it needs to be replaced?

**Mr. Murray:** The Alaskan Way Viaduct was built in the 1950s through the waterfront of West Seattle. Since the earthquake of 2001 [Feb. 28, 2001], it is structurally unsafe and is at risk of falling down.

**Ms. McLeod:** And there's been disagreement over what should be done to remedy the problem, which has been covered in the press. Governor Gregoire and Mayor Nickels have been in opposition to each other. Should it be a tunnel, should they just redo it as a viaduct, and I think there's a third option?

**Mr. Murray:** Surface.

**Ms. McLeod:** A surface road, as opposed to above ground or below, yes. And then there is the 520 Floating Bridge, which we've mentioned.

**Mr. Murray:** Yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** What's wrong with the 520 Floating Bridge?

**Mr. Murray:** The 520 was built in the sixties, and it was not built very well. Its two lanes in each direction, no shoulders, and it needs to be replaced. It's very difficult to replace a bridge like that through existing neighborhoods. You can't tear neighborhoods down to build freeways like you did in the sixties.

**Ms. McLeod:** The only reason I'm mentioning those is that they are the two biggest, perhaps most obvious problems, at least in the Puget Sound area. Am I right?

**Mr. Murray:** Yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** And those were not part of Referendum 51?

**Mr. Murray:** I don't believe they were, not in Referendum 51.

**Ms. McLeod:** So, tell me about your success in 2003.

**Mr. Murray:** I almost hate to talk about 2003 because it's sort of what we did without Ruth, and I'm not sure that's fair to her. I had a good majority in my committee, and we made some compromises. I had to



stand up to my leadership and seemed to have been able to pull that off.

**Ms. McLeod:** I sometimes wonder with someone who's been in the Legislature as long as she had, and chaired transportation as long as she had, is there any work of Ruth's left over, or is the spirit of Ruth in new transportation legislation?

**Mr. Murray:** Oh yes, I think Ruth's name comes up often in committee and in discussions on various issues where she had been a leader or had been thoughtful. We talk about her, and we talk about her approach. I think with this Regional Transportation Investment District proposal going to the ballot we have talked, again and again, about Ruth's proposal, which was a far more integrated, county-based proposal. Ruth's had a better approach, in my opinion, to a multimodal approach. If we had gotten Ruth's proposal back then we would have been better off today.

**Ms. McLeod:** Do you ever recycle old bills, pull them back up and rework them?

**Mr. Murray:** Oh yes, there are things that Ruth did that we have done. Our RTID proposal is one of them. If I sat here long enough, I could think of others. Various environmental approaches, transportation, some of the multimodal money we've put in. At least the House's commitment during my time to passenger ferries was directly keeping part of Ruth's legacy in place.

**Ms. McLeod:** This is a question a little off the track, but because other people have brought it up in interviews, I wanted to ask about it. The Transportation Secretary used to be named by the Transportation Commission, right?

**Mr. Murray:** Right.

**Ms. McLeod:** And in 2005, Governor Gregoire was given the authority to name the head of Washington State Department of Transportation.

**Mr. Murray:** Right.

**Ms. McLeod:** Do you know what prompted this change?

**Mr. Murray:** Well, I was the original proponent of it, and we got it out of the House in '03, and it died in the Republican-controlled Senate. Then, when the Democrats controlled the Senate in '05, we passed it.

I supported giving the governor direct control of the department, where the governor had no control over the Department of Transportation. I think Ruth may have been opposed to that idea.

**Ms. McLeod:** Letting the governor name the head of the Department of Transportation?

**Mr. Murray:** Yes, she was a pretty strong commission proponent.

**Ms. McLeod:** Yes, according to others who knew her, she didn't want that power to go to the governor. And why is that, because of politics?

**Mr. Murray:** Well, I don't know.

**Ms. McLeod:** That wasn't something you had discussed with her?

**Mr. Murray:** No, I knew we had a disagreement on it. I don't know, and we'll see if it works out.

**Ms. McLeod:** You mentioned Ruth's potholes earlier. I was told that just before Ruth left the House, the House Transportation Committee held a meeting, during which they proposed a new project, perhaps it was a special initiative, entitled, "Regional Urban Transportation Hamlet." R-U-T-H was the acronym. It had something to do with potholes in alleyways, Ruth's in particular. Were you at this meeting?

**Mr. Murray:** Yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** Ok, could you tell me what this was, where it came from?

**Mr. Murray:** I don't remember, I think Gene Baxstrom wrote it, or Jeff Doyle, maybe Jeff Doyle wrote it. It was very funny, and she loved it, and we laughed a lot.

**Ms. McLeod:** So what was the joke? There was a joke here about potholes.

**Mr. Murray:** Well she would make this joke, whatever street she lived on, about the potholes on the alley on X street. People would talk about getting things fixed, and this was an ongoing joke. Even when I was chair, in the beginning I pretty well knew she'd be watching [on TVW], and I'd say, "We're going to have to take care of, you know, the potholes on X alley."

**Ms. McLeod:** The last issue, on April 24, 2005 the House of Representatives approved a sixteen-year,

8.5-million-dollar transportation revenue package, the largest infrastructure investment in state history.

**Mr. Murray:** Two years after we did a nickel.

**Ms. McLeod:** Yes, what changed in the political climate and in voter's minds between the time of the struggles Ruth had and this moment in 2005?

**Mr. Murray:** Well, majorities made a difference. We had stronger Democratic majorities. Business was reaching the end of its rope with Republicans. When it comes to increasing taxes, leadership is always a problem, regardless who the leader is. I think I was more successful in assembling a group of people who pushed leadership. The times were changing, you know. Whatever was going on in the nineties, culturally in the state—a kind of anti-tax, roads, roads, roads mentality—I think people were looking around and saying, "Wow, we have to do something." I mean it's a long, complicated discussion about how we were able to achieve both those, particularly the second one.

**Ms. McLeod:** Well, I'm grateful that you've shared this history. Is there anything else that you want to add about Ruth, or what you feel her legacy is, or perhaps the way she cut a path for you?

**Mr. Murray:** I think Ruth was a trailblazer in getting the state to stop thinking about just roads. She was a woman who was in high school during World War II, not a generation of women who became strong political leaders, so she was a trailblazer there. She was a trailblazer in other issues including Growth Management, before my time, when she served and chaired other committees. We're talking about her mostly as a Transportation chair. She was also a very compassionate person.

One day on the floor, when we were talking during one of these breaks, she talked about how hard it was for her to sit through those committee meetings when somebody comes up and talks about their dead child who was killed in this road accident, or on a bicycle, because of this failure of the transportation or the other. She told me this story. She actually had another son who, when he was five years old, suffocated to death. It was clear from that conversation that Ruth was somebody who had been deeply hurt and thought about that every day of her life.



*Senator Mary Margaret Haugen represented the 10<sup>th</sup> Legislative District from 1993-2012. She served in the State House for ten years before her election to the Senate. During that time she chaired the Local Government committee and worked closely with Ruth on the Growth Management*

*Plan. This interview took place on January 29, 2007.*

**Ms. McLeod:** Do you recall the context of maybe your first meetings with Ruth, maybe the very first time?

**Ms. Haugen:** Actually, I still remember when I first went in the Legislature, I thought I knew something about the Legislature because I'd been a school board member, but I realized when I was elected I didn't know anything. And when we got together with that class, it was a very large freshman class, and Ruth was unique from the start. Ruth had had a lot of political experience. She was far more political than I. I'd been kind of a nonpartisan, and many of us came from school boards or were not necessarily political. But the one thing about Ruth was she had been involved in politics her entire life. In fact, had been a mover and shaker within Pierce County and in state politics.

**Ms. McLeod:** When you mentioned that impressive freshman class, who were some of the people in that class who went on to other roles in state government?

**Ms. Haugen:** We had Gary Locke and Jennifer Belcher and Marlin Appelwick.

**Ms. McLeod:** What did Jennifer Belcher and Marlin Appelwick go on to do?

**Ms. Haugen:** Jennifer Belcher was the Lands Commissioner and Marlin Appelwick now is an appellate judge.

**Ms. McLeod:** And Gary Locke, of course...

**Ms. Haugen:** Was governor. And actually we had another one who went on to become a King County Superior Court judge. Heavey, Mike Heavey. So there

were a number of them who went on to do a lot of other things.

**Ms. McLeod:** You said that Ruth had some political know-how coming in, which led me to wonder, what was the nature of your relationship at that time? Was she someone you consulted regarding how to navigate the political terrain, or what was that like early on?

**Ms. Haugen:** Actually, Ruth and I were never very close because she had problems with people like myself who were nonpartisan and independent. Ruth was really a yellow dog Democrat. She called herself that. And I was more independent, so she really struggled with people like myself.

**Ms. McLeod:** What was the nature of some of your struggles?

**Ms. Haugen:** Well, I always voted for my district no matter what. And often times I voted against things that everybody else voted for, which was not popular, and Ruth had a problem with that. She really did.

Ruth actually was a unique person because she knew so many of the political players. When I came down here, I hardly knew the difference between a good lobbyist and a bad lobbyist, but she knew everything about everybody. And so she really had a wealth of knowledge. That gave her a hands up where the rest of us had a real learning curve. She knew the good guys, the white hats from the black hats.

**Ms. McLeod:** Just to pursue that for a moment, in what way did that help her get bills passed that she wanted to get passed, or help her in her position?

**Ms. Haugen:** She certainly had more friends because she knew what was going on and she knew people who were in the political process, where the rest of us who had just come in hardly knew where the restroom was let alone know who the political players were. That certainly did give her one-up on the rest of us.

**Ms. McLeod:** In 1989, the House, which then had a Democratic majority, passed Growth Management Legislation, which died in the then Republican Senate. As part of the 1989 session, Ruth Fisher had introduced some significant pieces of legislation, which became part of the GMA in 1990/91, such as High Capacity Transportation, Transportation Revenue. I wonder if, leading up to that time, if

you could talk about the history. I know as early as the seventies there had been work—especially by Governor Dan Evans—toward land use planning, and that he had experienced strong opposition. I remember that the state Environmental Policy Act was passed as was the Shoreline Management Act in 1970-71. I know those pieces of legislation were passed before your time in the state Legislature, but what is your perspective on the history leading up to the Growth Management Act?

**Ms. Haugen:** What happened in the early eighties and late seventies is that we had all these cities and counties that were experiencing rapid growth, and they were allowing large housing tracts to occur and lots of development. There wasn't funding for infrastructure, primarily roads, water, sewer, whatever. So the cities and counties kept coming to Olympia asking for funding to do that. On the other hand, we also had cities and counties that were planning, but they didn't follow their own plans. They kept creating exemptions to their plans. There was a real frustration here in Olympia that they kept coming to us for funding. In essence, some of us felt they needed to go back and get their act together at home. In essence, that's what the Growth Management Act was. A lot of people don't realize that all it did was give force of law to local planning.

**Ms. McLeod:** There were comprehensive land use packages that had been passed by many cities and counties, right?

**Ms. Haugen:** Oh, no question. My county got a national award for theirs, but they never implemented it. They didn't have to implement it. So that's, in essence, what it did. The Growth Management Act said you really had to start doing what you said you did. If you planned, you had to follow your plan. And it went one step further. It made cities and counties sit down and talk together and come up with agreements. I've often told people that before the Growth Management Act, when I was chair of Local Government, cities and counties wouldn't even come up to the table and testify together. They were at odds.

**Ms. McLeod:** What did you see happen after the Growth Management Act was enacted?

**Ms. Haugen:** I think the local governments struggled for a while, but they really did come together, and I think if there's real merit in the act, it is the fact that

cities and counties really do work together much better than they did before.

**Ms. McLeod:** When they were at odds, what were they arguing over? What was at stake?

**Ms. Haugen:** It's always over money. It's always been over money. And what would happen is that the cities would reach out and annex any kind of development so they'd get money. That's always what it's been about.

**Ms. McLeod:** What do you think about the fact that Ruth was a representative from Pierce County, a county that was really resistant to the Growth Management Act? Do you have any insight as to how that might have impacted and shaped her dedication to passing the Growth Management Act?

**Ms. Haugen:** I think she was often frustrated with Pierce County. She always said, "I'm from Pierce County," and she told all the war stories from there as bad examples. I think Ruth was a wonderful person as far as her dedication to where she lived. She loved Tacoma, and I really think she really wanted things to be better. I think she could see, because she had been a part of the process, what the weaknesses were.

**Ms. McLeod:** Ramping up to the Growth Management Act, in the mid to late 80's, can you recall the growth the state was experiencing?

**Ms. Haugen:** They didn't even plan for it. Some developer would walk in and say, "We're going to put in a big, new housing development. We're going to put in a big shopping mall." They never, ever put the component in as to how they were going to provide roads to that facility, or how they were going to pay for the sewers? Did the city even have capacity? Pretty basic questions. And so the cities and the counties would come to us, "Oh, we have all these problems now." You could see they hadn't connected the dots. And yet, we did have planning before, but at that point, it seemed that was when the growth was really starting in the state.

**Ms. McLeod:** Do you recall Initiative 547 known as "Big Green," which was offered as an alternative to the Growth Management Act?

**Ms. Haugen:** I don't really recall that, unless you were talking about the push to take the Oregon model, which was the top down, and we said, "No, we're a bottom-up process."

**Ms. McLeod:** Can you explain what that means, top-down and bottom-up? I know that you supported a bottom-up process.

**Ms. Haugen:** Bottom-up is where you really develop a plan at the local level. The cities and counties work together and involve the citizens and put together a plan to have your community look like what meets the goals of the community you live in—how much development, parks, etcetera. Top-down is what they use in Oregon where they have a state planning board that sets out regulations, which filter down to the locals and are then implemented. Now, some people will tell you that’s what we have in this state. To some degree we’ve gone to that direction, but it’s really unfortunate. That was never the intention of the original Growth Management Act. It was always supposed to be a bottom-up approach.

**Ms. McLeod:** What was Ruth’s position?

**Ms. Haugen:** Ruth was a very strong environmentalist. Ruth would have supported the stronger state model, like Oregon’s. She and Jennifer Belcher really pushed for that process, but the rest of us were pretty strong that the local control needed to be stronger than the state role. Actually, the part that came out of the committee, which I chaired, was the actual planning part. So Busse Nutley and I, together, were the ones who said we’re going to go from bottom, up.

I served on a transportation planning commission in Island County, and it was really frustrating. I spent two years working on this plan, and Busse Nutley had also served in the local planning area and spent a lot of time on it, and the counties didn’t pay any attention to all the work the people had done. The process was there for people to be involved to develop their plans, but the local governments never implemented. So, actually, we were really giving power to the people more than anything else. And to some degree I think Ruth understood that because she’d served on a planning commission.

**Ms. McLeod:** Right. In Pierce County. Before we get too far, I’d like to go through the list and name the six committee chairs, as you’ve begun to do, who Speaker Joe King brought together to create the Growth Management Act that Governor Booth Gardner signed into law in 1990 and ’91. You can tell me if I’ve left anybody out. You mentioned Busse Nutley.

**Ms. Haugen:** She was my vice chair in Local Government. She eventually became Housing chair.

**Ms. McLeod:** And then Jennifer Belcher was chair of Natural Resources. Ruth Fisher, obviously chaired Transportation, and she also chaired State Government at the time. Maria Cantwell, Economic Development. Nancy Rust, Environmental Affairs. Yourself, Local Government. Was there someone else in there?

**Ms. Haugen:** There was somebody else that people forget, Dick Nelson. Energy was his committee.

**Ms. McLeod:** Maybe they don’t remember him because people remember the group as the “steel magnolias,” all of whom were women.

**Ms. Haugen:** Steel magnolias, that’s true.

**Ms. McLeod:** Can you, before we go too far, tell me how that came about, the name, “steel magnolias”?

**Ms. Haugen:** It was because of the 1989 movie that was out, *The Steel Magnolias*.

**Ms. McLeod:** With Shirley MacLaine?

**Ms. Haugen:** Shirley MacLaine and Julia Roberts and others. But [Speaker of the House] Joe King called us the “Steel Magnolias.” And Joe called us all into his office one day in November and said, “I need a bill.” And we all said there isn’t time before this session to get something drafted, but you never said “no” to Joe King. He was a pretty strong person.

**Ms. Haugen:** The truth of the matter is that Steve Lundin, who was my staff person, had one in the drawer. He’d already drafted the bill, so we had the bill. We just had to put some meat on it.

**Ms. McLeod:** Can you give us a sense of the pieces that came together when the Growth Management Act finally came together? The various parts, where they were being channeled from?

**Ms. Haugen:** A lot of committees were working on a lot of different issues, and that’s one of the reasons why there were so many people involved. Because every issue area had concerns that seemed to be magnifying because of the growth that was occurring in the state of Washington. So that’s, I think, why there were so many committees involved. In fact, the original bill was drafted in our committee, then it went out and was taken apart when it went to the other com-

mittees. And then it came back together in Ways and Means.

**Ms. McLeod:** How did you experience that process of drafting this original bill and then seeing it taken apart and put back together? What was that like for you?

**Ms. Haugen:** We understood what was going to go on because we thought there had to be continuity. So, the bill came together after each committee held hearings on their subject area, because of the expertise of their staff. We were really focused on local government. At that time the committees didn't, in general, deal with so many different issues. Local government didn't necessarily deal with environmental issues, and we didn't necessarily deal with transportation issues, although I served on the House Transportation Committee, so I knew what the problems were.

**Ms. McLeod:** What were the transportation issues related to growth management? When you were working on the local government part, did those issues echo in your mind at all?

**Ms. Haugen:** Actually, the truth of the matter is that today I serve as chair of Transportation for the Senate because I feel the transportation portion is the one thing we failed in the Growth Management Act. Ruth worked hard to put the concurrency in the bill, which would mean that you had to have the transportation infrastructure in place before you allowed development. Well, it wasn't easy to do because you needed a way to make the investments. With water and sewer you had rates that you could charge, and there was a mechanism to do that. But within transportation, we never could figure out how to fund it. That's one of the things that I've really felt strongly that we've lacked all these years. That's one reason I wanted to take on Transportation. In fact, this year we're looking at concurrency and how we fund concurrency. How we make concurrency work. But it really was key to growth management. If you're going to plan for people to live in these areas, you've got to make sure they can move about and even make sure they can have alternative types of transportation. And Ruth was ahead of her time when it came to alternative types of transportation. Of course, in my area we didn't even have bus service then. So she was truly from a more metropolitan area, and she knew about

bus and rapid transit and things that we didn't yet know about in the islands.

**Ms. McLeod:** When you say there were funding issues in regard to transportation portions of the Growth Management Act, I wonder what those issues were?

**Ms. Haugen:** Because local government has so many things they have to fund, and what kind of funding source would you give them? Of course, that's how the impact fees grew out of the Growth Management Act; we saw that as one tool to give local government. I think a lot of us thought the impact fees would do more than they did.

**Ms. McLeod:** What were the impact fees?

**Ms. Haugen:** Actually, before the Growth Management Act, impact fees were not allowed in the state of Washington. Now, when a new house is built or a business is built in a shopping center, the cities and counties can actually figure out how much this particular construction would impact the area and they can get a certain amount of dollars towards roads, parks, schools. Those are the three things they can get them for.

**Ms. McLeod:** Can you take part of that impact fee and then fund it back into the roads?

**Ms. Haugen:** Only local roads, which has created problems because much of the impact is on the state road system. It has to be used for specific things. If you get money for roads, it has to be used for roads that are a direct impact of the development. If you get money for schools, it has to be used for schools. If you get money for parks, it has to be used for parks. That's one of the things we're struggling with now because impact fees have never worked. But we hadn't had them before, and so we looked at what everybody was doing in the nation, and we tried to figure out how we put impact fees in place so that somebody building a house here wouldn't be paying for a road across town. So we tried to tie it together, and we did tie it. But the fact of the matter is that it didn't raise enough money to be able to do anything, so often times it doesn't do what we thought it would do. It is important to note that the impact fee was only given to cities and counties, not the state. So, if the traffic impacted the state highway, there was no funding.

**Ms. McLeod:** What about gas taxes? Other forms of taxes?

**Ms. Haugen:** We were raising some gas tax in the early eighties, but nobody realized at that point that we were going to go for thirteen years with nothing. And at that time we were still giving the cities and counties some of the gas tax. In fact, at that point the cities and counties were getting almost half of the gas tax. They don't anymore, but they were getting some gas tax. The last two increases only had one cent going to the cities and counties, a half cent each.

**Ms. McLeod:** Is the gas tax a politically difficult issue to bring up? What are the challenges with things like the gas tax?

**Ms. Haugen:** Gas tax has always been the tough issue because it really truly is a user fee. In particular, people from eastern Washington have to drive many miles. And people in my legislative district have to drive many miles. It's pretty hard to put a tax on them because the people in the city, who don't have to take a car to work, weren't paying it. But back in those years, I never voted for a gas tax. I never voted for any general fund taxes at that point, although I did vote for the impact fees. In fact, I worked on that.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did not voting for gas taxes ever put you at odds with Ruth Fisher?

**Ms. Haugen:** Of course it did. It really did. And what she used to really beat me up with more than anything else was that my Republican seatmates both voted for it. But I voted against it because I was thinking about the people who had to drive to work who didn't have any other choice. Today, many people have alternatives. There are buses that run throughout my district, so I don't feel as badly as I did then.

**Ms. McLeod:** You wanted it to be fair and equitable.

**Ms. Haugen:** I felt it needed to be fair and equitable, but it traditionally had been the way we'd funded roads, and it really works well because of the fact that there always was a big share going back to local government, but it wasn't enough.

**Ms. McLeod:** Can you explain some of the complications, difficulties and challenges there were in bringing all those people and parts together?

**Ms. Haugen:** Boy, you know it's really hard for me because it's been a very long time.

**Ms. McLeod:** We're talking sixteen, seventeen years ago.

**Ms. Haugen:** It was. And I must say that I'm the kind of person who does things and then moves on. One of the things that I had done for years was try to keep the Growth Management Act in place. In all the years I was chairman of Local Government and Government Operations, we really felt that the local governments needed to have time to work on it because the time frames were pretty unrealistic. We were asking them to do things that some had never done. Many of the jurisdictions, particularly the ones that were more rural, didn't even have a particularly good planning staff, so there was a requirement that they had to really gear up their staff to be able to do it. The environmentalists didn't like the fact that the "locals" were deciding how much protection was in place for the environment. There was a struggle between the environmentalists, and we involved the housing community a lot, more the builders at that point than the housing community, because we really didn't know about affordable housing at that point. There wasn't much out there, period. What we did was try to strike a balance, and that's one reason we put the goals in there instead of making it specific. Each county and city was to take a look at the goals and then try to tailor it to fit their own community.

I served on a local planning commission on transportation planning, and so I think that's interesting that I ended up serving on Transportation both in the House and Senate –because I ran for the Legislature because of educational funding. Because I had served on this commission that they never implemented, it was hard for me to visualize what a struggle it would be for the counties.

**Ms. McLeod:** What about differences like these top-down, bottom-up issues? Because, as you said, you and Busse Nutley were really more interested in the bottom-up process. How were those things resolved?

**Ms. Haugen:** We just won! We had the votes. It was that simple. Actually, we had people who were watching this very closely. Cities and counties really wanted to be involved. And part of our problem, which we were hearing at that time, was that the state government would come in and tell cities and counties this is what you've got to do. They disliked mandates; they did not see the Growth Management

Act as a mandate, but rather as goals to be met. The mandate was only for counties and cities of a larger size that were already planning. In essence, we were saying that the cities and counties, “If you plan this, you would do this in a certain way, meet these goals.” Then the state government is supposed to pay attention to your planning—which the state has done a poor job of doing.

In fact, just recently I had a situation where my Skagit County had actually planned to protect all the farmland. Well, the Department of Ecology has put two of their pilot wetland mitigation banks on prime farmland in Skagit County. They’d been working with people to put them there. And I’m saying, “What’s the matter with you?” The Growth Management Act says you’ve got to protect that farmland and here the county has a plan to do that and the state government is in here helping these people site these wetland banks right in the middle of prime farmland. The town doesn’t want these banks. And so, just to go back twenty years ago; that’s the way it was before. We had thought we’d turned that over, but we’re seeing it go back the other way a little bit. Well, needless to say, long story short, I actually have a bill this year to clarify that they can’t put wetland banks in prime farmland.

**Ms. McLeod:** Is that bill to become an amendment, or is it separate from the Growth Management Act?

**Ms. Haugen:** It’s an amendment.

**Ms. McLeod:** So there are clarifications that need to take place?

**Ms. Haugen:** That’s what happens. You pass a bill, and we thought, because it was fairly general, that it would be filled in by the locals. And then they put the hearings boards in later on, but I wasn’t involved in hearings boards. I could have never done that.

**Ms. McLeod:** How did new programs that were created, such as county arterial preservation programs, the transportation improvement board and pavement management systems impact local government’s ability to meet transportation needs?

**Ms. Haugen:** A lot of those had been around for a long time, but with some of the newer programs, Ruth actually created them to help. She saw that was one way for local governments to deal with some of the problems they had. I think the thing that Ruth

did more than anything else was that she actually gave the word to the concept of an alternative type of transportation, “multi-model.” She was truly known as a strong multi-model person. There’s more than one way of moving people other than roads. Regional transportation, Sound Transit, all those things actually came from Ruth as ways to begin to deal with how we can have alternative types of transportation. She was a huge player in the passenger rail in the state. All because she believed that in order to solve our transportation problems we needed more than just to move people on roads. We were still pretty much road mentality in the Growth Management Act, but I think that’s the one thing that Ruth did, more than anything else, was to make people aware of alternative types of transportation. To make sure that they were part of the way for people to deal with the transportation needs of this state.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did the Growth Management Act provide a means for Ruth, and others, to get attention to issues, pass bills, that she was working on?

**Ms. Haugen:** I think it really was. It was a place where she really was able to do some things that she really thought needed to be done with transportation. She could see that if these cities and counties started working together, that they were going to move people beyond the roads. Certainly passenger rail and passenger ferries. She started the passenger ferries because she envisioned that was one way to get people back and forth across the Sound. There was the Washington State Ferry system that ran car boats, but no state passenger service—that is what Ruth worked to get started. She also was a player in the state getting into passenger rail service. The state purchased train sets that would be operated by Amtrak. Those trains are still running today as a part of our passenger rail system. We actually lead the nation in our state support of passenger rail, which Ruth started. She did this before she created Sound Transit.

**Ms. McLeod:** Jennifer Belcher said, during a CTED interview on the Growth Management Act, that she recalls a time when, shortly after the House had passed the Growth Management Act, the six committee chairs, herself included, decided to go to the Senate to testify. Apparently the particular chair you all were meeting, who isn’t mentioned, wasn’t especially receptive to your presence, referring to the six

of you in a condescending fashion as “ladies of the House.” However, Ruth spoke up on behalf of the group. Do you recall this scene, and can you describe it?

**Ms. Haugen:** Ruth was always speaking up. That was not unusual for Ruth. I don’t particularly remember that scene, but Ruth was a pretty interesting lady. She didn’t care what she said; she said it and called it the way it was. Ruth was a little older than most all of us, and, at that time, you had a lot of respect for your elders. You weren’t quite sure whether you should respect what came out of her mouth or not, but she told you.

**Ms. McLeod:** Was there a leader among the six of you? Would most of the work be done in the committee, or would the work be done between your staff and that committee person’s staff?

**Ms. Haugen:** Actually, the staff worked together more than anything else. The bills, after they left committee, went to other committees. Being the person who really put the original bill together, I got a little nervous what was going on in other committees, so I tried to make sure we were watching what went on. When they all came back together again in Ways and Means it was really important, because we were really nervous that somebody would undermine our bottom-up process and try to push the other one down. And there was some effort to do that at times, but Busse and I stood together pretty strongly. We actually gave a lot of credit to Joe King, too. He and Ruth went at it tooth-and-nail. I think he supported us. He and Busse were pretty good friends. They came from the same district [49th District]. So I think Busse spent a long time talking to him.

I think the other key person that a lot of people don’t talk about was Jeannette Hayner. It would never have happened without Jeannette. If it hadn’t been the House and the Senate working together, it would have never passed.

**Ms. McLeod:** There was something called the “five corners” at work, right? Can you describe what that was?

**Ms. Haugen:** It was the governor. And we do that often now. Probably that’s where it started when you’d get all five, the House and the Senate, both Rs and Ds and then the governor’s office, and you try to

work together to kind of resolve some of the concerns before you got there.

**Ms. McLeod:** Wasn’t Jeannette Hayner the person from the Senate?

**Ms. Haugen:** She was the leader from the Senate, but she pushed her committee people to be involved. They didn’t like it necessarily, but she made them be a part of the process.

**Ms. McLeod:** You had a Republican Senate and a Democratic House at that time. Isn’t it usually the case that the House and Senate are kind of—when one is Republican and one is Democrat—sort of at odds when they’re trying to pass some legislation?

**Ms. Haugen:** Sometimes, but not necessarily. This is when you have good leadership like Joe and Jeannette. It was a priority for both of them, so they sort of agreed. I do think there might have been a trade-off for something else that Jeannette wanted, but it isn’t always that way. People perceive it that way, but it isn’t always that way. It’s more how do we get this done?

**Ms. McLeod:** How do you perceive how Ruth was able to work her staff, make things happen, have these portions within the bill? How did she operate as a how-do-you-get-things-done person?

**Ms. Haugen:** Ruth was never as willing to work with Republicans as some of the rest of us. I think she perceived them as bad guys. She never did like the Senate. That was one of the difficulties. When I came to the Senate, and she remained in the House, I really became the enemy, which was really unfortunate because I really used to try to reach out to Ruth, but it was pretty hard to do because she felt the Republicans were the difference between the House and the Senate.

**Ms. McLeod:** Didn’t you chair the Joint Committee on Transportation?

**Ms. Haugen:** I did.

**Ms. McLeod:** So, you did have to work with Ruth?

**Ms. Haugen:** We did.

**Ms. McLeod:** And how did that work out?

**Ms. Haugen:** It was never very pretty. We had some very difficult times.

**Ms. McLeod:** Is there anything you want to share for the record? As this is history, is there anything particular about those times that come to mind?

**Ms. Haugen:** Actually, I was in the minority at the time when we were negotiating with the House, and she and Karen Schmidt had ganged up on the Senate.

**Ms. McLeod:** Karen Schmidt is a Republican who worked with Ruth as chair and co-chair of Transportation?

**Ms. Haugen:** Yes, and they often worked together against the Senate. Ruth would always join with the House person against the Senate. I remember we were negotiating one time and I was the ranking minority on Transportation in the Senate. Senator Gene Prince was the chair of the Senate Transportation, and Senator George Sellar was the other minority member, both wonderful men, but I had to keep bucking those two male senators up because those two—Karen Schmidt and Ruth Fisher—were ganging up and ripping the Senate apart. They were Republicans, and they were in the majority, but I was behind them pushing, pushing, pushing because it was pretty ugly at times.

**Ms. McLeod:** Do you remember the issue?

**Ms. Haugen:** It was over the transportation budget. It was never real pretty. And Ruth would always go with the House against the Senate, even when we were both in the majority.

**Ms. McLeod:** So, when you say it was a transportation budget issue, do you remember particularly what was at stake? Was it where the money was coming from?

**Ms. Haugen:** Sometimes it was where the money was coming from and on what it was going to be spent. Some of it was pretty foolish when you think about it now. But when you get down to how money's going to be spent on which programs, everybody has their own philosophy. One time, on a local control versus state control we really came to blows. I was for giving more control to the local. Ruth and Karen wanted to give the control to the state; we had a very heated discussion. I finally said, "You know, I want you to know I've been praying about this, and if I've offended either one of you, please forgive me," and they gave into me. I won. I won, finally!

**Ms. McLeod:** That's good strategy.

**Ms. Haugen:** But I just said, "Please forgive me. I think I said things I shouldn't have said." Anyway, that was not something Ruth was used to doing, giving in, but she did. She did.

**Ms. McLeod:** There was another issue I wanted to ask you about. Ruth really struggled with public/private partnership, which she wanted to use to fund the Tacoma Narrows, the second bridge. Speaker Chopp, however, proposed a bill that would put the project back in state authority, making the Transportation Commission the tolling authority. Were you on her side with that issue?

**Ms. Haugen:** I was, because at that point there was no money. Ruth was innovative. She would really look out and try to do some creative, innovative things that were kind of ahead of her time. I give her a lot of credit because she really was determined; she wanted to build that bridge. She was willing to support a public/private partnership, which, as a Democrat, I don't think she really liked in her heart. She was a yellow dog Democrat, is what she called herself.

**Ms. McLeod:** You had left the House some years before Frank Chopp became Speaker in 1999, right?

**Ms. Haugen:** I remember she had difficulties with Frank.

**Ms. McLeod:** Do you remember those difficulties?

**Ms. Haugen:** I was chair over here and she was chair there. I remember one time being called into Frank Chopp's office [in 2002] to talk about transportation, and Ruth wasn't there. I said, "Where's the chair?" I don't talk to the Speaker without the Transportation chair there. I believe in strong chairs. That was Joe King. He made us strong chairs. And I think Ruth and I became friends after that because I said, "Ruth, I'm not going to go behind your back and cut a deal with the Speaker. I'm going to work with you."

**Ms. McLeod:** And at that time he was supporting the government funding. What is that called, the opposite of public/private funding?

**Ms. Haugen:** Government funding or doing it with revenue bonding.

**Ms. McLeod:** Right. Can you explain to me what's at stake in both those scenarios?

**Ms. Haugen:** What we saw as far as the merit in doing a public/private partnership is yes, we'd probably pay more for the bridge in the long term, but we would also not have to accept the risk. Were we to do it totally private financing; then we accept the risk. Although, the bottom line, the government always accepts the risk. But it does give you more money to do something in a period of time when you don't have money. Many states are looking at these public/private partnerships now where they have some large corporation come in and build the facility, then charge the tolls and collect their money back on that toll. They make money at it; they don't do it for nothing. They do it over a period of years and eventually the facility becomes the government's. But the merit of it is it frees up the dollars you have.

**Ms. McLeod:** And it can be more expedited, too, right?

**Ms. Haugen:** That's what some people say.

**Ms. McLeod:** You're not bidding out.

**Ms. Haugen:** No, you don't bid out. Generally, though, in this state we pretty much have some rules as far as labor and such is concerned. But it generally moves faster than it does with government. It primarily speeds up the process.

**Ms. McLeod:** After that meeting with Speaker Frank Chopp, where you say I'm not talking unless the chair's here, and the chair is Ruth, did your relationship indeed take a turn?

**Ms. Haugen:** It did, because I think Ruth realized that I really did respect her. She had far more knowledge than I did in transportation. I readily admit that I'd spent years and years in Local Government, and then I became chair of Transportation. Although I had served on the committee for a long time, I really hadn't focused on the issues like she had. I had depended upon some of my colleagues who were far more interested in transportation. I've always been interested in it, but when Senator Gene Prince became chairman of Transportation—he was a Republican and was the chair when I became ranking member—it was as if all of a sudden, after Gene and I had both been on the committees our entire political careers, we were sitting in the back of the bus reading a book.

All of a sudden he was driving the bus, and I had to tell him where to go like I was reading the map. We both were struggling because we both had been on the committee, but not necessarily paying as much attention to all the detail that one does when you really are in a leadership role.

**Ms. McLeod:** So then, can you call on Ruth, or can you utilize her staff, or how do you become educated?

**Ms. Haugen:** Regarding the staffing, another thing happened with us. We used to have joint staff between the House and the Senate, the LTC [Legislative Transportation Committee]. One of the things that was interesting, under Ruth's leadership and also Karen Schmidt, was that they really believed that the governor didn't have anything to say about transportation. Transportation was between the Legislature and the Transportation Commission because at that point the Transportation Commission picked the Secretary.

Actually, this committee, it had powers that were just unbelievable. It was put in place by—who was the woman legislator?—Julia Butler Hansen, to give the Legislature control of transportation. Ruth and Karen both loved that. They had control. We had joint staff between the House and Senate, and this committee had the ability to make decisions even when we weren't in legislative session. I'm kind of a purist when it comes to government, and so I thought there was really a need to be a separation of powers.

**Ms. McLeod:** There're some rules, too. You're not supposed to meet outside of a certain time and...

**Ms. Haugen:** We did it all. LTC was exempt from everything. It had its own funding packages. It had its own staff. They weren't considered part of the Legislature. The LTC was different. It was its own Legislative Transportation Committee within the Legislature. And of course Ruth loved it. It gave them a great deal of flexibility. They were able to do a lot of things. But for me, I had a real problem with that because I really saw there needed to be a separation of powers between the two. I even had that feeling before I came to the Senate, because I have a League-of-Women-Voters mentality. When I came to the Senate and started working in the Senate, I realized, particularly when I became chairman of a committee, that the people in the Senate always questioned the staff because they were housed over in the House.

The LTC staff, although they worked for both, served in the House. The same people who would write the bill for the House would then come over here to the Senate, where maybe we had a different philosophy and write an opposite bill. So it was the same people, our joint staff, that would have to take the position of the House when working on a bill, then come over here to the Senate and take an opposing side to the same bill. Well, they were wonderful people. They were very competent, but I felt sorry for them. They were put in awful positions. They had to come over here and argue against the bill they wrote for the House, for us, tell us the arguments. So I decided I was going to create Senate staff, to have our own staff. Well, it was ugly. Ruth hated it, and so did Karen. They just hated it.

**Ms. McLeod:** They lost control?

**Ms. Haugen:** It was, in essence, beginning to break down the control. And they even got to the point where they were willing to let me have my own staff during the session, but then they'd work together during the interim as just one big LTC. But I wanted to make the Transportation staffs truly separate from the House staff because I believed that's how government works. So those were the ugly divorce years, and, actually, we did break it up. The action ultimately dissolved the LTC. But it was like the ugliest divorce you ever saw.

Actually, afterwards it was interesting because we sort of cut the staff in half and part of them came to work for the Senate and part of them stayed in the House. They kept the LTC in the House. They continued to have the LTC. But our staff became part of the Senate nonpartisan staff. It became very awkward because the House committee still had control of their staff. It remained a separate, small agency within the House.

**Ms. McLeod:** And do they still have the control?

**Ms. Haugen:** No. We now have repealed all the laws that made the LTC a separate agency with the Legislature. Because I really do believe in the separation of powers, and since that time we now have put the Transportation Commission in the governor's office. But that was a very difficult time in legislative transportation history.

**Ms. McLeod:** Is the head of the WSDOT [Washington State Department of Transportation], the

secretary of the Transportation Commission, is that person still named by the commission?

**Ms. Haugen:** No.

**Ms. McLeod:** The Governor?

**Ms. Haugen:** He reports to the Governor now. And that was a huge transition. So that was probably the most difficult thing. I think Ruth saw me as the person who dissolved that, but there were lots of questions about it. Many felt that the LTC and Commission had powers that were really inappropriate. Some of my colleagues had made some accusations about things that shouldn't have been done. They were totally honest, these people who were doing it, but it just didn't look good. All the other legislators were living under one rule on all the other committees, but LTC could do whatever it wanted. We hired our own staff; we set their salaries. It was pretty amazing what you could do in the Legislative Transportation Committee.

**Ms. McLeod:** Can you tell me about the relationship between the Transportation Commission and the Legislature?

**Ms. Haugen:** The Commission's job used to be to run the Department of Transportation. We would give them funding by program on how the money would be spent. But in some cases the Legislature had tied their hands. So they really had to come back and ask the LTC, or the Legislature when it was in session, how to spend the money. We also set policy, which they were to carry out.

**Ms. McLeod:** So now that the LTC has been dissolved, does the Transportation Commission have more power?

**Ms. Haugen:** No. They have less power. Actually, I think the Legislature, in some respects, has more power, but not everybody would agree with me. There are still people who hang on to the old LTC model. But I think that was probably the biggest problem with Ruth and I was the breakup of the LTC. It was a unique government body. In fact other legislators used to comment that we have very unusual thing in our state where we have our own separate Transportation Committee with its own funding source. If you travel as a legislator for any other committee, you'd get permission from the House or the Senate, while if you traveled for Transportation you'd get permission from the LTC. And the chairs actually ran it. It

gave the Transportation chairs a great deal of control over Transportation in many respects, far more than they're given today.

**Ms. McLeod:** And through having so much control, some good came of that, I assume.

**Ms. Haugen:** Oh, yes, they did wonderful things.

**Ms. McLeod:** What were some of those the things?

**Ms. Haugen:** Actually, legislators, at that time, didn't have as much opportunity to spend working on committees during the interim. There were fourteen members divided between the House and the Senate, and whoever was in the majority had the majority of the people on it. But it gave them a great deal of flexibility, so that we became very knowledgeable on Transportation because you did a lot of good studies. They had their own budget. They could do a lot of independent studies and a lot of good things came out of it.

The biggest problem was the separation of powers issue. It was like the Governor didn't exist when it came to transportation. In fact, one of the comments Governor Gregoire made to me the other day was, "What did governors do before they had transportation?" Although the Governor is still the Governor of the state, the Transportation Commission and the Legislature really were the ones who were the key players in transportation.

**Ms. McLeod:** What are the impacts of Ruth Fisher that you see now as chair of Transportation looking at the state?

**Ms. Haugen:** I think it's an issue of the different modes of transportation. It's the fact that now we have Sound Transit, we have rail, passenger rail plus freight rail. Her legacy is the fact that she got us out of the cars, or at least started getting us out of the cars. It was Ruth who really did bring that forth, and I think that's the accomplishment she needs to be remembered for. She really did make "multi-model"

a word we all understood. Before Ruth I'm not sure any of us even knew what the word meant. But multi-model, where there's multi-model types of transportation issues, she was the one who negotiated for any kind of increased funding. She wanted to make sure there was money to do other things other than just roads. That's her legacy, really. She made us realize that we needed to do something besides just build more roads. And that was to provide all kind of types of transportation.

She also was pretty aggressive about making sure that we looked after the disabled and the handicapped folks, too. She did a lot in that area to make sure that there was funding set aside to take care of their needs. Some of the programs that benefit them the most were started by Ruth Fisher.

But, again, it's getting us out of the cars. But she was very supportive of the gas tax and making the roads. She needed to make us all understand. She taught us all, particularly someone like myself who came from a roads-only district, how important it was to invest in rail and transit and all those things.

**Ms. McLeod:** Is there anything else you want to add?

**Ms. Haugen:** No. I think although Ruth and I always didn't get along, I always admired her, and I always respected her. I always felt bad that she didn't realize how much I respected her, because I wasn't really her enemy. She really made me her enemy. I became a senator, and she didn't like the Senate. Then, because I wasn't a yellow dog Democrat, that was another problem. She didn't have much patience with those of us who were pretty independent. In fact, she used to tell us off periodically. She was so proud of being a yellow dog Democrat. They don't make them like her anymore. She was truly a great lady.

**Ms. McLeod:** Thank you so much. You did a great job.

**Ms. Haugen:** Thank you.



*Karen Schmidt, was a longtime Republican State Representative who served the 23<sup>rd</sup> Legislative District. She worked for the airlines and ran her own travel agency before assuming political office. Karen worked closely with Ruth on transportation issues, eventually forming a mutual respect and*

*bipartisan working relationship.*

*Schmidt resigned to lead a state transportation panel, the Freight Mobility Strategic Investment Board. This interview took place on May 11, 2007.*

**Ms. McLeod:** When did you enter the House of Representatives?

**Ms. Schmidt:** I was elected in 1980, and my first term was 1981. I served continuously in the House from 1981 until I chose to resign in 1999 to take this position. Ruth was very much a part of that ultimate decision for me to move on.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did you consult with her?

**Ms. Schmidt:** I consulted with her a great deal. We had had a tumultuous session that year, and I decided I didn't need that kind of irritation and that kind of negative force in my life. I had talked to her and told her that I was considering ending my career in the Legislature and was trying to figure out my next challenge. She tried to talk me into applying for a position heading up the ferry system. She thought I had spent so much time studying the ferry system that she frequently tried to steer me in that direction. I told her I was really more interested in the Freight Board. She was very complimentary and, "Oh, you'd be great. You'd be the perfect person for the Freight Board. I think you should go and apply for the Freight Board, and I'll do whatever I can to help you."

I hadn't written a résumé in a number of years because I owned my own business. Of course, when you apply for a legislative position it involves door-belling, not writing a résumé. So, with the help of some friends I wrote the résumé and sent it in. I was still somewhat naïve about how one applies for these jobs because I hadn't really been in the job market

looking for a job as I'd been self-employed for so many years. So, I talked to Ruth one day and said, "Do you think I should call these directors and just let them know that this is not frivolous, I really am serious?" She just waved her hand and said, "You don't have to do that, I've already called all of them." I said, "What!" And she said, "I called all of them. I told them you'd be perfect for the job." Yes, she was very much a part of helping me get considered for that position.

**Ms. McLeod:** So, let's bring Ruth into this. Ruth joined you in the Legislature two years later in '83.

**Ms. Schmidt:** Yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** I'm most interested in the moment when you meet Ruth, your first impressions, and how you meet. Are you immediately friends or are you an adversary because you are Republican and she's Democrat? Is she active on the Transportation Committee right away, or does she do what she later advised other freshmen legislators to do, just stay quiet?

**Ms. Schmidt:** She actually was fairly quiet when she came in. Especially when she was on the Transportation Committee her first two or four years, she was very quiet. I remember she was most closely involved with the election process and some of those issues as a member of the Constitution, Ethics & Elections Committee.

She was on the Transportation Committee, but she wasn't that outspoken in committee. We could always count—when we were talking about budget—that she would be advocating for transit. But it's what you expected from a woman who drove a car that said, "Ride the damn bus."

**Ms. McLeod:** I love the irony of that.

**Ms. Schmidt:** That was her bumper sticker. At that point, we had met but we really had very few dealings together. I probably saw her more in the restroom, because in those days you could smoke in the Legislature, and Ruth would go into the ladies restroom, which had a sitting area, and have the window open. She would usually be in there having a cigarette, and you'd exchange pleasantries and talk about things going on. Ruth and I were probably, on

most of the controversial issues, philosophically on different sides. Ruth was very partisan when she came to the Legislature. She was very partisan when she came to leadership of the committee. That changed over time and helped make it a much more pleasant working relationship. But I'm sure there were a number of issues where we probably were totally opposite of each other in voting.

It's now twenty-seven years ago, and it's hard to remember back to some of those issues, so I don't remember when I first met Ruth. In those days also you had more interaction between the Republicans and Democrats, particularly in the House, when we went and did activities after hours together. But Ruth didn't participate in a number of those activities, partially because she could drive home to Tacoma, partially because she didn't drink, and that just wasn't her thing. But there were some activities where there were some opportunities to see each other one-on-one, not as in a political environment but more of a social environment.

**Ms. McLeod:** You mentioned seeing Ruth in the women's restroom; did you smoke at the time?

**Ms. Schmidt:** I did. It seemed like a lot of people smoked in those days. My seatmate who sat next to me on the floor also smoked. I would usually try to encourage him to go to the men's room.

**Ms. McLeod:** Who was your seatmate at the time?

**Ms. Schmidt:** His name was Joe Williams, and he's the reason I don't smoke.

**Ms. McLeod:** Really?

**Ms. Schmidt:** Yes. He contracted a nasty cancer and had, if I recall correctly, a small stroke. He insisted that I be brought to the hospital, and I saw him one day in the hospital. There was no bravado as he had been known to exhibit. He grabbed my hand and squeezed it and said, "Don't do to your family what I just did to mine." If that doesn't stop you from smoking, nothing else will. He died that week. So it was very profound. That's what some of those relationships are like down there, particularly over the long term. It's like a family thing that you get into, and nobody understands what it's like to be in that caucus, or what it's like to be in that position, except someone who's been in that position. You can come home—and I've heard this from other legislators—and you

can try to tell your family or your friends what it's like, but you cannot impart that to them like you can to someone who has been there and knows exactly what the emotion and all the other factors are that surround it. That's what you just can't capture.

**Ms. McLeod:** You've assembled yourselves into a kind of family and there's these dynamics that your personal family isn't taking part in. And because these sessions, at least to me, seem compressed, you end up working very tightly in order address all the issues. Is that how it feels?

**Ms. Schmidt:** It's a very intense situation, and you're constantly shifting gears. You're talking about this issue with this person, and then you immediately switch and talk about this other issue, and then you're talking about a budget. You're talking transportation, and then you're talking law and justice. You're constantly having to shift gears on a whole variety of different issues. There are more issues and more things demanding your time than you will ever have time for. One of the first lessons I learned down there was that I had to ration how much of my life I was going to give to the Legislature. That's what any legislator has to do; otherwise that place will devour you. It will take everything that you give it, and still demands more.

**Ms. McLeod:** Can you describe, in terms of the Transportation Committee and the work that you and Ruth did, how being on that committee is unique from other committees? Also, can you talk about how the House Committee on Transportation, Senate Committee on Transportation, the now defunct Legislative Transportation Committee, and the Transportation Commission function in relationship to each other?

**Ms. Schmidt:** The House Transportation Committee and the Senate Transportation Committee are the two statutory committees of the Legislature that deal with policy and appropriations for transportation. It is the most unique committee in the Legislature, and it is unique to Washington State. I haven't found another state that does it the same way. Usually you have one committee for policy and one committee for appropriations as you do for the General Fund. In this case, those of us who served on Transportation not only dealt with the policy issues, but then we had to turn around and deal with funding those issues and those

priorities. So you were in charge of both sides of the equation, which is a very unusual situation for one committee.

The Transportation Commission was put in place to try to be a buffer between the politics side, the executive branch, the legislative branch and the Department of Transportation. The direction was supposed to come from the Legislature and the governor through policy and appropriation. The Transportation Commission was put in place to make sure the Department of Transportation was carrying out the will of the Legislature and the governor in whatever came out of bills and appropriations. So, that was, in theory, how the whole thing was supposed to work.

The success or failure of the Transportation Commission was a direct result of whoever was being appointed to the commission. If you appointed weak people, you ended up not having the oversight that really should have been there. If you had some strong-willed people, too strong-willed, sometimes they thought they were in a policy setting position, and that was a little bit of chafing to legislators and to the governor because, after all, we had to doorbell to go and have the privilege to set policy. It wasn't the role of the agency or the commission to set it, but to actually provide oversight.

**Ms. McLeod:** Tell me, who names the commissioners?

**Ms. Schmidt:** The governor named the commissioners, still names the commissioners. But throughout the years this friction built and built until a couple of years ago. That's when the Legislature was so angry that the Commission wasn't doing its job that they turned over the appointment of the Secretary of Transportation to the governor. Prior to this, it was the Commission that hired the Secretary of Transportation. Now the head of the Department of Transportation is actually the governor. The Secretary is a Cabinet officer working for the governor.

**Ms. McLeod:** Can you provide a historical perspective, describing where we were 1983 in terms of transportation projects, especially in regard to roads and highways versus mass transit and multimodal forms of transportation?

**Ms. Schmidt:** Not as much, no. Remember, the Transportation Department had been the Highway Department, and then there were a number of other

pieces pulled together under that umbrella. One of those was the ferry system. So all of a sudden instead of worrying about just building highways, they were worrying about things like ferries. They had a little bit of involvement with rail, not a lot, but a little bit. A little bit of involvement with airports. There was just a whole bunch of little pieces now that were part of this. But the dominant issue was always roads and highways in those days.

Certainly, when I first came in, the big push was that we needed a gas tax. Well, we voted a gas tax, and the legislators at the time thought it was very clever that we would vote a gas tax that would be tied to inflation. Well, of course, with what happened, everything went into the tank after we voted for this gas tax. Then, in 1983 when Ruth came in, we had to vote for another gas tax because instead of being current and staying up with inflation, we were actually losing money from our previous way of just having pennies per gallon. So we continue now, to this day, to have a gas tax that's tied to pennies per gallon, not to inflation, because it failed so magnificently at the time. But over the years the role of the Department of Transportation has changed and there has been more emphasis on expanding beyond their principal role, which is the highway side, into addressing all the other pieces that have to fit together.

Ruth was certainly a large motivator in pushing for that. She was a strong advocate of mass transit and believed very, very strongly that if you did more with mass transit and got more people out of their cars, you would have to build fewer highways. So that was an issue that was chafing between the Republicans and the Democrats on the committee. The Democrats lived in urban areas and buses worked in urban areas, but a lot of Republicans lived in rural areas, and buses didn't work as well as efficiently in rural areas. So, while there were differences between Republicans and Democrats on those issues, it wasn't really Republican or Democrat, it was more geographic. The perspective of where many Republicans come from is a little different from where a lot of the Democrats come from because if you come from an urban area you can see that buses can be an efficient mode of transportation and available. But if you live out in the boonies, you're not going to be an advocate for that because you don't go five miles to pick up one person and then go another five miles and pick up someone else.

**Ms. McLeod:** So there's this Eastern/Western Washington split because the east side of the state generally elects more Republicans, and the west side generally elects more Democrats. The west side being the highly, densely populated Puget Sound area. And it's easy to recognize the need, just take a drive down the I-5 corridor, and you know we need mass transit. But this becomes a tax-base problem, because the east side doesn't want to find themselves paying for the transportation needs of the west side.

**Ms. Schmidt:** And that's always been a very convenient argument, but in reality it's not true. Over the years, King, Pierce, Snohomish and, to a lesser extent, Kitsap, have been donor counties. So the money collected here has gone into the pot because most motorists don't care if they're driving on a city street, county road or a state highway. They want it to all flow together. If we raised taxes and put money back directly into those jurisdictions, well, you can think of it this way: there aren't a whole lot of people who live up around Cle Elum. They would never be able to pay for the I-90 expansion and improvements that will be needed up there. It had to be a statewide collection of funds so that, statewide, we looked at what our problems were and whether you were in sagebrush country or the Pugetopolis area, it all needed to work. Projects cost more over here and they cost less in eastern Washington for a variety of reasons, but yes, in eastern Washington they're interested in farm-to-market roads. They're interested in moving equipment and freight and agricultural products. You do have some congestion issues in the urban areas, such as the Tri-Cities. Not too much, but a little bit. It's a growing problem. Certainly this is true in Spokane, but nothing compared to what we have in Pugetopolis.

When we would talk about the budget, identifying the need to put money into, say, some Spokane projects, Ruth would always support that. Traditionally, the Spokane legislators would rarely vote for the money to fund transportation building projects. But Ruth always advocated that we needed to put money over there to keep Spokane from becoming the problem that we saw on the west side. So she was able to recognize that it's kind of too late for us, we need to fix our problems over here, but over there, if we're smart, we can avoid getting into the same mess that we have on the west side.

**Ms. McLeod:** I'm interested in what you said about partisan issues and the way the committee sometimes worked, how there could be division between Republicans and Democrats. I found it interesting, looking at some of the work that you did with Ruth, because it seemed you were not partisan, but, instead, you were issue based. I'm curious how that worked for you in caucus.

**Ms. Schmidt:** We were very issue based. If I gave you the impression that the committee was partisan, it's probably one of the least partisan committees in the Legislature. But because of the geographic priorities, that's what drove predominantly Republican thinking versus Democrat thinking, but it was the geography that was driving it more than anything else.

When Transportation got politicized it was by leadership outside of Transportation who held the Transportation budget and projects hostage for other considerations. So, all of a sudden Transportation became this political football. You know, "If you don't vote right on a whole bunch of other things, you're not going to get your projects in the budget," or whatever. So that's when it really became much more politicized than when Ruth and I first started. It was really a very pleasant committee to sit on. As I said, Ruth and I had a number of differences, probably philosophically, on most issues that were partisan. But on Transportation, it wasn't partisan. Our differences were whether we could both address what was needed in various areas, and one size does not fit all. Roads don't necessarily work in downtown Seattle, but ferries don't work in Pend Oreille County, even though there's a ferry county next to it. So, there was a lack of global understanding, and there continues to be.

But it's the same issue of eastern Washington saying, well, we don't want to pay for western Washington's roads. Eastern Washington was the biggest beneficiary of funds collected for many, many years because they didn't have the population base to sustain the road network that was needed for a statewide system to work. You can't just build roads where the people are because people want to go other places. So it was a complete fallacy that was never extinguished by some of the legislators from those eastern Washington areas.

We on the western most part of the west side of state—those of us who used ferries constantly—heard

that others felt they were subsidizing the ferry system. Well, that was totally untrue. In our area, particularly in Kitsap County, our ferries were supporting themselves through tolls. They were called ferry fares. Our people also pay gas tax. Our gas tax supposedly went into the ferry system, our marine highway, but it wasn't because any money was coming out of eastern Washington. But if you go to eastern Washington that myth is still there that they don't want to be paying for those ferries. Well, they're not.

**Ms. McLeod:** Before we go too much further, talking about your work with Ruth on the House Transportation Committee, I think it might be important for readers to know that you two essentially traded positions, depending on whether Democrats or Republicans had the majority in the House. Ruth became chair in 1990. You were chairperson from what, '95 to '98? In '99 there was a split in the House, and you were co-chairs. I wondered how easy it was to make that trade, how she was able to sit beside you as ranking minority member while you were chair and vice versa? What were some of the problems and issues?

**Ms. Schmidt:** First of all, we were two very strong-willed women, and not lacking in opinions. So when Ruth replaced George Walk on the committee, she still had a lot of the partisan edge that she carried into the Legislature from her past experience. She had been very active with her Party, including going to the Chicago Democratic convention where she was one of the rioters. God knows, I would have believed that one! (chuckles)

**Ms. McLeod:** I was lucky to get that story from Art Wang, on the record.

**Ms. Schmidt:** Oh, good, good. I hope you have the story of her serving food at the Twenty-seventh District Democrat fundraisers, because the moderate Republican women always begged Ruth: Tell us when you're going to be serving food, because we loved the idea of seeing skinny Ruth Fisher in opera hose serving food. We were willing to contribute to the Democratic Party just to see Ruth in that role.

**Ms. McLeod:** Her good friend Carol Larson said that Ruth told her that when she dressed up in that outfit she looked like a spider.

**Ms. Schmidt:** That's what she told me, too. She says, "It's no big deal, I just look like a spider." I said, "How can you say that? You were a daffodil princess; you can't become a spider."

Anyway, when Ruth came to the leadership and replaced George Walk, it was a kind of bumpy transition. George had been very open in the way he handled the committee and Larry Vognild was the leader in the Senate, also very open, very much inclusive of both parties and everyone's opinion. When Ruth took over, she started with that partisan edge and basically excluded the Republicans on the committee. Well, that was like a bucket of cold water thrown in faces that had been used to working together across the Rotunda and certainly across party lines. So, there was some friction that obviously occurred due to this change in how the committee was being handled. The first year that she was there she was, theoretically, able to be the chair of the LTC, Legislative Transportation Committee, by virtue of the fact that the House had one more vote than the Senate did. So, if the entire House membership on LTC voted with the House chair, we would outvote the Senate, which was part of the friction between the House and the Senate. But in this particular case the chair was Senator Vognild who had been very inclusive, and so when we were having problems in the House getting our issues raised into the budget or elevated for consideration, I ended up having to take a number of those issues over to the Senate's side, sit down with Senator Vognild and say, "We can't get a hearing on this. Here are our priorities; can you get them into the discussion?"

**Ms. McLeod:** Was he a Republican?

**Ms. Schmidt:** He was a Democrat. And he said, "Absolutely," and took every one of the issues that we had concerns about and at least got them into the discussion. Most of them got into budgets or policy bills. But we ended up having to go around Ruth and go over there because she was being too partisan.

So when it came time that she wanted to take over the LTC, we were not getting any consideration from Ruth at that point, and so we voted for Larry Vognild. So that became the cold water in her face, with us voting for the Senate chair to continue to be chair of the LTC. That didn't make it pleasant as we were having to work this working relationship, and there were some discussions. Certainly she would come

into my office and tell me what she thought and slam the door, and I'd go to her office and do the same. We kind of operated like that for a short period of time, and everyone just said, "Oh, two strong-willed women who are just never going to be able to work this out." I can't tell you exactly what the turning point was, but there were some times where Ruth and I would sit down and talk about issues and we got away from the partisanship. And we frankly did talk about that issue of why the House Republicans on the committee voted for Senator Vognild—the elephant or the donkey sitting in the middle of the room. I finally said, "Ruth we've got to tell you why we voted the way we did. This is what you were doing, and this is what had been the practice prior to that." I don't think she really realized how much of the partisanship from other committees that she was used to was being brought to this committee.

From that point on she started talking a little more with us. We had Tuesday meetings where we would work together to set the agenda and talk about what bills were going to come up. I would tell her what bills I thought our members were going to have problems with. She would tell me what bills she had to bring up but wasn't planning to take to a vote. So, we developed a trust and that continuity by talking about "Here's the way the committee's going to flow." There were times when she'd say, "I've got to hear this bill, but it's a terrible bill, but it's from somebody in my district. You've got to get your people to roll me on this." So there's a lot of legislative theater that goes on down there also, and it's not always what it appears to be. Shock of shocks!

**Ms. McLeod:** That's the part of legislating that really intrigues me. The behind-the-scenes.

**Ms. Schmidt:** She's got to represent her district, her constituency. But she knows that it's not a good bill, and so she'd sit there and tell a few members of her caucus, "Vote against me, and I'll just lose the bill."

**Ms. McLeod:** I've also heard that the two of you staged verbal sparring matches on the House floor. Do you remember any of those times, and, if so, can you retell any of those stories and describe what the issue might have been?

**Ms. Schmidt:** I can't remember exactly what the issues were. Usually it was a budget issue or a bill that we both agreed would be good policy. But for

one reason or another we would have reluctant members of our own caucuses who didn't want to vote for the bill. We would be maybe a vote or two short of what we needed to pass the bill out, but we both thought the bill should go. So, what we had found over the years is that our caucuses would rally if they thought one of us was being attacked. All of a sudden someone who was neutral or on the fence would say, "Well, they can't do that. If they do that, I'm going to vote with you." Well, it would accomplish the goal, and so it would move some of my members to support me, because "They can't say those things about you and be so mean. We're going to put our support behind you." Of course, her members would say, "Oh, man, you are really being tough; we're going to back you because you're standing up to those people." Usually the vote would go, and we wouldn't be too obvious about it. Usually either Ruth would call me on the phone or I'd call her—we have phones at our desks—we'd say, "Do you think we got the Academy Award for that one?"

**Ms. McLeod:** You mean right in the Chamber there are phones at your desks and you'd call each other?

**Ms. Schmidt:** Yes. We'd talk to each other across the floor. We'd see the board light up and say, "Humm, look at that. We've got the votes."

**Ms. McLeod:** Oh that's really something. But you don't remember a particular vote?

**Ms. Schmidt:** I don't remember a particular vote. It didn't happen that often, but it happened more than once. And so, yes, there were times that we would do that. Remember, these other committees are fairly partisan, and they wouldn't want to see Ruth and I getting along too well. She used to love, particularly, to needle me over things like I would have a perpetual bill for taking the sales tax off of ferry fuel, and she knew it should go, and it was not a big dollar issue, but she'd always make me really work for it. So it was just a thing, okay, here it comes, Karen's got another ferry bill and Ruth's going to go after her. We didn't disappoint.

**Ms. McLeod:** Oh, so that was kind of a non-issue that you could duke it out over and it wouldn't look like you were being the best of friends?

**Ms. Schmidt:** Right. And here's something Karen is passionate about, the ferries. And I would do the same

thing with her with some of the transit stuff so that we wouldn't appear to always be on the same side, but that we're fighting about issues.

Ruth, in her later years, she really became very passionate, as I think you do when you're on the committee for a long time, about what's good for transportation. She didn't like some of the direction she was getting from her own caucus and railed against that from time to time. She really believed that there was a right and wrong way to do things. I mean, two of the issues that I remember that she just absolutely—they were not big issues—would go crazy over was, one, when all these legislators would put in bills for vanity plates. It just made her nuts.

**Ms. McLeod:** Don't we have vanity plates in Washington? Haven't we had them for some time?

**Ms. Schmidt:** This was an expansion of the vanity plates. We had a few vanity plates you could have your name on or something to that effect. Then we got into Vietnam veterans, or people saving wildlife, and then this whole explosion of new plates: firefighters, Humane Society plates. It's just a whole bunch of plates that are out there, all with different backgrounds. The technology really wasn't there, at that particular time, because they were metal plates made by the prisoners. So, you had this sheet metal technology, and it became very expensive to consider making these special plates. Now they can do it through technology, and it's not as expensive. But, she still opposed it and said, "The vehicle identification plate is to identify the vehicle, not tell the life story of the driver." And she felt very strongly about that.

Mary Margaret Haugen always had a bill dealing with line jumping at a ferry line, a ferry queue. So, if you were a line jumper, you not only got a ticket but you had to go to the back of the line, and Ruth just thought that was the most ridiculous legislation that anyone could ever propose because you can't legislate good manners. So this was one that she'd say, "I do not want to see this bill advance. We either kill it or just not bring it to a vote." I didn't care, but she was adamant.

**Ms. McLeod:** I wanted to understand a little bit better the relationship between the House Transportation Committee and the Senate Transportation Committee. I was interested because Larry Vognild was a Democrat, and many people have said Ruth had a

really hard time with the Senate. She considered the Transportation Committee the House Transportation Committee and would rather the Senate not have a lot to do with it. At least that was my interpretation. Why did she have such strong feelings, if she did? What did that stem from?

**Ms. Schmidt:** First of all, in that era we had what was called the LTC, the Legislative Transportation Committee. The Legislative Transportation Committee was an amalgamation of members of the House and Senate Transportation Committee staffs that would come together and support members of the House and Senate Transportation Committees. The ones who were selected for this committee operated in the interim to work together on transportation issues that took more research, more delving into, more time than just the legislative session in trying to come to grips with issues. The two staffs worked very, very closely together. There was a strong regard—there still is, I think—between the House and the Senate, each one thinking that their staff is better than the other staff. We certainly had the more senior staff on our side, and the Senate staff and the Senate members were constantly trying to get LTC to be changed so that the House didn't have one more member than the Senate. They viewed that as the means for the House to always control who is going to chair LTC. So there was that friction between the House and the Senate about this committee.

Ruth believed there was more vitality, more energy, in the House committee and a lot more people were paying attention to transportation issues. If you look at attendance lists from back in those days, you always had a lot of House members and rarely would the senators even show up to the hearings. There was a feeling that Ruth had that the Senate was not as vested as a body in doing the heavy lifting on transportation issues. They wanted to be there to be briefed and then vote up or down, but they didn't want to do the research and the hard work. So there was that friction.

Certainly she wanted to be chair of LTC. And, after our positions softened in the House, when Ruth and I started working more and more cooperatively, the next time the chairmanship for LTC came up, I talked to Ruth and said, "We will support you as long as you can be even-handed in your dealings with us. But the day you stop we'll ask for a revote." Ruth got it.

She understood, exactly, that was a rule, and that she had to provide that balance. It had to work with both sides.

There were some senators who abused the system, I guess, from our perspective. They tried to get staff involved in political discussions in the district where a senator would convene a meeting and ask that a staff member be at that meeting to answer questions. Well, that was placing the staff in an awkward position because they were not there to advocate for a particular position. They were there to provide information, and to place them in this advocacy position was extremely awkward. So we started, through LTC, saying you have to get approval before you get a staff member to come to your district. We would have the approval power. If it was a senator, we'd ask the Senate lead, the Senate chair, to sign off that they knew this was being requested. As long as their travel or whatever was being requested, then it had to have a second check-off, and that would be the chair of LTC, who was a House member. Well, there was some friction as to why senators should have to seek approval from a House member. There were some abuses, one of which was the senator from West Seattle who wanted to put some staff members in a very awkward position. Staff was concerned because then they would have other members who would be mad at them if they participated in these discussions, and so we said, "No," and did not allow it.

There was some chafing that started going on at that point between the House and Senate, and there was some resentment about why they were being asked to get approval from the House. We didn't point fingers and say it was because of some abuses on their side, but some abuses on the House side, also. It was just a better way of controlling unapproved travel. We had some senators who would go to a conference and represent Washington State and then bring the bill back and expect to have it paid, and we said, "No, unless you got it approved before you went, we're not going to pay the bill." So there were some of those issues where people had their hands slapped, and it didn't bring exactly warm and fuzzy feelings between the House and Senate, but it was a way of tightening up the process of what had been going on. Also, we were trying to get more control over who was going to do what and how the budget was being spent. It needed to be spent by approval, not just ad hoc when somebody decided to go do something.

So you had those kinds of issues. You had the whole issue of who was going to be the chair and the view that it was always going to be the House. Well, there were some transitions that were taking place in the Senate also. The senior LTC members were in the House, and so there was a lot more support for the LTC chairman being the House person because there didn't appear to be any reason to make any change for that seat to become a Senate chair when the person who was there was a junior member.

**Ms. McLeod:** I was going to bring this up later, because it happens the year you left the Legislature, but eventually, in 1999, the LTC begins to dissolve, right?

**Ms. Schmidt:** Yes. But as you say, we can talk about it now or we can wait 'till later. The thing is, Ruth and I had a lot of transitions, and, with time, there was more and more trust built between Ruth and I. She would come in and we'd close the door—I'd open the window because she was still smoking, and I wasn't. We would talk about some of the things going on. It was very common for us to sit down and talk about what do you need for your caucus? What do I need for my caucus? We would talk about that. I remember, when I took over as chair, I went into Ruth's office. We closed the door and just sat there and talked about, okay, what do we need to do to get through this? What do you need to have for your caucus to sell a package? We had pretty well decided where we needed to end up, and then she would say, "I need this, this, this and this." I'd look at her and say, "Yeah, that's just a bit farther than I can reach." She'd know that. She'd always ask for more than I could do. So I said, "What's your bottom line? What do you need to end up with?" She'd say, "Well, if I have this, this and this, that's going to make my caucus happy." I'd say, "Well, we'll work to get you there. This is where I think we have to go, and we'll get through this." I would tell her, "We're going to have a bill on this. You're not going to like it, your members are not going to like it, but we're going to vote it out." So we would talk about some of those issues. There weren't any surprises that way.

Ruth liked looking at the big picture, and so she would look globally at the whole big picture and how all the big pieces would fit together. I liked minutia, the details of the budget or how it was going to fit together. So once we decided what it was going to

look like, then I'd get to sit there and start moving pieces around and see how the puzzle actually came together. She had enough trust and confidence that, in the end, she knew what was going to come out was what we had talked about. She wasn't particularly interested in how I had to move the pieces to get it there, if I used a different funding source or whatever. So it was a very comfortable relationship because she had the level that she needed and was comfortable with, and I had the level of actually working with the budget that I felt comfortable with, and I knew every line of it.

Now, having said that, Ruth also knew every road in the state and would regularly drive around, or be driven around, to see it because she was hands-on; she liked the global picture. She liked to actually know what was happening in those areas.

**Ms. McLeod:** There's two things I wanted to ask you, and one's related to driving around and traveling around and doing some of the homework. But before I get to that, I want to ask you when you walked in that door to Ruth's office, and you would say, "Okay, I know my caucus wants this," and she'd respond, "Well, my caucus wants this," and then you'd sort of make the trade and begin negotiating. Were there typical things that your caucus wanted or ask for compared to hers? If so, what would those things be?

**Ms. Schmidt:** Her caucus would want more money in transit. I'd usually say, "You know, Ruth, this is your area. This is how much we can give you in the budget. You figure it out. You work on that piece of it and figure out what we have to do to make your caucus happy, but this is how much we'll give you. Beyond that, no, we're going to fight you because we need the money for other priorities." When I was chair, and I would tell her to go do that and do the legwork. Some of it was the Sounder and the support for light rail.

I got more into the heavy rail—the issue of the Amtrak Cascade service and the potential of how it could help relieve the number of commuter flights between here and Portland. We were seeing a growing explosion of flights out of Sea-Tac and a limitation on other kinds of flights because we had all these little, local feeder flights that were in there. My question was whether rail service between Seattle and Portland, and Seattle and Canada, could actually take traffic off the road and provide relief for the airports

at the same time? That was more my issue. Hers was the light rail and the Sounder issues and a lot of the urban stuff. So, she would work on that because she had a passion for it. You don't get any better hard work than from somebody who has passion.

When she was chair, it was always, "You go do this with the ferries. I've got some members who have ferries in their districts; would you work with them and talk to them?" At times we would do something, and she would say, "I need my member to sponsor the bill." It might be something that I worked on, and it was my bill, but as they say in the Legislature, as long as you don't care who takes credit for something, you can get almost anything accomplished. So I saw a lot of my bills go under the name of someone else. Sometimes you get stuff done that way, also. It's that partisan thing of we need a bill for so-and-so who's a Democrat and the Republicans are in the minority, so if you want it passed we're not going to give the Republicans a lot of bills to pass, and so they're not going to have stuff to take home to say, "Hey, I did this," but give it to someone else to take home and say, "Hey, I did this."

**Ms. McLeod:** Are there other things that you can remember that have happened since that the era you and Ruth worked transportation for the House, things that you maybe had not thought of?

**Ms. Schmidt:** Oh. There were a lot of changes. You see DOT running emergency vehicles on the roads now. You see a lot more attention to not just transit, but flyover ramps and working on projects that are beneficial to both. There's money that Sound Transit is putting into the freeway system to get their buses efficiently on and off the highway.

At the time that Sound Transit was going for money there was still a lot more passion for roads than for transit. So part of what they had in their package was that they would build the fly ramps on the freeways. It was a way of tying it to this is going to improve the movement on the freeways as well as improve the buses. That's how it was sold, and that's why they're now putting money into those ramps. In those days there was more interest in doing something for the highways than for transit. Now, depending on where you are in the state, there's more of a reality that we need to probably do a little of both to make everything work. You're not going to abandon the roads. You're not going to get everybody out of their

vehicle, and even if you did, you're still going to have to move goods, which is my area. I still have to move cargo because you can't drive to Toys 'R Us and get Barbie unless that truck gets there first and unloads Barbie.

**Ms. McLeod:** When you were talking about freight earlier, you mentioned your transportation research trip to Los Angeles to observe the Alameda Corridor.

**Ms. Schmidt:** I know what story you're interested in.

**Ms. McLeod:** There might be other stories, but this is the one I picked up on. I wonder if you can talk about this trip.

**Ms. Schmidt:** First of all, it was a big deal for Ruth to fly. Ruth had been in an airplane accident years before, and so for her to get on an airplane to start with was a big deal.

When we started recognizing the problems that the state had with the economy, and the need to start focusing on our freight corridors, we looked south to the Alameda Corridor. They were doing some dramatic things. They were going to spend over a billion dollars on a roadway, a trench that was going to have a railway embedded in the trench and allow the surface streets to operate above them and have grade-separated crossings, so you didn't have the interference of rail and road. It was a pretty dramatic undertaking and certainly a huge amount of money to be talking about—a billion dollars just to go from the Port of L.A.-Long Beach to downtown Los Angeles.

So, we worked with our Ports Association here in Washington and others, and we put a group of legislators and people involved with freight together. We ended up taking this trip down to L.A.-Long Beach together, and we met with the sponsors of the Alameda Corridor. We met with the local governments that were tied into the Alameda Corridor. We talked to them about lessons they had learned. Would they do it again? What would they do to change things? Part of what we have in our statute for the Freight Investment Board is a requirement that once we select your project, that's the only bite you get out of the apple. You don't need to keep coming back, saying, "We want to expand it and do this and do that and do something else." That came as a direct result of meetings with the local governments down there who said, "If you don't curtail us, we will keep coming at you. So you need to set some boundaries or

this is going to be a runaway program. But you need to know how much you're going to spend going into a project. The only way you can do it is to stop us, make us do it once." So those were the kind of lessons that we learned from the people who were down there who were saying, "Stop us;" that we heeded. A lot of those recommendations went into our statutes.

So here we were down in L.A.-Long Beach talking to all of these people, and one of the things that they had planned for us was to go out and actually see the Alameda Corridor. You can drive next to it, but to see the whole expanse of the Alameda Corridor, you had to go up in the air. Well, again, this was going to be a challenge for Ruth because she had had this airplane accident earlier in her life. The idea was that she was now going to get into a helicopter and fly over the Alameda Corridor. There was a little tension, a little apprehension. We were in a van being driven by the executive director of the Ports Association here in Washington, through not a very nice area of Long Beach.

**Ms. McLeod:** Who was the person?

**Ms. Schmidt:** Pat Jones. So all of a sudden he runs out of gas. He's got all of these senators and representatives and people who they're trying to get legislators to be supportive of the issue, and Pat ran out of gas.

**Ms. McLeod:** The issue is transportation, and you ran out of gas?

**Ms. Schmidt:** And we're in this horrible industrial area.

**Ms. McLeod:** So the joke goes, how many transportation legislators does it take to make sure you have a full gas tank?

**Ms. Schmidt:** That's right. That's right. So, I had my cell phone with me and said, "Hey, I'm a member of Triple A. I'll call and get some gas out here." Well, meanwhile, we've got the helicopters waiting. They're now maybe a mile away from us, and so while I'm on the phone calling AAA, trying to figure out where we are, directing them down and that we need gas, the next thing I knew they had flagged some truck down to get the first people out on the helicopter. I look up, and the next thing I see is skinny Ruth Fisher climbing in the back of a pickup truck. We have no idea who's driving this truck, where they came from, but they're going to be driving Ruth and these other people down to the helicopter pad, and all

we could say when they drove off into the distance is we hope we see them again, and we hope that the helicopter pilot has checked his gas tank.

**Ms. McLeod:** This was just some individual driving down the road, someone who happened by?

**Ms. Schmidt:** I never knew who it was, but I kept asking everyone, “Who was that guy? Was he from the Port?” They responded, “We don’t know. He just came by and was willing to take them.” I said, “So you sent these women legislators in a truck from the industrial area to God knows where, and you hope that we’re going to see them again?”

**Ms. McLeod:** It was probably Ruth who commandeered the truck.

**Ms. Schmidt:** I think Ruth liked the idea she could sit in the back and smoke. So she was probably back there having a cigarette before she has to get up in a helicopter.

**Ms. McLeod:** Was it an open pickup?

**Ms. Schmidt:** It was an open pickup. It was an open pickup, and she was sitting in the back. She didn’t have an ounce of fat on her, so I can imagine her bouncing around. It had to be very uncomfortable.

**Ms. McLeod:** All in the name of transportation. Did you take any other trips with her? Did you look at other forms of mass transit?

**Ms. Schmidt:** We took trips within the state, and we did things together. Yes, we’d go to meetings, and we would go to see facilities that were coming together in the state. She really did not like to fly, and you had to come up with a pretty darn good reason for Ruth to fly. Even when we had meetings across the state, most of the time she’d drive to them or would ride with someone who was going to that meeting so that she could avoid having to get on an airplane.

**Ms. McLeod:** I didn’t realize she’d had a plane accident. I thought her aversion to flying was because she couldn’t smoke on the airplane.

**Ms. Schmidt:** That would be a good excuse. No. It seems to me there was a plane accident. I think she was coming home from Mexico, and the plane crashed.

**Ms. McLeod:** I didn’t know about that. Do you happen to know the year or about the time when you were in L.A. looking at the Alameda corridor?

**Ms. Schmidt:** That would have been in ’95, because in ’96, after we came back, we put together what’s called FMAC, the Freight Mobility Advisory Committee. That was the committee based on our findings there. We said, “We need to take this further and figure out how we apply this knowledge. We’re not going to build an Alameda corridor. It doesn’t work for Washington, but there are lessons to be learned in what they did. Now we need to figure out what do we need to do that fits our area.” So we created the Freight Mobility Advisory Committee and we said, “You start working on what should be in place that can address our unique needs of freight when you have water, land, water, land.” Those were our challenges. That freight committee met in ’95, ’96. One of the findings was if you’re going to have a program, you need a very strong project criteria selection process. So, in ’97 they prepared—after going out and studying for a year—the scoring matrix for projects. It’s the same one we use now. We’ve tinkered with it very little over the years because it really was a very sound way of doing it. But it took them almost a year to put it together, to balance east side/west side, urban/rural, road and rail. It had so many pieces that had to be balanced. When they came forward with the recommendations from these two, they created the Freight Mobility Board, and they put in place the scoring matrix. They had a series of projects that had been submitted, and they scored them. I remember Ruth and I sitting there, looking at this list and how they scored them. Ruth just got her pen out and said, “This is where we draw the line, after thirty-three.” So the first thirty-three projects were the ones that went into the initial creation of the Freight Board. We gave them the first thirty-three projects to be responsible for, gave them funding. Initially, we had funding that was a hundred-million dollars a biennium, which was lost with I-695.

**Ms. McLeod:** That was Initiative 695, which was passed in ’99?

**Ms. Schmidt:** It was in ’99.

**Ms. McLeod:** That was a bad year.

**Ms. Schmidt:** It was a terrible year. I remember the initiative passed right around the time that the Board finally decided to offer me the job. It was a long process. I think I put my application in after session—that was May—and I had a series of interviews

in between. Then they finally narrowed it down and offered me the job. I remember thinking at the time this is probably one of the stupidest things I've ever done. I'm now going to head an agency that just lost all their money.

**Ms. McLeod:** Wasn't Initiative 695 overturned, at least partially, by the Washington Supreme Court?

**Ms. Schmidt:** It was overturned, but the will of the people was quite clear. So the Legislature moved forward in the 2000 session and codified what had been in there and kept the thirty-dollar vehicle tabs.

**Ms. McLeod:** Was that Referendum 49?

**Ms. Schmidt:** No. Referendum 49 was the one I worked on. Referendum 49 was the precursor to 695. Referendum 49 took the undedicated portion of the motor vehicle excise tax and used it for transportation. It had been an area where it was used for a whole variety of other non-transportation issues. Trying to pull those dollars back would have been absolutely impossible. But we convinced chairman Huff at that time and others, Dan McDonald in the Senate, that this money currently was not dedicated to anything. We had problems within the transportation system. They were not willing to vote for a gas tax. They were not willing to vote for any new money for transportation, but they all agreed that we had a problem in transportation, and the only way to fix it was to use this money that is currently undedicated and move it into transportation. So we finally convinced them to do that. It's one of those things where everyone then wanted to be the owner of the issue. They passed the bill, and it was a referendum to the voters. The voters approved it.

All of a sudden we got this money for transportation the following year, that was in '98. The following year in the '99 session we wrote a budget. Everyone loved the budget. Everyone all of a sudden had money for projects. In the House the budget went out with a hundred percent vote. I think the Senate had one negative vote. So it was really a very upscale, positive experience. That was the '99 session when we passed the budget for how we were going to spend the Ref. 49 funds. That's when I said to myself, "Transportation's in good shape for a while, for a few years. I got a lot of things done that were important to me. If there's a time to move on, this is probably the time." And then there were some issues that happened

in that session that convinced me that was definitely the time. I'd had it.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did you leave in October of the '99 session?

**Ms. Schmidt:** I actually took the job in November of '99. Session had ended in April. It had been a long session. We had written the budget, and it was at the end of that session that I started thinking about moving on. Then the initiative was filed that summer by Tim Eyman, and the voters passed the thirty-dollar car tab. There really hadn't been much opportunity to tell people this is what you're going to lose, and they really didn't care. They just liked the idea of thirty-dollar tabs.

**Ms. McLeod:** One of the issues that comes up in terms of voting for a gas tax is that for it to work in the Legislature it has to be nonpartisan. If one side is voting in favor of a gas tax, and the other is not, then during the next election the Republicans can say, "Those Democrats voted to raise your taxes; we did not," or vice versa. It can become kind of divisive.

**Ms. Schmidt:** Yes. It can be. But in all the years I've served in the Legislature I cannot point to anybody who ever lost an election voting for a gas tax. It was an infrastructure thing that is different from other taxes where you actually do see results. It's a user fee. I never saw anyone who lost an election because of the gas tax, and I certainly came from a very volatile district. We had a lot of transportation problems, including the ferries. As a Republican, I voted for just about every gas tax that we had during those years because I could see that it was needed, and it was something that was going to go back into something that was useful for the people who were paying. Did I have to explain my vote when I went home? Yes. I certainly did, and what the benefits were, and why I decided, how I weighed it and how I made my decision to vote for it. But it becomes more rhetoric than, oh, I'd lose an election over a gas tax vote. No. You'll get a lot of heat for it, but I don't think it defeats you.

**Ms. McLeod:** But isn't there some idea or feeling that it can be used as a form of negative propaganda against someone in the next campaign?

**Ms. Schmidt:** Yes. That is very true. And, yes, it is used as a tactic as many of those things are. Whether it's valid or not, nobody likes to be attacked. Was

it used against me? Sure. I remember hit pieces on myself that said, “She voted for one of the largest gas taxes ever conceived of.” Of course, now I’ve been eclipsed by new gas taxes. But, yes, you have to answer and yes, it is used as a weapon. It always irritated us because it should be bipartisan. There are no Republican roads. There are no Democrat highways. We all rely on them. It’s something that goes in the infrastructure. It is a user fee, but it is now being used politically, and that’s unfortunate because it makes it more and more difficult for people to do what they know they should do. I’ve heard so many legislators say, “I know we need a gas tax, but I can’t go home and tell my voters I voted for it.” It’s unfortunate that it’s come to that. Now the parties have gotten involved, and certainly, when I was there I had a lot of problems because the party came out against a gas tax right at the time we were putting a gas tax together.

**Ms. McLeod:** You and Ruth co-wrote a letter to the people of Washington published in the Seattle P.I. You describe six myths and then six facts about gasoline tax and where our money comes from for mass transit and roads, etcetera. What instigated this letter? The beauty of it is that it’s written by a Republican and a Democrat together.

**Ms. Schmidt:** We wanted to take the politics out of it, not only for our members, but we were tired of every place we went having to say the same thing and undo these myths and talk about what the reality was. There was so much hype over these issues versus the reality of what was being proposed. So Ruth and I had talked about doing a joint letter so we could take the politics out. It’s a Republican and Democrat, both coming together saying, “This is what is needed in our state. We come from different political perspectives, but this is something we agree on that’s in the best interest of the people of the state.” Had it been done before? Yes, you see it occasionally. Has it been done very often? No. But Ruth and I both felt very strongly, very passionately about transportation. We had spent so many hours, so much time on transportation.

In Ruth’s later years she started spending more time with Transportation and less on other committees. In my later years on the committee the Speaker at that point was a Republican who had said, “This is such a huge issue dealing with our budget bills; I don’t want the chair of the Appropriations Committee

or the Transportation Committee on any other committee. I want you to solely put all of your time into those issues that deal with just that single committee.” So we really started going into Transportation and into the Appropriations, because we weren’t on other committees. Prior to this, I’d been on the Judiciary Committee, which was a very high-level, lots-of-bills, lots-of-issues-to-deal-with committee. Now you’re really focusing down just on transportation, and Ruth had pretty well turned her focus totally onto transportation. She dealt with a few other issues, she still served on a couple of committees, but most of her time was spent on transportation. We both felt passionately that somebody needed to set the record straight.

**Ms. McLeod:** Clyde Ballard was the Republican Speaker?

**Ms. Schmidt:** Clyde was the Republican Speaker, yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** In reading the history, following the news articles, I could see that Governor Locke had been advocating for a five-cent a gallon increase in gas tax, I believe in 98, leading up to the ’99 session. Then there’s a Republican retreat at Ocean Shores before session. Dale Foreman who was then state chair of the Republican Party met with legislators, and he’s reported to have urged Republican legislators to not support raising the gas tax. But you had advocated in ’97 to raise the gas tax? I wondered, what was your response to your Party?

**Ms. Schmidt:** I’ve never been quiet about my opinion. At that time, 1997, we had gone for a gas tax, and in the course of trying to secure the votes, I was within, I think, one or two votes of having the number I needed. Ruth had all the numbers of votes she needed. We had figured out she’d need to do this many votes, I’d need to do this many votes, and the majority party always has to do more than the minority party. So we had decided what we could do on the votes. I was within about one or two, as I said, of having my votes secure so we could vote for the package. When the Republican Party came out and publicly assailed the effort, it went to talk radio. It spooked all of the members of the Legislature, particularly those in my caucus. All of a sudden the votes I had, a number of them withered away. So we lost it. The Senate still hung on to their votes, but we ended up losing the votes that we had to have in the

House to get that passed. It was after that I spoke up that it was irresponsible, that the Republican Party had always been the party of looking to the infrastructure from the days of Lincoln building the South and the railroads, and Roosevelt with the National Park System and Eisenhower with the interstate system. And now this new version of Republicanism looked at using up and consuming what was created in the past without leaving anything for the next generation, and they weren't building the infrastructure and improving and fixing the infrastructure as they should. Because I'm so shy, I would say things like that. So, yes, we had that discussion, but we had already met months before with Dan McDonald and Clyde and said, "You're not willing to vote for a gas tax. You're not willing to vote for any money to come from the General Fund directly into transportation. You're not willing to come up with funds, but you do agree that we have a problem." And they all agreed. That's when we had the discussion about then giving us the undedicated portion of MVET so we could solve some of these problems, because they were not willing to do it with anything else. Dale Foreman was just verbally supporting what had already been decided upon.

**Ms. McLeod:** That's how you got that?

**Ms. Schmidt:** That's how we got it.

**Ms. McLeod:** There's also, somewhat simultaneously, a recognition of the many difficulties in funding transportation. I think that's one of the reasons the state created in 1998 the Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation, is that right?

**Ms. Schmidt:** Yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** And were you part of that?

**Ms. Schmidt:** Oh, yes. I was there in two different capacities because I started as the lead for our caucus, and so I was appointed and helped make the selection of who the co-chairmen were going to be and some of the issues. I was on the executive committee for that as a legislator. Then, in '99, when I resigned from the Legislature, I left the Blue Ribbon Commission as a member of the House, and I reentered the Blue Ribbon Commission representing freight.

**Ms. McLeod:** How did that commission serve to solidify ideas and transportation plans? Ruth was quoted as saying a lot of those issues weren't new. They'd been there, but how did the Blue Ribbon

Commission draw attention to critical transportation matters?

**Ms. Schmidt:** The reality was that we went beyond the transportation wonks, like Ruth and me. We reached out to other members of the Legislature who hadn't looked at some of these issues. But we went beyond them, to the business community. We went to outside interests to say, "You've got a vested interest in some of these issues because your businesses all rely on transportation. Your employees have to use it. Your goods have to get there. Take a look at transportation." A lot of this stuff we knew, but the light bulb was going on. As CEOs they were saying, "Well, gee, if I had this problem with my company of course I would address it." Well, the message was a little different coming from them than coming out of our mouths. Now they were elevating all these projects that we knew had to happen. It wasn't just the transportation wonks saying this. It was the real world was saying this.

**Ms. McLeod:** So who were some of those faces on the commission besides you and Ruth?

**Ms. Schmidt:** John Rinlaub was with Bank of America. Oh, gosh, the guy from Uwagimaya was on there. A retired executive from Boeing was there. A guy that had a big construction company on the east side was there. There were legislators there; labor was there; the environmentalists were there. It was a pretty broad-based group, and we didn't agree on everything. They certainly never brought things to a vote. It was more a process of putting issues together, and your issue might be part of that. So you globally supported it even though there were pieces in there saying it's not as big a priority to me as it is with somebody else.

So that was the way this broad-base group could get a recommendation. But it still elevated issues. For example, the need for freight had to be addressed, and we needed to do something. People had to start paying attention because it was tied to the economy, and it is tied to our quality of life.

**Ms. McLeod:** The Freight Commission had already started, right?

**Ms. McLeod:** When you left and became Executive Director of the Freight Mobility Investment Board in '99, what was your relationship like with Ruth at that time? She continued to be chair of Transportation.

**Ms. Schmidt:** It was a very good relationship. One of the hardest things was to leave the Legislature and some friends. Some relationships were not just acquaintances, and Ruth was certainly more than just an acquaintance. As I said, when she was so sick I would go up and visit her at her apartment in Tacoma, and we had some very long talks about a whole variety of things. It was a really good relationship. Obviously, we had an age difference between us, but we didn't have a relationship of a mother-daughter nature. We just were two people who felt passionately about issues and we had found a common ground that we could work on. We loved the fact that there was someone else there who could share that same passion. While we didn't agree on the direction on everything, there were times when we would honestly disagree. We would agree there was a problem; she had one solution, I might have another, and so we had honest disagreements over what was going to work best. But by that point there was so much respect that the issue would come and go, and you'd have to let it go.

**Ms. McLeod:** Ruth's daughter, Joan, mentioned, in the end, that there were a lot of things that Ruth still wanted to get done and see done. I know the Tacoma Narrows Bridge was a difficult final issue for her. What were some of the things that were still on her mind that she was concerned about?

**Ms. Schmidt:** She wasn't happy with the direction of the new leadership at DOT. She was very passionate in her feeling that it was the wrong person and the wrong direction that the agency was going in, and had told me that she had shared that opinion with the governor, which didn't surprise me. Ruth was not shy about sharing her opinion. She was concerned about the bridge and the approaches to the bridge getting funded and built, and that it needed to be done. Enough study had gone on that we needed to stop studying and get the thing done. She was very concerned about the fact that transportation was being controlled in her Party by leadership, rather than those who knew transportation best. So she had a very stormy relationship with her Speaker [Frank Chopp] over priorities. Certainly one of the things that came out of that was how the Tacoma Narrows Bridge was going to be funded. Ruth's position and her Speaker's position were two different positions, and it was not an amicable resolution. There was a great deal of resentment and anger. It

may have been expeditious, but it was the wrong way to fund the bridge in her opinion.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did you share that with her, or you were outside of the Legislature at this point?

**Ms. Schmidt:** I was out of the Legislature, so it was beyond me. I know that it could have been a kind of a safety valve in the future for statewide projects if they needed to use it, but was now a tool that was no longer going to be available to them.

**Ms. McLeod:** Are there any final thoughts or things that you wanted to add? There were a lot of things that we didn't get to talk about, but is there anything that you wanted to share about Ruth or lasting thoughts about what you think her legacy is? Any little story?

**Ms. Schmidt:** I remember that we all thought that Ruth was collecting bears, and so every time I'd travel, I'd find a bear and bring it home to her. She was very gracious about it. She knew I collected ducks, and so she started buying me ducks. I never knew that Ruth really wasn't collecting bears, she just had a bear, and all of a sudden this collection evolved. She never knew that the Lladro duck that she bought me, for my collection, was a duck I hated. So it was when we sat down years later, at the end, actually, we talked about a lot of things. I had an opportunity to tell her how much our relationship had meant, and the importance of some of the things that she had done for me, such as helping me get the job with FMSIB. I got to tell her how grateful I was and what a difference it was going to make in my life, having that role, that opportunity. I said, "I've also got to tell you that Lladro duck, I cherish, Ruth, because you gave it to me, but I actually hate Lladro." She said, "Those bears, I don't collect bears." So we had a good laugh. She kept smoking while we were talking through all this.

**Ms. McLeod:** That's a great story.

**Ms. Schmidt:** But, yes, it was a very nice relationship, and it took some time to get there, but the actuality of it is that you had two strong women who could work together. I've been told by outsiders, legislators and lobbyists, that the most frightening thing was seeing Ruth and I working together because they could fight one of us, but they couldn't fight both of us.

**Ms. McLeod:** That's great. Thank you.

# Ralph Munro and Gary McIntosh

*Interview Transcript*



*Ralph Munro was a Republican politician who served as Secretary of State from 1980 to 2000. He attended Western Washington University and came to work for the Legislature in 1967. He worked in the Capitol Building ever since in one way or another—either for the Governor or for a division of the Governor's Office, or as a lobbyist for handicapped children, or as Secretary of State.*

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*Gary McIntosh is the former State Elections Director from 1978 to 1988. He attended Washington State University. During the time of this interview, he worked as the manager of the Information Services division in the State Auditor's Office.*

*This interview took place on January 29, 2007.*

**Ms. McLeod:** Ruth Fisher joined the Legislature as a representative from the Twenty-seventh District in 1983, and she served for twenty years until 2003. During that time she served on the Constitutions, Elections and Ethics Committee, and she served as chair from '85 to '89. She also served as chair of the State Government Committee from '89 to '90, and, as you know, she went on to serve as chair of the Transportation Committee. She was vice chair of the Select Committee on Elections before retiring in 2003. In what capacity, and in what context, did you come to know Ruth Fisher? When and what were some of the main issues you worked on together?

**Mr. Munro:** Ruth Fisher was one of a kind. There's no question about that. She was not like other legislators in many, many respects. She was the wife of a dentist in Tacoma, if I remember correctly. She had not been active in state government politics until she got involved as kind of a citizen activist over transportation projects. She was mostly on the opposing side. She fought a lot of transportation projects. And it's pretty ironic that she moved over the years from that position to being a very powerful, influential person in the Legislature and after the Legislature on transportation issues for our state. I think that when you look at her rise to prominence it goes back to

the old populist theory that in this state anybody can move into a very high position if they're willing to work hard and do a capable job and be an advocate for the people. So that's why I say she was unique and different in many respects, as opposed to people who start off on the park board and then run for the city council and then run for the Legislature and so forth.

The second thing about Ruth Fisher that I'd point out is that she was willing to take on anybody. Nobody scared her. She wasn't afraid of a soul. Her theory was the bigger they are, the harder they fall, and she proved that time and time again. She took on issues and she took on ideas that were very important to her.

The third thing I'd point out is that she hated laziness and corruption. She came from an area of Tacoma that, over the years, had sometimes been represented quite well and other times had not been represented well at all. She didn't like that. She really felt that if you're going to be a state representative, you'd better represent the people, and she spent a lot of time listening to what was really on people's minds. And these weren't rich people. She didn't live in a rich district. These were people who were trying to make a living, trying to put their kids through school and were trying to survive in today's world. I think that she really worked hard to represent those people.

The fourth thing is, I think, that she was willing to take on people. Even if she lost an issue year after year, she never forgot. She'd come back and go after that issue the fourth year and the fifth year and the sixth year. I think that's pretty remarkable. Most people just quit and move on and really don't do that so much.

Fifth, she was very funny. She had a quick wit about her and she was kind of a smart-ass in her type of humor. I'm not saying that in any kind of derogatory or negative way. If I had a nickel for the times I nearly busted a gut laughing when she'd come up with some comment in the committee about something or somebody just at the right moment. Her timing was perfect. I don't know, I suppose we'll think of other things as we go by here, but those are the things that really strike out to me as far as Ruthie goes.

**Ms. McLeod:** How would you describe your relationship with her in regard to the issues you worked

on? What were you mostly working on with Ruth and in what context?

**Mr. Munro:** I got along very well with Ruth, I think, on a lot of stuff. Because when she chaired the State Government Committee, all of the Secretary of State's issues go through the State Government Committee. So whether it's changes in corporate law, or what have you, any division of the agency goes through State Government Committee.

Then she was involved with Constitutions, Elections and Ethics, and all of our election-related issues go through that committee. These were times of some controversy, times where we were trying to figure out what was the future of the initiative process, how would we deal with presidential elections, trying to upgrade the systems of voting. There are many things that she did that the rest of America still hasn't done.

I recently served on that Carter-Baker Commission, which is a committee where President Jimmy Carter and Secretary of State Jim Baker took a look at election reforms across America. And there's stuff that we're doing in this state that Ruth Fisher helped implement that the rest of America hasn't even started on yet. Our ability to use an absentee ballot, or the move to voting by mail. The whole question of the type of election equipment we use. All those sorts of things where she made just remarkable progress. And we changed a lot of the election procedures under her leadership.

**Ms. McLeod:** I'm going to talk to you more about those things as well, but I wanted to get your impressions also, Gary, before we forward. In what capacity did you come to know Ruth Fisher and what context?

**Mr. McIntosh:** As Ralph mentioned, I was the State Elections Director during that time when Ruth was heading the State Government Committee. The joke in our office was that we had a legislative package, usually one that contained a certain number of bills, about ninety percent of them were elections—which I still think was unfair, by the way. So I had to monitor this whole giant package, and, as Ralph mentioned, almost all of those would go through the State Government Committee. So my first contact with Ruth happened right after I was named State Elections Director in '88. I went right into the '89 session with

Ruth on that committee and me having to work those bills. So that was the first thing I did.

After that, the other time that we really worked closely together was when she was a judge of what was called, at the time, the Citizen Bee that was put on by a nonprofit group. It was a collection of high school students who would come together and they would have this contest on current affairs at the University of Washington. She and I were on the judge's panel together, and there was at least one occasion when we drove up together, myself, John Pearson and her. John worked in our office, and we spent a lot of time in the car going back and forth talking between Tacoma and Seattle. Those would be the times I had the most contact with her.

In terms of the issues that we worked on, the number one thing that comes to mind is getting rid of the lever machines in Pierce County. That was probably one of the larger issues we worked on. We did a lot of work on issues dealing with the presidential primary and a number of other things that we had to deal with her. But the big one was the lever, getting rid of those machines.

**Ms. McLeod:** Maybe we could just go to that and talk about it a little bit... Do you recall the bill itself and the circumstances surrounding the need for the voting machines?

**Mr. Munro:** When I became Secretary of State, the state of Washington voted in several different ways. The small counties still voted on paper ballots. Most of the rest of the counties voted on lever machines. And a few counties had started punch card. These lever machines were just awful. I frankly would have rather they voted on paper or punch card because then you had some record of the vote. The lever machines were just big mechanical devices. They were maybe the size of a stand-up piano or a little bit smaller. They were heavy; they were hard to use; they dated back to the 1930s and forties; and they were hard to replace. Many states were getting rid of them and using them for things like artificial reefs, throwing them overboard, to create more fishing opportunities. They were archaic equipment. I was totally convinced that they could be manipulated.

And secondly, I think it's fair to say that Ruth Fisher did not like Dick Greco. Dick Greco was the Pierce County auditor, and I can't remember if that was before or after he'd gone to jail.

**Ms. McLeod:** Yes. He was in jail in 1986, but there had been quite a history. Do you want to talk about what had happened?

**Mr. Munro:** I can say a little bit about it. Dick was the kind of guy who, no matter what the Secretary of State said, his attitude was, "Screw it, I'll do it my way. If they want to sue me, let them sue me." So, we constantly had reports that there were problems in Pierce County, and it was very difficult to deal with. Ruth did not like him, being from Pierce County herself, and she didn't make that a secret. But every time we'd try to eliminate these machines, Pierce County would come in and say, well, they were worried about the cost of replacing these machines. A couple of other counties were involved, too, that still used lever machines. Or they'd say that punch cards were corrupt. Pierce County had quite a little group of election, quote, oversight experts, who thought they really knew everything about elections. One woman, named Ballisotes, and some others, would raise holy hell with the county council any time the county council wanted to do anything. Ironically, they trusted these lever machines, which were the last thing you wanted to trust. But they did because they were used to them over the years, and they were convinced everything was fine.

So, Ruth set out on a crusade to get rid of them, and it was hard. Other counties were moving ahead with modern equipment, and she just couldn't get anywhere with it. So we had a bill, and Stan Johnson was really terrific. He was a very progressive Republican over in the Senate.

**Ms. McLeod:** And he was from the Twenty-eight District, which includes part of Pierce County, right?

**Mr. Munro:** Right. And [State Representative] Shirley Winsley, who was very supportive, was also from the Twenty-eighth, I believe. She was from the Fircrest / Steilacoom area of Pierce County. Yeah. She'd been a Democrat and switched to being a Republican. Others worked hard on this, but we couldn't ever get this bill passed. Finally, the day arrived that we got enough support for it. I'm not even sure what year it was, but I do remember that it was about 9:30 at night, ten o'clock at night. The Legislature was in session, and Ruth called down to the office and said, "Come on up here." So I went up to the floor, and I looked around, and I said, "What

do you mean?" because her desk was right next to the edge of the floor. At that point she was sitting on the far right-hand side of the Legislature, on the north side of the building, and she was easy to access from the wings. So I went over, and she got up out of her chair and came over and talked to me. I said, "What do you mean?" and she said, "Just wait right here." I said, "What's coming?" She said, "The lever machine bill, and we're going to ram a hot poker up Greco's asshole." I said, "Well, I'll wait for that." So I waited, and sure enough she had a lot of votes, and she passed it, finally. She was very, very happy. Ruth wasn't hesitant to let out a whoop or a holler, and she was very elated about that. So it was a big deal in her life.

**Ms. McLeod:** You remember her being in the chamber when that vote was passed?

**Mr. Munro:** Yes. It passed and I'm quite sure it was like 9:30 at night. Now, you have to remember that the Legislative chamber, even sometimes in the daytime they're kind of dark, but I'm just almost sure it was like 9:30 or 10:00 at night that it passed. But I certainly remember her telling me that.

And then Ruth smoked a lot, so she'd leave every ten minutes to go have a cigarette. At first you could smoke in the wings, and then you had to smoke only in the lounge. Every year it got a little more restrictive. I don't remember. Eventually, you had to go outside to smoke, but she always stayed close enough and kept her eye on things. She was a first-class legislator.

**Ms. McLeod:** I love that story. Do you have anything to add to that story, Gary?

**Mr. McIntosh:** The only thing that I would add is that it's kind of ironic today. It seems to me that lever machines are very similar to touch-screen voting. It was regarding the whole thing about whether there was a record of the vote, and in this particular case there was no ballot. So one of the other additional issues with lever machines that we were always concerned about, as Ralph mentioned, they were easily manipulated, but a lot of times they just didn't work. So, at the end of the day you'd go back to the machine and pull up the tally and there was no tape and everybody had zeroes. Had not recorded any votes all day long on the machine. You had to rerun the election or do something else. So, there were those kinds of issues as well.

The big thing in relation to that issue was that Ruth was one of those individuals from whom you really had to earn her respect in order to really work well with her. Until you really had that, she—I wouldn't say was dismissive—but she didn't necessarily either recognize you or recognize what you were saying or give any importance to it. It's certainly difficult to explain, but she was somebody who you had to get to know and got to know best by earning her respect. I can remember starting out in '88, and I hadn't worked with her very much prior to that, and so I was the new director and she knew her people on our staff. She knew them a lot better than I did, and she respected them as a result of that a lot more than she respected me.

But there was a very famous meeting that took place at the Tacoma Community College. I'm guessing it was probably around 1989 or '90 about the time this issue was going on, and as Ralph mentioned there were a bunch of skeptics there of the voting process, as there are today. So I had to go and speak. I was invited by Brian Sonntag, who was the county auditor at that time, to go to this meeting and to speak and be on the panel. This went on for like a two- to three-hour meeting, very late at night, with a lot of people there in the auditorium. Somebody from the audience stood up and made a speech and asked me a lot of questions and really grilled me about what was wrong with lever machines and what would happen if they went to punch card voting, how terrible punch card voting was and the other forms of voting. Those couldn't be trusted either and lever machines were better. This went on and on and on. I can remember when that meeting was over with, somebody came up—I was walking by Ruth—and somebody said to Ruth, "How do you think the meeting went?" She said, "There were a lot of skeptics here, but Gary McIntosh, he really took care of them." I knew from then on I was okay. That's when I went across that line with Ruth. We worked very well together after that. It's not like we didn't work well together before, but I had to, somewhere along the line, show my stripes, and that was it.

But the most important thing about that night was that for Brian Sonntag, who was also there along with a number of others, it was kind of a community breakthrough on that whole subject. And that, of course, the bill went on into the Legislature and, as Ralph said, it was very appropriate that it got passed. The interesting thing about that whole bill and the

way that we approached it was that we didn't really have a bill to get rid of lever machines. It was the first time we established a statute that established the fact that before we could approve a voting system, we had to have a record of the vote. We were not going to approve systems that did not have some kind of a record of a person's vote, be it a punch card or a piece of paper or whatever. So that was the way we approached that, which is the way things are today. It's fairly ironic because we're still having those same kinds of discussions even today.

**Ms. McLeod:** So you're talking about the 1990 House Bill 2775, prohibiting the use of voting machines that do not record votes on separate ballots?

**Mr. McIntosh:** That is correct. That was the bill that got rid of lever machines and you won't find the word lever machines anywhere in that bill.

**Ms. McLeod:** Why didn't the bill obviously prohibit lever machines?

**Mr. McIntosh:** Because we didn't want to make this about lever machines. The other interesting thing about this was that at that time there were many systems coming out that were what I would call "electronic lever machines." They were, essentially, a lever machine that was nothing more than a box. Instead of pulling the lever, you pushed a button. At that time, those machines did not produce any record at all, and we wanted to make sure that those were included, so we didn't want to make it about lever machines. We wanted to make sure that we made it a requirement that before we would approve a machine, it would be capable of producing some kind of a record of the voter's vote in this particular case.

**Mr. Munro:** You know, there's a reason that we're so vague about all this stuff, and I'll tell the really truthful reason, and that is that our attitude was, throw as much crap at the wall as you can and see what sticks. And that's really true. So we would go to a legislative session with thirty or forty bills. That wasn't unusual. And we were a very small office. Gary was trying to juggle all these. So it's hard for us to go back. People say, well, what about 1984 and House Bill 43? I have no idea. We might have run that bill six different ways in six different years until we finally got it passed. So it really is difficult to build a legislative history that's legit.

But the thing about Ruth was that it didn't make any difference to her that I was a Republican and she was a Democrat. That didn't bother her in the slightest. And some legislators it does. They're quite partisan and they're very hesitant to work with each other. So once we had that relationship that Gary talked about, she was just terrific to work with. She was comfortable to approach. I tried to be comfortable for her to approach.

This was also a transition time for women. Washington State has a long history of women legislators, and so forth, and there were always a few. But it wasn't like it is today at all. Women legislators had a much tougher time. Also, to have a woman committee chairman and to move up to that stature wasn't all that common. Now, you go back and you look and you can name some people that did it. But Ruth was kind of a maverick, and yet she worked her way up and became chairman and she became respected. Ruth was Ruth, and you just had to figure out, how do I work with her, how do I develop a relationship? I think she's a real credit to what happened over the years.

**Ms. McLeod:** It's interesting, what you said about Ruth's ability to be bipartisan when she worked on issues. Do you think that there's a difference between the way people operate now, in terms of party affiliation as opposed to the era in which Ruth came of age in politics?

**Mr. Munro:** She came out of what, I guess you'd say, is the area of South Tacoma. South Tacoma was such a Democratic area that the trouble is when you have an area that's so Democratic or an area that's so Republican, they don't get represented very well because you get people elected there who just can be lazy. You're much better off to have a district that has a little play in it one way or the other. Then people have to really stay on their toes to be reelected. And Ruth had a great deal of disdain for some of her predecessors from that area. She'd tell you, "So-and-so, he was worthless." She wasn't even hesitant about saying that. And she was also convinced that some people were corrupt. And then later on a couple of them went to jail.

**Ms. McLeod:** Like Dick Greco went to jail in '86 on counts of bribery. And he was accepting kickbacks, I think, from people who were storing voting machines.

**Mr. Munro:** Oh, yes. Kickbacks and side deals for a lot of places. And that was an era where those things were considered kind of routine. But Ruth had been involved, if I remember correctly, with the League of Women Voters, and she'd been involved with a number of organizations that were convinced that they wanted to make the place a better place, and I think she did that.

**Ms. McLeod:** You talked about voting by mail, absentee ballots, initiative process, all these things that Ruth helped implement. And there were issues regarding presidential primaries. What was the issue in the state in terms of how those primaries were structured and where they were held? What were the arguments for and against regional primaries as opposed to the method of precinct caucuses, from Ruth's perspective?

**Mr. McIntosh:** Cutting this to the quick here, without getting involved in specifics and the nuances of all the bills, basically the argument with the presidential primary—and it's true even to this day with the discussions we've had regarding our former blanket primary—is whether or not political parties should be treated as private organizations and be in control of their nominating process, or whether or not this process should be opened up so that everybody, all the voters, get to participate. There are arguments certainly on both sides of that issue, and this had been battled in the courts and everything else. Ruth was very much an advocate that people should be involved in this and that the political parties were essentially a part of the elections process. And by that I mean that the parties did not have the right to exclude participation in a way that required people to state or in some way affiliate themselves with the party in order to participate in a primary. Parties, on the other hand, believed that they had a right to associate and to assemble and to be in control of that process. So you can talk about this issue any number of different ways, but basically it comes down to those two points of view. Ruth was very much an advocate that people should have the right to participate without having to affiliate or in some way align themselves strongly with a party. I know that a number of times she expressed to me a great deal of frustration in terms of dealing with the political party. And it put many of those who had that point of view in a very difficult position still to this day. The former Secretary of State

and the current Secretary of State have had to face that issue.

But I know when Cal Anderson took over as chair of the State Government Committee that it was very frustrating for Ruth to have to work with the party. Cal was very much an active Democrat and believed strongly that the Democratic Party had the right to restrict participation in their primaries, and I know that was a difficult thing for her. Ruth was pretty open about she felt that ought to work.

**Ms. McLeod:** I guess I'm trying to still understand why, for what reasons to the GOP and Democratic Party feel the primary process is something that belongs to them and they are less inclined open up the nominating process to the people.

**Mr. Munro:** That fight goes back to the founding of America. And basically on the East Coast the political parties have a lot of power. When these populist pioneers got out here to the West, they hated political parties. They didn't want them to have any power at all. They were part of "the machine." A lot of these people had heard about the corruption in the big cities so they gave power to the people. They said that parties don't nominate people; anybody can step forward and run for office. Slowly, over the years, the political parties have taken these issues to court, and they've won some of them. But Ruth, in my memory, always stood up for the people. She said, "I don't care what the parties think they have or what they should have, and so forth; the people should have the power to do this."

And Cal was just the opposite. That's not saying that Cal's a bad guy. Cal, by the way, was a great chairman. But he was very much a party person. He believed that parties should have the right to nominate their own people.

But if I remember right, Ruth, when she ran the first time, took on some other Democrats. She was kind of the challenger. She was the one who stepped in. I don't remember in her first race who she had to beat, but I'd be willing to bet it'd be worth going back to look at that.

**Ms. McLeod:** What's interesting to me is they way she put herself at odds with her own party.

**Mr. Munro:** Didn't bother her a bit.

**Ms. McLeod:** Don't legislators rely on support from their own party?

**Mr. Munro:** Depends on who they are and what they are. The ones you remember most are the ones who are willing to take on even their own friends because they strongly believe in an issue.

**Mr. McIntosh:** There are a lot of old political science studies that have been done on this about strong parties and weak parties and state-to-state on how much control political parties have over individual members of the Legislature. Certainly one of the controversies that you get into is that parties will make the argument that in order for us to have a strong, good two-party political party system we need to have strength, we need to have control. And so their issue has always been that in order to have good, strong political parties and political debate, they need to have more control over the process. And that's one of the arguments, in fact, that they used. But it's different in this state. We've always had this populist notion that government belongs to the people and the people have the right to participate as fully as possible, which led to the establishment of our blanket primary and the active work of the Grange and all of that. So, here's also the opposite point of view that you can have strong political parties and you can have strong political discourse without turning over the entire process to the political parties. And I think that's kind of where Ruth was coming from.

**Ms. McLeod:** There was another bill that I think Ruth worked on that you wanted to talk about, House Bill 291, passed in 1987.

**Mr. Munro:** Yes. Revising procedures relating to voter challenges. If I remember correctly, this stemmed out of an instance that happened here in Olympia. In those days a precinct worker could challenge a voter at the polls and demand that they provide proof that they're an American citizen or something of that nature. There was a family that came here after Castro took over Cuba named Capestany. They fled to Spain first, and then left Spain and came to the United States. A very successful family. Hard working people. The father was in the construction business. The son was the shining light in the schools, a kid named Adolfo Capestany, active in Republican Party politics, working for Dan Evans and working for different people. He even helped me a lot. Family friends, and so forth. Adolfo went to vote at the polls and the poll worker challenged

Adolfo's right to vote. He said, based on the color of his skin, because he looked Cuban, "Do you have proof you're an American citizen?" Adolfo talked with a little accent, but not much of one. Not near as much as his father. He'd gone to school here. And it turned out to be a rather disgusting situation where it boiled down to racism. Besides that, Gary McIntosh and I were very concerned because the average American has no proof of American citizenship. Unless you carry a passport around with you, there is no way to prove you're an American citizen. The driver's license doesn't prove it, and the voter registration card doesn't necessarily prove it. So, anyway, we were quite incensed about this, and we ran this bill to change the way voter challenges took place. Ruth picked up on it, and she carried the bill and was the prime sponsor and helped us pass it. It made a much more fair situation for all people involved.

**Mr. McIntosh:** I was actually the County Elections Supervisor in Thurston County at that time. It was just prior to my coming over to be the State Elections Director. It was probably one of a couple of instances that occurred in our county that led to some future legislation. I know that we had some issues dealing with the closing of the polls and the releasing of the election returns on the East Coast was another one. We had exit polling issues and any number of different things that we worked with her over the years.

So, Ralph's right. We looked back at the list of bills that she's worked on, and to me it's always amazing to look at those and see where even today we were certainly well ahead of the curve and certainly the debate and discourse that we were having is still being talked about even today.

**Ms. McLeod:** Earlier, you mentioned absentee ballots and voting by mail.

**Mr. Munro:** This was a fight. This was a fight. Passing election legislation is not easy because the average legislator you present it to says to you, "Well, I'm here, what's the problem? There can't be a problem if I got elected." And so they really are very hesitant, and every time you propose something in relation to elections the Democrats think you've figured out some new way for Republicans to vote, and the Republicans think you've figured out some new way for Democrats to vote. And they're very difficult to pass. Almost all of these bills—there's a whole list

of them that we passed related to elections—grew out of some instance where some situation happened in some election—maybe it was Chelan County or maybe it was Spokane County, or maybe it was down in Wahkiakum County—something that wasn't fair or right or didn't go well. So we really worked hard to upgrade those. A lot of these bills are pretty vague; they say: "relating to provisions of election law." Well, what's that mean? It probably had forty changes in it or thirty changes in it.

The second thing that happened was that we wanted to open up balloting to every single citizen. If they were a citizen of the United States, they should have every convenience in voting. We never used the word "easy," and Ruth didn't use it either. She was very cautious about it. We didn't want to make voting easy, but we wanted to make it convenient.

And so with things like absentee balloting, it used to be you had to go to the doctor and get a letter to cast an absentee ballot, or you had to prove you were in Arizona or someplace to get an absentee ballot. And so we started with the most vulnerable people, people who had the most difficulty: people who had been hospitalized, the military who were out at sea, people who couldn't get out of their apartments if it was snowing, elderly, handicapped. Every year we'd try to expand it a little bit. And Ruth was in the forefront of every one of those fights.

Some years the Republicans were very nervous about it; other years the Democrats were very nervous about it, but Ruth was always with us. She stuck with us on every single one of those. And she led the charge. It's one thing for a statewide elected official to propose a bill, but it's another thing to get it passed. You know, we're not allowed into caucuses. She's got to go back to the Democratic Caucus, and she's got to sell it. And so we'd provide her with the arguments like we do other Republicans or anybody else who's a chairman, and hopefully they would be able to sell it. But if one person stands up in a caucus and says, "Oh, God, this is going to beat me and I won't be here," blah, blah, then you never know why you lost, but you lost. But Ruth was very supportive of that legislation.

I used to get accused by the opponents who said, "Munro wants to carry an absentee ballot to every individual, every election, and he wants to have absentee balloting in the laundromats," and they'd make all these jokes about stuff. But, the fact of the

matter is, that's what we wanted to do. We wanted to open it up.

**Ms. McLeod:** Were there bills that you remember working on with her that did not pass? Is there anything in particular that stands out now that make you think, geez, I really wish that would have made it through?

**Mr. Munro:** Oh, there were probably scores of them. Not that I remember right now. Do you, Gary?

**Mr. McIntosh:** No, not that I remember. As Ralph said, there were so many. I used the word "house-keeping," that's not really true. But a lot of times bills would get lost. I think of the struggles we had to establish the certification and training program for county auditors. That fell short on a number of different occasions with that committee. As Ralph says, sometimes you throw the bills out there and hope some of them will stick. But usually you have some of what I would call "priority bills," things that are really important, but yes, there were problem bills. I don't think any of them were so noteworthy that I can remember off the top of my head.

**Mr. Munro:** Can I mention a couple others?

**Ms. McLeod:** Sure. Yes.

**Mr. Munro:** One is in her first session, regulating exit polling. And this was a very, very controversial subject because of the election that had taken place in 1980 where Jimmy Carter conceded the election to Ronald Reagan at twenty minutes after five, local time here. A lot of people just turned around and just didn't go to the polls. So there was a great deal of fighting about that, and we were trying to figure out a way to regulate exit pollsters. That's a fight that eventually went all the way to the United States Supreme Court. Ruth was very supportive of the effort, but also was concerned about the constitutionality. How do you keep it constitutional and so forth? It's an issue that still goes on to some degree today. And she was in the forefront of that issue.

The second one is relating to registration and voting by handicapped people. I think it's important to note that up until this timeframe very few handicapped people voted. The Washington state law that we passed became a model, in many respects, for the national legislation. This meant mostly making polling places accessible. Now, in today's world, that just

sounds like "what's the problem?" How could that be a problem? But if you go back to even twenty years ago the vast majority of our polling places were not accessible to the disabled. By that, I mean you could not get a wheelchair in the door. Period. That doesn't mean that it was a steeper slope than two percent, or something like that, it just meant you couldn't get in. So, those people really had no way to vote, and they wanted to vote in person. They did not want necessarily to use an absentee ballot. They wanted to go and vote in person.

So, Ruth was very involved in passing the legislation to make polling places accessible to all people. Sometimes that meant building a ramp into the Grange hall, or making it that way. But then it went much farther than that. It meant we had to move hundreds of polling places. And that's very controversial.

**Ms. McLeod:** Because it's a lot of money?

**Mr. Munro:** Well, there's money involved, but it's more than the money. It's Mr. and Mrs. Smith saying, "You know, I've voted at the Rome Grange hall since 1911 and our family started voting there, blah, blah, blah, and we don't want to move. We don't want to vote at the nursing home, or we don't want to vote at the school." So county auditors were really concerned about that legislation, and it was tough. But Ruth was very involved, and she really took it on and was very, very helpful.

**Ms. McLeod:** Gary, you commented that you couldn't attend the committee caucus meetings, but did you go to hearings? Do you remember when Ruth presided over hearings related to election laws, and can you share any stories?

**Mr. McIntosh:** I would expect that Don Whiting, John [Pearson] and I probably appeared in that committee more than almost anybody in state government over the years collectively. So, there were lots of stories about Ruth and the way she ran that committee.

A couple of things come to mind. Ruth was a chair who wore her emotions on her sleeve. It doesn't work well in an oral interview to describe her because most of it dealt with mannerisms. If you were saying something that she was agreeing with, you'd get that really strong nod, the up and down motion of the head. And you knew that you were getting somewhere with her. A lot of times if you were saying something that she disagreed with, you'd get the other, side-to-side

motion. The other one that I always liked was when somebody was trying to explain something that was overly complex. She'd get that quizzical look and frown and burrow her eyebrows, and she'd shake her head quickly back and forth, as in "I'm really having a hard time understanding this."

And very often, when you were testifying in front of her, you'd get that quizzical look, and you knew you needed to stop and explain this a little more in a full manner, a full way, or you needed to clarify something you had just said because you were not getting through, at least to her. So you had this constant sign language that was going on throughout the entire testimony.

The other thing, Ruth always knew where her committee was headed. She was a chair who knew if and when she had the votes. She, as Ralph said, tried to work efficiently. There were a lot of bills in the House. Normally, the House deals with a gazillion bills because there are more House members, so their workload tends to be pretty high. But she was one who wanted to get things rolling in her committee. It was not unusual to go to a committee hearing where there would be fourteen, fifteen bills maybe on the agenda that day. I can remember a couple of occasions where there would be somebody in the audience who was there testify for a bill, and she would say to them something like, "Well, you can come up here and testify and answer some questions or we can just put the bill up for passage and pass it out of the committee. What would you like to do?" The person, if they were smart, they would say, "That's okay. Go ahead and let her go."

I remember one time, one of the more controversial bills. I don't remember which one it was, probably doesn't really matter, but, again, she knew she had the votes to get it out of committee, and she knew that there was going to be a lot of testimony, there were going to be a lot of questions. She also knew, without a doubt, that bill was going to pass out of the committee. So, when the hearing started, she would sit down and say, "Okay, we're going to take this bill. We're going to have the staff explain it to the committee. We're going to take some testimony, and then we're going to vote it out." So that was the deliberative process by which this bill was going to go through to the Legislature. She knew exactly what was going to happen, and so that's exactly what occurred. Staff people came up and explained it, there was some testimony

and they took a vote and it was gone. If they were going to kill the bill, they were going to have to do it someplace other than her committee.

So the way she ran that was great. I know, as a person who worked with the Legislature a lot, that when you're dealing with a lot of bills, and you have a lot of things going on, you appreciated that because you didn't have to play a lot of games in terms of getting your stuff moving along. I don't know if you recall any of those, Ralph?

**Mr. Munro:** Gary's right. There'd be fourteen or fifteen bills on the calendar and people would drive all the way down to the Capitol and they'd say, "Well, I'm going to give them a piece of my mind," and they were not smart enough to realize that they're better off not to testify sometimes. They've all got their testimony prepared and they want to give it. And she would say, "Now, the bill's going to pass out, so you can either testify or not testify," and the smart ones would not testify, but the other ones would all line up, they'd want to make their glory speech, you know. About three or four of those would be done, and she'd say, "I'm sure that your opinion is very important, and I'm sure you heard me when I said that the bill's going to pass out. And I'm sure you also know that you're killing all these other bills on the calendar because you're going to take the time that we would normally have spent on them." So you have to deal with these people when the meeting's running long. She'd just effectively tell them shut up. And it worked most of the time.

The other thing is when she first became chair of Constitution, Elections and Ethics—I can't remember if she was chairman or acting chairman—they met in Hearing Room D, I think it was. The hearing room was a long room, and instead of having a table at one end of this long, rectangular room or the other, they had it kind of along one side of the room. So, the chairman would sit in the middle, and all the members would sit in a big, long row out there. The audience was stretched out the whole length of the room, and the chairman couldn't really see the other members without leaning forward and looking down the table.

There was a person on the committee named Paul Zellinsky, and Paul was from Bremerton, and he was not a morning person. Paul operated from noon on, but not mornings—and these hearings all took place at eight a.m. Paul would fall sound asleep in the hear-

ings all the time. I'm not putting him down, I loved Paul, I knew him personally, and I think he's a great guy, but he had a hard time staying awake at eight o'clock in the morning. So, it would come time to vote, and just at the right moment, she'd say, "Would somebody please wake up Zellinsky?" Everybody just wanted to laugh out loud, but we all kind of muffled it, you know. But that was the way she was, she just said it like it was. It was quite interesting to watch.

**Ms. McLeod:** There was another issue I wanted to ask you about. In regard to elections, one of the first votes Ruth took was redistricting by commission. I believe, in 1983, a new, independent redistricting commission was established and an amendment was added to the State Constitution. Do you remember this incident?

**Mr. Munro:** This was a very tough issue because up until 1980 redistricting in the state had been done by the Legislature. And it had virtually failed every

single time. Every ten years there's a census, and the Legislature takes up this issue. So, this issue came up again, and as the Secretary of State we were fighting for an independent redistricting commission. We thought that was a reform that should take place. The party leaders were very much opposed to it. They did not want any piece of it. I do not remember Ruth's role in that, but if she voted for the independent redistricting commission, that was a brave vote because it was not something that was very popular with the parties, and if she was a brand new legislator and voted for it, that was a pretty brave vote.

**Ms. McLeod:** Are there any other memories you two want to share? Any other things that we should discuss?

**Mr. Munro:** I'll probably think of something tonight, but...

**Ms. McLeod:** Yes, we always think of something when we're driving away. Thank you both very much.



*Art Wang served as a State Representative from the 27<sup>th</sup> District for 14 years, Court of Appeals Judge, and Chief of the Office of Administrative Hearings. He entered politics when he started doorbelling as a 13-year old in 1962. This interview took place on October 26, 2005.*

**Ms. McLeod:** When did you meet Ruth Fisher, and do you recall your first impressions of Ruth and what she was doing at the time?

**Mr. Wang:** I vaguely recall going to her house. She was married to Bill Fisher, a dentist, at the time. I remember she had a swimming pool. She was one of these classic, wealthy, liberal white women, living on the west side of Tacoma. She was very involved with Democratic politics and very involved with campaigns. I remember going to her place for fundraisers, or for organizing meetings, things of that sort. I had a very positive impression of her as a friend, but I don't recall a whole lot of details about her at the time. This would be in the period starting probably around '74. So we're talking 32 years ago.

**Ms. McLeod:** You had mentioned to me, over the phone prior to this meeting, about Ruth's involvement in the Democratic Convention in New York in 1976. I wondered why it was you had remembered that and were you also involved?

**Mr. Wang:** Because of her party involvement as a delegate to the national convention she had been elected at the congressional district caucus level. First of all, '76 was the year Carter was running. I think Scoop Jackson had also run that year and had not done very well. But in those days the Democratic Party was very strongly split between Scoop Jackson, who had organized and dominated Washington Democratic politics at that point, and the anti-Jackson people, and Ruth would have been in the anti-Jackson camp, with those who were far more liberal. It goes back, in part, to the Vietnam War. There were other issues involved also, but certainly Scoop was more on the conservative side of the Democratic Party, and

Ruth was the classic liberal. And the way it worked was that you had to divide into caucuses committed to various candidates, and so there was a Carter delegation and there were uncommitteds. The more liberal faction basically ended up being uncommitted. Udall was the more liberal candidate in that election running for president.

**Ms. McLeod:** Morris Udall?

**Mr. Wang:** Morris Udall, yes. But he did not have the votes, particularly, and so the liberal factions all went as uncommitteds. And so Ruth was elected as an uncommitted from the Sixth Congressional District. I don't remember the exact number, but there were only nine or thirteen uncommitted delegates elected at that level, statewide, and Ruth was one of them.

I was a candidate for that also, but didn't expect to win and, in fact, did not win. It was also ironic because that congressional district caucus was held on the day I got married, so that was a slight conflict of interest there in not going to the congressional district caucus. Eventually I did become a delegate, but it wasn't at the congressional level. There were only seven congressional districts at the time, and I don't remember how many delegates—it varied probably from district to district.

**Ms. McLeod:** Can you kind of explain how, at that time, Ruth was politically connected and how she won people's votes to serve as a delegate?

**Mr. Wang:** She'd been one of the people involved heavily with Democratic politics for a long time. I don't remember the exact timing of it. She'd been one of the plaintiffs in suing the state Democratic Party. Neale Chaney, at the time, was the state chair of the Democratic Party. The way the party organization worked was two people per county, a county committeeman and committeewoman. So, there had to be two people, male and female, from each county and they in turn elected the state chair, who was Neale Chaney.

Ruth was part of the insurgent group which had opposed that and which was proposing the way it is now—two per each legislative district as well as the county committeeman and committeewoman. And the Democratic Central Committee for the state—the state Central Committee then—became much, much larger with the change of bylaws to adopt this.

But Neale Chaney knew, of course, that he would be out of office as soon as that happened, because he was with the old guard. Because, after all, that meant that eastern Washington, that Asotin County, had as many votes as King County. And so Neal Chaney was from eastern Washington and had support there, whereas Karen [Marchioro] was from King County and she had the support of the dominant population.

So Ruth was one of the plaintiffs. In fact, that case made it back to the U.S. Supreme Court. I remember Ruth talking about how exciting it was to go back to the U.S. Supreme Court and actually sit there and hear the oral argument on it, which eventually they won at the U.S. Supreme Court level.

But I never finished the whole story about the Democratic Convention. Eventually, I was elected. In fact, Ruth supported me, but she also was committed to Bill Baarsma. Bill and I were, in effect, running against each other for the same slot. It didn't necessarily have to come out to that, but as a practical matter it did in terms of geography and things. And there were at-large people who were elected after the congressional district caucuses at the state level. And so I was kind of surprised that I won an at-large seat. Baarsma was completely shocked that he didn't have the votes on that. But yet the campaign was just among those thirteen people, or however many it was, for a simple majority of them to get elected as an at-large delegate.

So I went back to New York City for the convention. Ruth was part of the '76 delegation. Her close friend, Bill Ames, from Seattle, was also part of the delegation and, in fact, I roomed with Bill Ames. A lot of the time, conventions are a mixture of being very hyper and up and seeing all these celebrities and things, and also you're listening to boring speeches and listening to dull stuff. You want to be there, but there are also parties and things going, all kinds of different little caucuses. I was involved with the Asian caucus, creating the first Asian caucus at that time. I actually chaired that.

Because of the Vietnam War, one of the big issues was amnesty or what eventually became President Carter's pardon. He pardoned people. I was a war resister. I'd been convicted of refusing to register with the draft. That's actually how I joined VISTA, as a condition of probation, basically. So I got Ruth and others—the uncommitteds—to help with the different anti-war, pro-amnesty kind of demonstrations and

things. The guy who Tom Cruise played in the movie, *Born on the Fourth of July*, Ron Kovic, was involved. He was one of the focal points because he had been convicted of some sort of a draft resistance kind of thing also. So he and I were involved with things together.

But I remember leading a demonstration on the stage, or leading a demonstration where we had these big signs, and I got Ruth to participate with holding these signs for universal, unconditional amnesty, and parading around with them. Ruth was kind of amazed afterward. She said, "We just don't do that type of thing." She would always tell me that she didn't do that type of thing. She credited me with getting her out, doing that, because she didn't do that type of thing.

**Ms. McLeod:** Had she felt that demonstrating was uncouth?

**Mr. Wang:** I'm not sure. I never really understood that. But that was what she told me. I remember vividly that she told me that at the time, "You don't do things like that." She was a classic little, old lady.

**Ms. McLeod:** I was just doing some math. I think she was fifty-one at the time. She was born in 1925 and that was '76. How old were you at the time?

**Mr. Wang:** In '76, I would have been twenty-seven.

**Ms. McLeod:** So you were just a young buck out there. Do you remember Ruth changing her mind in support of Carter?

**Mr. Wang:** Basically, we were all on our own. There was no dispute about it; Carter was the winner going in and everything. Everyone knew that. Ruth, eventually, and most of the uncommitteds, voted for Carter. But it was a foregone conclusion that all the others in the delegation would vote for Carter. There may have been one or two people who just held out for Jackson, just to do it. But, basically, all the conservative to moderate types were for Carter. And most of the uncommitteds went for Carter in the end. Supposedly, Bill Ames told her, "Ruth Fisher, for once in your life, vote for a winner." I don't recall exactly, but something along those lines. I eventually voted for Udall. I kept trying to find reasons to vote for Carter and was disappointed with several things he had done at the time.

**Ms. McLeod:** Between that time, 1976 and 1982, were there other instances that brought you and Ruth together politically? Eighty-two is when she ran, but I wondered if there were other instances?

**Mr. Wang:** Oh, sure. All the way through that time we would be out doing things together with Democratic Party stuff. Campaigns; various things.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did she support your campaigns?

**Mr. Wang:** Yes, she did. She was active and supported my first campaign in 1980. We had also worked together for Anne Jacobson when she ran for the House Twenty-seventh District in 1976. Anne Jacobson was also a good friend who later served as my treasurer from 1980 all the way through 2000, and as Ruth's treasurer from 1982 all the way through—I'm not positive as to when. She may have quit somewhere along the line.

**Ms. McLeod:** Was there an inkling, while Ruth's doing all these things, that she was going to be running for the House? When she was helping you, was there any comment?

**Mr. Wang:** No. Not particularly. There was no expectation that she would run for the House at that time.

**Ms. McLeod:** Even from herself?

**Mr. Wang:** No, I don't think so. I think because, again, it's kind of along the lines of what she did in 1976. She didn't do that type of thing. She was always the person who liked organizing, doing things, promoting people. She had her candidates and things, but she herself did not seem to be a candidate at that point. It may have also been partly her role. Again, she was a housewife with time to do these things, but I don't think she saw herself particularly as a candidate. She was a person who at that point was probably more driven to liberal causes, not necessarily to win elections. She was more for the cause at the time.

**Ms. McLeod:** When Ruth ran for State Representative in '82, you said you remained neutral through the primaries, which disappointed some of her supporters. Can you tell me why you remained neutral?

**Mr. Wang:** I don't want to make a big deal of that because it really wasn't. I stayed neutral on that because I was going to have to work with whoever was elected, and I didn't want to just endorse anybody and play favorites with anybody in terms of who my

seatmate would be. I'd let the voters decide on that rather than trying to attempt to be a boss and anoint somebody or try to help somebody on that.

**Ms. McLeod:** Or else you would have alienated that person if you supported somebody else.

**Mr. Wang:** Right. Yes. Actually, I did the same thing also when I left the House. I didn't endorse anybody when I left the House either, myself, in '94.

**Ms. McLeod:** Is that a common practice, or is that just something you live by?

**Mr. Wang:** It's something I live by. I don't think it's uncommon, but I don't think there's any unstated rule about it or anything else. So I don't think it's uncommon for people not to endorse.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did Ruth understand why?

**Mr. Wang:** Yes. Ruth understood that. But I think in that '82 election that I did endorse Brian Ebersole in the Twenty-ninth District. Some of Ruth's people—I think Doris Evans probably, because Doris would have been one of the ones to immediately get in your face—would have said something about it to me. "How can you endorse Brian if you're not endorsing Ruth?" Well, different district.

**Ms. McLeod:** I've heard that, in general, Ruth didn't like to campaign. How would you describe her attitude toward campaigning?

**Mr. Wang:** It's probably a mistake to say she didn't like to campaign. She liked to campaign for other people. She didn't necessarily like to campaign for herself as much. She didn't like some of the aspects of campaigning, but she liked voter contact. She would be okay with voter contact and with doing things, and she was certainly active in doing campaign activities for other people.

She hated yard signs. She called them "litter on a stick." In fact, she made these big, clumsy yard signs in '82 in her first campaign, because they were the large size they tended to fall apart after a while. They were a bitch to get in the ground because they were the big size. I've always been a believer in yard-sign campaigns and used lots of yard signs. Of course, I supported Ruth because she was then a Democratic candidate in the Twenty-seventh, and so we'd do signs and things together. I ended up with tons of her signs because we'd collect and clean them up after-

wards. So I ended up stashing her signs. I don't know where else she had them stashed, but she had her signs stashed for the future. I think we used the same signs over and over again. I'm not sure she ever had any more printed after the '82 campaign. I think the last time I ran, in '92, and I think I gave her the last sign at that point. I don't remember if she ever used the signs again after that, but there certainly weren't many around.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did she go out and pound them in the ground with you?

**Mr. Wang:** No. I don't think she did. I don't think she pounded them in the ground.

**Ms. McLeod:** What did the signage look like? Did you share, with both your names on the signs?

**Mr. Wang:** No. We each had separate signs. She had these big, kind of reddish signs. Her literature was kind of reddish. My literature tended to be blue because I used blue on my signs, and hers tended to be red because she used this kind of off red, more of a dark red, rust color on her signs.

**Ms. McLeod:** It's interesting because others have noted that Ruth's attention seemed to be more on the business at hand and getting the work done, and less on campaigning. And I assume she really didn't have to campaign very much after the '82 election. Would you say that's true?

**Mr. Wang:** Yes. The one serious race that she had was in '82 in the primary and ever since then, basically, she didn't have any serious opposition ever after that. The Twenty-seventh is a very strongly Democratic district and as long as she didn't have any primary opposition,

any Republican opposition would have been fairly token. There were some years in fact she did not have any Republican opposition or any opponent.

**Ms. McLeod:** So she was running unopposed?

**Mr. Wang:** Yes. I was always mad at her because she would be unopposed and I would end up drawing a last minute token opponent or something. I never had a free ride, whereas I knew Ruth did have free rides I don't know how many times, but at least once.

**Ms. McLeod:** Was she seen as such a formidable force in the Twenty-seventh that people didn't want to oppose her?

**Mr. Wang:** I don't think it made any difference. There was just token opposition to anybody in the Twenty-seventh.

**Ms. McLeod:** Okay. Tell me about the era and what Tacoma—the Twenty-seventh District we should say, not just Tacoma, but the Twenty-seventh District—what was it like at the time that you and Ruth had run for House in '80 and '82. It hadn't yet experienced what's now regarded as its renaissance. Commencement Bay, which was one of the nation's Superfund sites, one of the early Superfund sites, hadn't begun its cleanup. The University of Washington campus in Tacoma didn't exist, and the Tacoma Art Museum and the Glass Museum didn't exist. Union Station hadn't begun its transformation. I wondered if you would describe what the needs were in the Twenty-seventh District at the time.

**Mr. Wang:** Downtown Tacoma lost its battle as a retail center and starting—in the old days—with the creation of the mall and things, it was trying to come back with a few things. Like the law school came back to downtown in the old Rhodes Building in 1980, but there were relatively few things. There were a lot of empty buildings, a lot of empty areas that were not doing well in the downtown area. The Hilltop was also fairly poor and didn't have quite the gang activity that it later developed. The south end of downtown where the University is now was basically warehouses and many of them empty. So Tacoma was not doing very well at that stage. Union Station was in incredibly bad shape. You would go in, and there would be pigeons inside. It had been abandoned and water poured through the holes inside. The ceilings



were hanging down. It was just amazingly awful in terms of just how dirty and filthy and decrepit it was.

The State History Museum didn't exist there. The State History Museum was located in the Twenty-seventh District at that time, but it was the old facility next to Stadium High School. So, anyway, that was some of the situation with Tacoma at that point.

**Ms. McLeod:** What did you and Ruth feel, coming in, that you could do for your district? What was it that you two sat down and talked about, if you did sit down to talk? I assume you did.

**Mr. Wang:** Actually, I'm not sure that we did. I'm not sure that we did sit down and have a conscious decision about these things particularly. Actually, the Superfund site for Commencement Bay wasn't even established until '81, '82, somewhere around in there. So it wasn't even identified as this huge problem until about that time period.

'82 was a deep recession. It was the worst recession in this state since the Great Depression. So the economic situation was pretty bad, pretty horrendous. The Republicans had control of the Legislature and had been just a disaster with unbalanced budgets and having to come back in and make cuts and then come back in and make more cuts. They ended up going through something like six special sessions and had a terrible time of it, which, in part, led to the election of 1982, which was a huge Democratic landslide. It's probably not coincidental that '82 was a huge Democratic year and '94 was a huge Republican year at both the state and the national levels, and [in] 2006, twelve years after that, is probably going to be a huge Democratic year. We seem to be in that kind of twelve-year cycle in terms of just huge sweeps because the pendulum swings, yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** One of the things I've always wondered about, and I think that different seatmates do it differently, is how you strategize and/or divide your legislative work to make sure you best served your constituency?

**Mr. Wang:** In part it was a matter of what is your particular interest? What did you want to do? So Ruth had been involved with constitutions and elections issues and ethics. She'd been involved with some sort of Pierce County ethics commission at the time, as I recall. Ethics had been a huge problem in Pierce County about that time. I don't remember

exactly the timing of things, but there had been the Janovich ethical problems. Janovich was the sheriff who was arrested. There had been scandals at the time in Pierce County or shortly before that, and so part of her interest was in the whole election process, so Constitutions, Elections and Ethics was a natural for her. She'd also ended up on the Labor Committee, which was not particularly a favorite committee to be on necessarily because it's so polarized on labor issues. And she ended up on Transportation.

I was not particularly interested in Transportation. I was interested much more in the appropriations side of things, the general government side of things, not transportation. Ruth had been very interested in transit, going back to her father who had been involved with streetcars in Tacoma when she was growing up. So she had long been interested in it from that standpoint of transportation. I'm not sure that she had as much interest in the roads and highways at that point. But she certainly had the interests, all the way through, in public transit.

She also ended up as the vice chair on Environmental Affairs in '83, but that was kind of a fluke. First of all, the way committee assignments were done was that you submitted a list of your top choices for what committees you wanted to be on. I suspect that Ruth's top choices would have been either Constitutions, Elections and Ethics, or Transportation. She got those and probably took Labor not because she was particularly desirous of having it, but because they needed a person who would be a solid labor vote.

But, she was not originally assigned by the Committee on Committees to Environmental Affairs at all. In fact, Carolyn Powers [D – 26<sup>th</sup> District] was assigned to be vice chair of Environmental Affairs at first. Then Carolyn had a fit about it, I believe, and didn't want to be on Environmental Affairs, so I think what happened was that the leadership came to Ruth—probably Wayne Ehlers as the incoming Speaker—came to Ruth and said, "Would you take a fourth committee and be on Environmental Affairs?" and so she did and became the vice chair of Environmental Affairs.

At the time I would have been on Financial Institutions, and I was on Social and Health Services, and Rules. I was the Assistant Majority Leader for the '83-'84 session, so I would have been on Rules. So, we just happened to divide things up in different

ways. It made sense. I was interested on the insurance side of things and with the banking. There were a lot of banking issues in those days. And I was interested in human services issues, welfare policies and things of that sort... benefits. Ruth's interests were on the constitution and elections side and the transportation side. We were both interested in environmental issues, but she ended up, as I said, serving there as a fluke.

**Ms. McLeod:** It seems like it wasn't too hard to discern which committees you would be on because it seems like you had different interests at the time. I mean maybe you met on environmental issues, and I'm sure you each had issues in all the varying areas. But it looks to me when I look over your lists of what committees you were on that there's a kind of natural division. Because it seems like you even moved more towards the fiscal side of things, especially at the end of the time there.

**Mr. Wang:** Right. So did Ruth. She became Constitutions, Elections and Ethics chair after the '84 election. So, in '85, '86, '87, '88 sessions also. She also stayed on Labor; what was reconfigured and became Commerce and Labor after the '84 election. In fact, I became the chair of that from '85 to '88.

**Ms. McLeod:** Why did you two choose to be on that same committee?

**Mr. Wang:** It wasn't a matter of choosing to be on the committee; it was a matter of kind of random factors. She had already been on the committee. I wanted to be a committee chair after the '84 election. I'd done my stint in leadership, and it wasn't particularly a good position for me. I should have gone the committee chair route. I also wanted to become a committee chair in '84 and Commerce and Labor was the one that ended up being open to me.

**Ms. McLeod:** Oh, I see.

**Mr. Wang:** Ehlers, as the Speaker, wanted to put me there and have me do that. It wasn't my first choice, but it was kind of where I was forced to go. And I suspect that was where Ruth had been forced to go, in effect, back when she was first elected in '82.

**Ms. McLeod:** Do you have any outstanding memories of being on that committee with her at that time. Things that you were tackling?

**Mr. Wang:** A lot of it was stuff that was incredibly important to business and labor, but where they were just always at each other's throats. It just was very frustrating to deal with all the time. A lot of that was unemployment and worker's comp. And Ruth, frankly, did not get involved in those things. She just stayed away from those things. She would vote as she was supposed to do with labor on that, but she wasn't much of a player on those things.

**Ms. McLeod:** Why was she less interested in that?

**Mr. Wang:** It was just that she had other priorities and things. And frankly, there's not a whole lot you can do because they're so polarized. And clearly Ruth was going to be on the labor side of things. It was very frustrating to try to work with labor, in fact, to try to get them to be reasonable about things.

**Ms. McLeod:** Within a committee, when you're doing that kind of work, are you heavily pursued by lobbyists?

**Mr. Wang:** Yes. True.

**Ms. McLeod:** Is that part of the pressure of being on that committee? Or is that every committee?

**Mr. Wang:** Every committee is that way. Except what's different about Commerce and Labor, or the labor side of things, is that the parties tend to be probably more absolute than they do in a lot of other committees. It tends to be one of the most polarized committees. And there tends to be less willingness to compromise or to find what's a common interest. A lot of issues tend to be win-lose. The only way we win is if you lose. So that was part of the dynamic of the labor side of things. The commerce side of things was largely regulated interests, whether it was liquor or whether it was horse racing or some of the other types of activities. Different kinds of gambling related activities.

**Ms. McLeod:** Does tobacco fall under there, too?

**Mr. Wang:** No. Not particularly. I don't recall there being much tobacco stuff. At the time I was a smoker and Ruth was a smoker. In those days you could smoke on the floor of the House, in fact. It's kind of amazing to think of now that people would smoke routinely on the floor of the House.

**Ms. McLeod:** Do you remember particular bills Ruth worked on, or certain bills she really wanted to see passed?

**Mr. Wang:** For her first years, her focus as a committee chair was on Constitutions and Elections. In the '85, '86, '87, '88 period she was the Constitutions, Elections and Ethics chair. So her focus was on a lot of campaign activities and trying to deal with some ethics issues at the time. And in '89, '90, she was State Government chair. I believe that's the time period when she was part of the "steel magnolias," one of the committee chairs involved with dealing with land use issues and growth management. So, in her role as State Government chair she would have done that. She became State Government chair, in part, because there needed to be some sort of an omnibus committee where the Democrats had a strong majority and a committee chair who would work with leadership on it. So she was the person in that time whose committee, State Government, was used as that committee where you could justify sending almost anything. And then she would be able to work it and pump it out. So she chaired State Government and then when George Walk, who was then chair of the Committee on Transportation, left the Legislature and Ruth became Transportation chair. So for the last decade or more that she was in the Legislature, her focus was on transportation.

But in many respects you can follow Ruth's career in terms of the phases of where she was committee chair, in terms of her interest at the time. So, in the early days, when she chaired Constitution, Elections and Ethics, some of the issues were of election reform and trying to respond to different problems from an ethical standpoint. An example of that was when she was asked to handle the situation with an ethics investigation into Dick van Dyke, who was a very conservative Republican legislator elected from, I believe, the Thirty-ninth District. He had made a copy of the *Everett Herald* endorsement as if it endorsed him, when in fact he did not receive the endorsement, and used that as a campaign piece. So there was a whole uproar about to what extent the House, as a judge of its own members, the elections of its own members, could take action based on that. So Ruth had the difficult task of dealing with that in terms of chairing that committee and organizing the results there. She ended up deciding to reprimand van Dyke, so the House did not end up overturning his election.

Elections included some of the redistricting aspects. In 1983 Ruth was a member at least of the committee which supported the independent redistricting

commission, which became a constitutional amendment. She also was involved with measures to try to restrict exit polling. There was concern with the ways in which announcements of how the votes were going based on exit polling were impacting voters. This had particularly affected the 1980 election. Calling the states so early seemed to play a role in changing the way people would vote in Washington State. They would actually leave the lines prior to the end of voting because the presidential election had already been decided at that point based on exit polls and various other things, before the polls closed in Washington State. So there were attempts to restrict that, and that's what she was involved in.

She was also involved in trying to promote voter registration and making voter registration easier.

Another issue that Ruth was one of the leads on was Union Station. She and Dan Grimm, from the 25th District / Pierce County, actually were some of the people behind that. Union Station was just a horrendous mess, as I mentioned earlier. Dan was chair of the Ways and Means Committee at the time. Ruth was a person who cared a great deal about the preservation aspect. Also, it had been a train station, after all, and she loved trains. Ruth was instrumental in trying to maintain and save the station as it started falling apart. As it got worse and worse, it appeared that the only thing left that could be done with it was to tear it down. Fortunately, we didn't. So that was one of the successes in terms of turning things around in Tacoma. It started with Union Station and eventually the History Museum and then later, still, the University of Washington, as well as other things. But those were some of the key parts that we all played a role in doing.

**Ms. McLeod:** Can you describe the results of that? What Union Station is now?

**Mr. Wang:** Union Station is now a federal courthouse. It became a federal courthouse, was totally remodeled, totally redone and now it's gorgeous. It's a gorgeous facility. Not as accessible to the public as we would like in some respects because of its use as a federal courthouse. Norm Dicks, as Congressman, was very heavily involved with that also. But a number of people in the delegation, Ruth and Dan in particular, were instrumental in helping in doing that.

**Ms. McLeod:** I think it's also a rental facility. There's Chihuly glass pieces, sculptures in there as well.

**Mr. Wang:** Right.

**Ms. McLeod:** Can you remind me who Dan Grimm was?

**Mr. Wang:** He was the chair of the Ways and Means committee at the time. He later became State Treasurer. Was elected State Treasurer in '88.

**Ms. McLeod:** I didn't mean to interrupt you. There might have been more bills that you wanted to talk about that Ruth was involved with.

**Mr. Wang:** She was also concerned, even though she wasn't Transportation Committee chair yet, she was very concerned about safety issues. So some of the things would be like seatbelt laws and trying to promote seatbelts and require seatbelts and increase use of seatbelts and so forth. I remember riding together, when I was driving. I had a habit of putting on my seatbelt as I would start the car, and then it would start going, and then I would put on the seatbelt as I was driving. And Ruth freaked at that. "Put on your seatbelt!" She would have a fit about it because even though I knew I was about to put on the seatbelt, she didn't. Even pulling out of the parking lot was far enough for her without wearing a seatbelt.

**Ms. McLeod:** And also, I think there was some conflict in terms of her supporting a helmet law for motorcyclists. I think she received some harassment, did she not?

**Mr. Wang:** Yes. She did. There was a group called ABATE [A Brotherhood Against Totalitarian Enactments]. As I recall, there were all these motorcycle riders who did not like the helmet law and who would have demonstrations and things. They would consider her this terrible person taking away their freedom to enjoy things; their freedom to ride without wearing a helmet.

**Ms. McLeod:** I actually read one excerpt from her assistant, Bev Callaghan, who said that these guys hung out in her office looking surly and Ruth was not at all bothered by it. She kind of waltzed by them. But she wanted to get that helmet law passed, and did. Is there something that you wanted to add?

**Mr. Wang:** I was going to say that Doris Evans was her first legislative assistant and so Doris and Ruth were great friends. They had worked together in the census in 1980. They had been North End liberals, little old lady types, and had been just the greatest pals for decades, involved with Democratic politics and stuff. Doris had certainly been instrumental in my election and in Ruth's election in '82. And so, of course, Doris came along as Ruth's first L.A., legislative assistant, and it quickly became a disaster. Doris would demand that Ruth justify Ruth's vote to Doris, that Doris thought that *they* had been elected, not just Ruth, but *they* had been elected. Even though their voting record would have been—had Doris actually been elected—virtually identical, nevertheless, Doris was very upset with Ruth on some things. They weren't getting along, working together, and it was interfering with their friendship, so that came to an end.

**Ms. McLeod:** So Bev Callaghan came in.

**Mr. Wang:** Bev Callaghan came in after that.

**Ms. McLeod:** In the 80's and 90's marked the political reign of what became—and please correct me if I'm wrong on any of this—the "Pierce County Mafia." And so I have that the Speaker of the House was Wayne Ehlers, I think he was in for '83 and '85, those terms. And then House Majority Leader, I guess after that time, was Brian Ebersole, '88 through '92, and then he became Speaker in '93. And then Booth Gardner, the Governor from 1985 to '92, was from Pierce County. And then there were some other folks. I wondered if having fellow Pierce County politicians in such positions of power, how that would have impacted the work that you and Ruth did?

**Mr. Wang:** We were certainly part of the Pierce County Mafia then, the so-called Pierce County Mafia that existed there. There were a lot of people in different key positions. Certainly, having the Speaker and so forth was part of it, but it was more than that. Probably one of the most capable people was Dan Grimm as Ways and Means chair. And on the Senate side, Marc Gaspard was also either Ways and Means chair at various times, or was Senate Majority or Minority Leader at various times. So there were key players in that as well. But there was a matter of having a number of people, a lot of players in different roles that worked largely cooperatively in getting things done.

**Ms. McLeod:** And George Walk?

**Mr. Wang:** George Walk was a key person, also.

**Ms. McLeod:** What position was he in?

**Mr. Wang:** He was Transportation chair before Ruth. Wayne Ehlers was the Speaker in '83, '84, '85 and '86. Then he left, and Joe King succeeded him in '87. At that time Dan Grimm was still Ways and Means Committee chair. So that was part of the key period of doing things for Pierce County.

In '89, Joe [King, Speaker of the House] restructured things so that instead of a Ways and Means committee there were four separate committees, actually. There was the Appropriations Committee, which Gary Locke ended up chairing; there was the Revenue Committee, which I chaired; Capital Budget Committee, chaired by Helen Sommers; and Transportation was chaired by George Walk, and then Ruth had the Transportation Committee. Then we would all meet. There were the fiscal chairs who would all meet once a week or so in Joe's office, the Speaker's office. Actually, I think Ruth was Transportation chair by then, so, or became Transportation chair somewhere in that time period. So we would meet and try to coordinate things between the different fiscal committees at that time.

At various times Ruth was even on Capital Budget. I became chairman of Capital Budget in 1993. I was on the non-transportation fiscal committees and Ruth was on the transportation side of things. So we cooperated and were a big part of trying to do work together on behalf of a lot of those Tacoma projects.

The University of Washington Tacoma was the biggest one. But that, in turn, followed some things like the creation of the History Museum and the Union Station and other things.

The Puyallup Tribal settlement, the land claim settlement, was a huge deal. That was something that I organized and was the lead on. That was enacted in 1989 when we finally passed that.

**Ms. McLeod:** And the Puyallup tribes had made claims, was it to areas of Commencement Bay?

**Mr. Wang:** It basically tied up all the land in the Port of Tacoma among other things. So it put a cloud on the on title for land and everything else there in the port area. That was a huge factor in terms of the development of what was possible in Tacoma and the port area.

**Ms. McLeod:** And also Congressman Norm Dicks was somewhat instrumental in that.

**Mr. Wang:** Oh, absolutely. Norm, as well and Senator Dan Inouye, because he was the chair of the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs, were key to that, also.

**Ms. McLeod:** I wanted to ask also what was the relationship between—maybe this isn't that relevant or significant—but did Ruth have a relationship with Congressman Norm Dicks, from the Sixth District? Had she been an early supporter?

**Mr. Wang:** I was trying to remember. I think she did support him back as far as '76 when he was first elected. I believe she supported him in that. I was trying to remember, there was an environmentalist candidate but he wasn't considered a serious candidate. O'Donnell, I think, was his name. And then Gene Wiegman was running, and I can't remember if Gordy Johnson was in the race also, but there were several other candidates. But I think Ruth supported Norm. In fact, I believe one of the events where I went to her house, I think, was an event for Norm at her house back in those days.

**Ms. McLeod:** I believe Ruth had issues with Congressman Dicks' positions on defense, but for the rest of it she supported him according to some of the things that I've read.

**Mr. Wang:** That's true, too. She did have concerns about some of Norm's policies on defense, but for the most part Norm's been a great congressman for us. I have some of the same concerns. Ruth and I actually thought a lot alike in many respects. As seatmates we didn't always get along because that's just the inherent tension that always goes with seatmates, but we did pretty well together. We thought a lot alike on a lot of issues. There were very few issues where we actually would have voted differently.

**Ms. McLeod:** Do you remember what those were?

**Mr. Wang:** I think I did probably more anti-gambling votes than she did. I'm trying to think of what else. She might have been a little bit stronger on labor, some of the more extreme labor kinds of bills and things, but I was pretty close to one-hundred percent on labor voting record, too. So there weren't huge differences. I'm not thinking of very many issues where we actually disagreed on votes.

**Ms. McLeod:** Were you surprised to find someone like Ruth, a different age, from a different kind of place, that you two had such similar political interests?

**Mr. Wang:** No. We came from the same Democratic base. We shared the same constituency both in terms of the overall Twenty-seventh, but also within the dominant factors of the Twenty-seventh. We appealed to the North End liberals. And we were both practical about things, too.

**Ms. McLeod:** But when you described her earlier, I was imagining, one, your age difference, but you mentioned she was one of the sort of wealthier ladies from the North End, and that sort of political liberal base. But it seems like you're of different demographics in a way. But you really came together politically.

**Mr. Wang:** Yes. She had helped me and supported me as far back as 1976, and when I was running to be a delegate at the Democratic National Convention. So I think we'd been cooperative and really, for the most part, were similar in terms of background. Yet there were some demographic differences, certainly. She's female; I'm male. She's white; I'm Asian, all those types of things.

It was funny, I would always be the one pushing for photos and doing things of that sort, trying to get photos together for our newsletters and such, and she always hated having photos done. She would take the most terrible pictures. Oh, she was awful about taking photos! Partly it was because she wore these huge glasses and would have bifocals, and so she would be looking down her nose as she would talk to somebody. Up close, if she were looking directly at you, she would have her head back and be looking down her nose at you because of her bifocals. And so it gave the most terrible appearance in photos.

**Ms. McLeod:** And it might have been intimidating to people who'd speak to her as well, with Ruth looking down her nose at them.

**Mr. Wang:** Yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** I'm going to be talking to people about the Growth Management Act and Ruth's involvement as one of the steel magnolias, but I wanted to know your perspective in pushing through the Growth Management Act and forming Sound Transit and things like that. What do you think made

her especially successful and the right person for the job at the time?

**Mr. Wang:** Her tenacity for one thing. She was one of the tenacious people, although the steel magnolias all tended to be pretty tenacious. People were very committed on different sides of things there. Nancy Rust was one of the chairs from environmental affairs. Maria Cantwell was doing economic development. Mary Margaret Haugen was local government. Jennifer Belcher was natural resources. All of them were very feisty, independent women.

I don't think Ruth got along as well with Nancy Rust, and I think that was one of the reasons she wanted off Environmental Affairs, because Nancy was chairing that and it was kind of difficult sometimes. Ruth would have worked well with most of the women on growth management. She cared about the substantive issue. Most all of them really cared about the substantive issues involved and were able to follow up. She worked with staff and having the staff coordinate things and do things. She would put up with the Speaker, Joe King, who was really the one pushing the whole issue, originally. And Ruth and Joe did not get along as well. She got along better with Joe than with Frank Chopp, but that's not saying much.

**Ms. McLeod:** I wanted to ask you also about Speaker Frank Chopp, about the time after you left the Legislature, because it seems that the dynamics of the House changed. Republicans took control in '95. Then Frank Chopp became Co-Speaker with Clyde Ballard in '99, then Speaker in 2003, when the Democrats took control. Then Ruth's conflicts with Speaker Chopp became widely publicized, especially over the second Narrows Bridge. I wonder how you thought all those shifts in power impacted Ruth's ability, or maybe even Ruth's confidence, in her ability to take care of business, especially transportation issues?

**Mr. Wang:** I think Ruth really resented the Speaker's involvement, that the Speaker should have respected her role more in terms of being the committee chair. She did not think he should have been so involved. This was not his area in terms of geography or in terms of his general interest. As Speaker, his background had been more on the human services side, which is the appropriations side of things as opposed to transportation.

Transportation tends to have its own turf and tends to develop its own world. A lot of committees do that, but probably more so with transportation. I think that was part of the reason why she was kind of resentful about what she saw as inappropriate interference, what she would have perceived as screwing up stuff that she'd been working on for years, if not decades.

**Ms. McLeod:** Of all the things that you saw her work on over the years, what do you most admire about the work that she's done?

**Mr. Wang:** Probably Sound Transit. Sound Transit had to grow through some pretty dismal periods, but as you drive up to Seattle you see them working on the rails. It's going to finally happen. Certainly, much of it has happened already in terms of the buses, in terms of the Sounder commuters and things of that sort. But the light rail part is the part that is most visible and that is actually happening. That's the part that is Ruth's real legacy in many respects. Certainly, there are lots of things about transportation, but the com-



mitment to the mass transit side as well as the road building side is one of her key legacies.

**Ms. McLeod:** There are so many Ruth stories, and I know that you have some that you haven't told me. What are your memories in regard to some more outstanding, comical or surprising moments that Ruth created?

**Mr. Wang:** Probably what sticks in my mind is her feistiness, her willingness to stick up for things and her commitments to things. She tended not to be a very good speaker on the floor when she was addressing things. Just simple things, like she would hold the microphone too far away from her face to be effective. Dumb stuff like that. But she was willing to stick to her guns in a positive way as opposed to somebody who was just being a pain in terms of not cooperating in pursuing things that would be contrary to the caucus. She would be certainly in the mainstream of the caucus on things, but also would be willing to champion things. She wasn't a good-old-boy in terms of doing that, but she would still be effective in influencing issues, and people would respect her and enjoyed her for her feistiness about things.

In her State of the State speech this year, Governor Gregoire did refer to Ruth and talked about imagining Ruth standing outside the pearly gates smoking her cigarette.

**Ms. McLeod:** Can you tell me about that, what Governor Gregoire said? Wasn't it in relationship to the law that was against smoking in public places?

**Mr. Wang:** Oh, twenty-five feet, that's right. She would have to be twenty-five feet away from the pearly gates, smoking her cigarette.

**Ms. McLeod:** You were one of the people who advocated for having the oral history done about Ruth Fisher. Why did you decide to do that?

**Mr. Wang:** I think it was a surprise to everybody how quickly she passed away, but I knew she was seriously ill, and was hoping to get an oral history done of her. I'd talked with her, shortly before she passed away, about her willingness to do it. I was sorry that there just wasn't enough time to do it.

**Ms. McLeod:** What is your lasting memory of her? What is the thing that comes to mind when you think about Ruth?

**Mr. Wang:** Her toughness. She'd be sitting back there smoking, even when I visited her at her home, surrounded by books. She loved books. I gave her a book about a person who was a survivor of cancer a few weeks before she died. And so I'd given her that, but there she was still with cigarettes, still surrounded by ashtrays and things. I used to occasionally bum cigarettes from her. I was notorious for bumming cigarettes from people, because I never wanted to have cigarettes because then I would smoke them if I had them. But she smoked menthols, and I couldn't stand menthols. So I really didn't use her cigarettes very much.

**Ms. McLeod:** She wasn't a good source.

**Mr. Wang:** She wasn't a good source for me, no.

**Ms. McLeod:** Is there anything else that you want to add that we didn't already talk about?

**Mr. Wang:** I think it's important to recognize the different things that Ruth was dedicated to. One was

Tacoma and Pierce County. That was an important thing to her in terms of just the local types of things. Another was public transit and especially rail, because that was such a love of hers going back to, again, her father. She loved politics and just the fun and games of politics in many respects, although she also got tired of some of the meanness, at times. But she certainly was dedicated to traditionally liberal platforms. She wouldn't be an advocate for all of them, but her dedication to the ethics, the good government aspect, is one of the important parts about her also. Going back to her Constitutions and Elections experience, she worked actively in terms of election reforms, whether it be trying to make sure that people could vote, or other issues. I think she would have been horrified at the way in which the trend has been to worry so much about potential abuse of elections, rather than worrying about making sure that people can vote. That there's been too much attention to preventing people from voting, rather than enabling people to vote.



*Bill Baarsma was the mayor of Tacoma from 2002 to 2009. Before his election, he taught business and public administration at the University of Puget Sound. He served on the Tacoma City Council from 1992 to 1999. He is a fixture in Tacoma politics and a longtime friend of Ruth Fisher. This interview took*

*place on January 19, 2007.*

**Ms. McLeod:** I know you have a long history with Ruth, although I realize you're about seventeen years younger than she was, but you two share much history of Tacoma politics. Do you remember or recall the first time you met Ruth Fisher?

**Mr. Baarsma:** I knew you were going to ask that question, and I was racking my brain. It's my recollection that the first time we met as interested political activists was during Dennis Flannigan's ill-fated campaign for [Tacoma] City Council in 1969. In fact, there were a number of candidates who were running that year that the progressives within the community supported. We were interested in being involved in local politics because of A.L. "Slim" Rasmussen's election as mayor. That year, in '69, he was running for re-election and he'd put together a slate of like-minded rightwing populists, so we supported a progressive group of candidates. And my involvement, my opportunity to work with Dennis happened because I knew Dennis when I was a student at UPS. So when he chose to run, he called me and asked if I would be helpful, and I actually designed the campaign plan.

**Ms. McLeod:** For Dennis?

**Mr. Baarsma:** For Dennis. He didn't follow the plan, so...

**Ms. McLeod:** I interviewed Dennis, and he talked a little bit about not having followed the plan.

**Mr. Baarsma:** Yes. He filed against the wrong candidate. Well, that's another story. But actually, that's a Ruth Fisher story in a sense. I'll never forget. The plan was that Dennis was going to file against a

Slim Rasmussen ally on the council by the name of George Cvitanich, who had been on the council for a number of years. We knew that in all likelihood there wouldn't be a strong candidate filing against George in the primary, and we had a pretty good organization and could raise some money. My thinking, and Dennis agreed, was that we would have a free shot through the primary and then we could really go after George. We could doorbell the entire city, raise some money, get Dennis out there, get his name known, develop a network of support among progressives, and pull it off in November. Our thinking was that George had never really campaigned that hard and probably would not take Dennis seriously until it was too late. So that was all set. As a matter of fact, on the day of filing, Dennis filed against Cvitanich. Then one of Dennis' buddies and political advisors by the name of John Smethers convinced Dennis to file against another candidate, Jerry Bott, who was not a Rasmussen ally but who was somewhat of an in-between. But Jerry had some strong opponents in the primary, which would have necessitated a very difficult primary campaign because there was a Rasmussen ally filed against Jerry already.

I didn't know anything about this, and Dennis' campaign kickoff was on a Friday in northeast Tacoma. When I arrived at the kickoff, I saw Ruth, and she came up to me and she said, "Baarsma, Baarsma, you wouldn't believe this!" I said, "What?" She said, "Dennis filed against the wrong candidate." I said, "What?" "He filed against Jerry Bott." I said, "He filed against Jerry Bott. You've got to be kidding me." I almost turned around and walked out I was so miffed. Of course Dennis was a strong-minded guy, and he hadn't sat down with his advisors and hadn't said anything to me. That entire campaign plan that I had worked hours on became, for all intents and purposes, a waste of my time. He did not make it through the primary, and, as it turns out, Slim's slate of candidates all prevailed, but, ironically, Slim lost because he was running for mayor at the same time.

So Ruth and I worked on that campaign, and after Dennis lost the primary, she and I and others supported Harold Moss who made it through the primary and lost in the general. Not against a Rasmussen ally, but against a well-known media personality by the name of John Jarstad. We also helped out Gordy

Johnston who was running against Slim and Gordy did win. But Gordy did not have a working majority on the city council at that time.

Actually, he became a member of the council minority before the recall, which was another issue. Maybe you have a question about that, because Ruth and I were deeply involved and really bonded during that campaign. We bonded in this campaign, but really bonded in the recall campaign.

But after the recall was over, all of us who were involved in the Harold Moss campaign urged the City Council, when they were making appointments to fill these vacant seats, to appoint Harold Moss. They were very grudging, but we thought it was the right thing to do, that Harold was eminently qualified. Finally, they did appoint Harold and so he was appointed to the City Council in 1970 and then ran on his own accord in 1971 and was elected and then stepped down from the City Council and he came back on the City Council later. Actually, after the death of Mayor Jack Hyde—when Harold was deputy mayor, which is an appointed position, the council felt that he would be the perfect choice to fill Jack's place as mayor. So he was appointed mayor in 1994.

**Ms. McLeod:** Was Mayor Moss the first African American mayor of Tacoma?

**Mr. Baarsma:** Yes, he was.

**Ms. McLeod:** What year did you say?

**Mr. Baarsma:** Let's see, I was elected in '91, Mayor Karen Vialle was defeated in '93, Jack was sworn in in '94, and so Harold was appointed mayor in '94.

**Ms. McLeod:** You were elected to the City Council in '91 and started serving in '92?

**Mr. Baarsma:** Right.

**Ms. McLeod:** That's an excellent history that you just rattled off of the top of your head. It's amazing how much you can remember. I'd like to go back to Slim Rasmussen because he was a somewhat liberal legislator in the House before he became mayor in 1967. And then, after he was mayor, in '71, he was elected to the Senate, and remained there for some time. I don't know that liberal is the right word.

**Mr. Baarsma:** Populist is the right word.

**Ms. McLeod:** Populist. Democrat, though. But then when he became mayor of Tacoma, he was in fact supporting a more conservative constituency.

**Mr. Baarsma:** Extreme right.

**Ms. McLeod:** Yes, extreme right. And I remember reading that there was a conservative radio station at the time.

**Mr. Baarsma:** KAYE

**Ms. McLeod:** KAYE. Yes. So, can you talk a little bit about that? What happened to your City Council and what led up to the recall, which Ruth was involved in...

**Mr. Baarsma:** That's kind of a long story, and you can read about it in my doctoral dissertation.

**Ms. McLeod:** What was the focus?

**Mr. Baarsma:** It was my doctoral dissertation on Tacoma. It's a long title, but it boils down to a discussion of the political culture of the City of Tacoma as it relates to the form of government. In any event, after the 1969 election, it was kind of a wild period because Slim had lost his re-election bid. Now, in those days the mayor served a two-year term, and the council members served for four years, so the mayor was always up for election. Slim was elected in '67, and he did not have a working majority on the council, although he was able to humiliate the city manager at that time, Dave Rowlands, on a number of occasions. He also attacked the Human Relations Commission and referred to "my best friends are colored people, and they're not interested in the Human Relations Commission," and he tried to stack it with his political rightwing allies. So there was an ongoing tussle over that.

And then, after the 1970 election, although his slate won, Rasmussen lost. His slate of council candidates were all sworn in on the day on which their elections were certified. But Slim, because of a state law, would continue as mayor until the end of the year. So from November through January Slim had a working majority. It turns out that on the day in which his slate was sworn in they had decided to call a special meeting at 12:01 a.m. for the sole purpose of firing the city manager, David Rowlands. Well, David slid his resignation letter under the door at 11:59, so they did not have the opportunity to fire him. It's very rare that you ever fire a city manager; they almost always

resign. That's part of the profession. They count the tea leaves, and if they don't have council support, they don't force a council into firing them. So David did what almost all city managers do.

So you had this period of time in which Rasmussen had this majority, and they proceeded to do just unbelievable things and actually cooked their own goose, politically. One of the things they did was to hire an elderly person who was a radio commentator on KAYE, a gentleman by the name of Floyd Oles who was a very conservative Republican, and opposed to the council-manager form of government. They appointed him city manager thinking that he would be a figurehead. George Cvitanich and Slim Rasmussen, during that period of time, had another scheme, which I'll share in a moment. George Cvitanich was deputy mayor and Slim would kind of run the government as a deputy city manager with Oles as his figurehead. Well, Floyd Oles was no figurehead and would not be a figurehead. As a matter of fact, they went to Floyd, and the first demand that they made was that he fire the police chief. George Cvitanich and Tony Zatkovich on the City Council were retired police officers and did not like the police chief, Charles Zittel. Zittel either resigned or was fired. He left. But then Floyd did something that they didn't like. He hired the straightest arrow in the police department to be the chief, Lyle Smith. They didn't like that. He also fired the urban renewal director and the finance director then quit.

Well, while this was going on, Rasmussen apparently went to Oles' home and said, "Look, here's the deal. The deal is that when I am forced out" — Slim had to leave January 1 — "You are to appoint me as your chief deputy city manager." So the idea of the game plan was that Gordon Johnston, who had been elected mayor and was the minority in the council, would be pretty much cut out of the action. The five that were later recalled would run the show and then Slim would be the deputy mayor. Well, Floyd said, "I'm not going to do it." And they said, "If you don't do it, we'll fire you." So when they hired Floyd, Floyd had said, "I'm not really qualified for this position, and my role is to do everything I can to change the form of government." That became a recall charge: hiring an unqualified person. And they did so without a search and did so under suspension of the rules.

So Floyd had said, "I'm not going to hire Rasmussen." Then, at a council meeting, Floyd comes in and sits down. That council meeting, which was on the radio KAYE and radio KTNT, was full, jammed, people standing in the hall who couldn't get in. At that time, I was over at the county-city building — they were honoring a Stadium High School musical quartet that had won some award, and so the meeting started with the quartet playing some very nice pieces and then they left. And as soon as the mayor called the meeting to order and there was a roll call and a flag salute, George Cvitanich moved for a suspension of the rules to take up a resolution that the five had cooked up. The motion was made, and it was voted five to four to suspend the rules and the resolution was to fire Floyd Oles on the spot. So the resolution was passed and Floyd Oles was fired on a five-to-four vote. During that meeting, Floyd picked up all of his papers, got up and walked out.

In the meantime, there was a group of us who met, Ruth Fisher being one, and I can tell you the others, but Ruth was one of a number of us, Norm Anderson and Ronald Thompson, and Brad Gienke and Jack Warkink and Jim Billingsly and Lucille Hurst.

**Ms. McLeod:** What year was this?

**Mr. Baarsma:** This was 1970. And this was after this crowd had been elected in '69.

So, with the help of Ron and Brad, both of whom were attorneys, we framed a number of recall charges. There were three. One of them dealt with the granting of a franchise for a cable TV franchise without competition. The other two dealt with hiring an unqualified person as city manager — Floyd Oles had admitted to being unqualified — and doing so under suspension of the rules, which was a violation of the charter. That's when Ruth and I and Jerry Vaughn were part of the group that put together the recall petitions and went out and collected the signatures.

In the meantime, we'd listened to the council on KAYE — Ruth and I and the rest of us — and we'd applaud because they were essentially doing all the things that we wanted them to do. They were cooking their own goose, politically.

After we'd collected the signatures, the council majority refused to place the measure on the ballot, so the State Supreme Court directed them. Well, then they turned around and placed the items on the ballot on five different days. Monday it would be George

Cvitanich, Tuesday it would be Becky Banfield, Wednesday it would be Fred Dean, Thursday it would be John O’Leary, like so. The county auditor at that time, Dick Greco said, “I can’t conduct elections like that because you’ll have to lock up the machines for forty-eight hours.” So he sued the City Council, and it went to the State Supreme Court again. The State Supreme Court actually set the date for September of 1970 for the recall.

We all felt the recall was a scary proposition because we perceived these folks as being dangerous and potentially causing physical harm because they had a lot of supporters who were, I think, goons. Really. People who would take guns into the council chambers. I kid you not.

**Ms. McLeod:** Really?

**Mr. Baarsma:** Yes. There was a lot riding on this, and I think many of us felt that if we weren’t successful we might have to leave town. My spouse was pregnant at the time, and so I had my first child coming. As a matter of fact, he was actually born shortly after the recall election. He was born in October. So we had a lot riding on it, and it turned out the recall prevailed on a two-to-one vote. Five of the nine council members were recalled from office.

The thing goes on with Ruth and I because I later ran for precinct officer for the Democratic Party and was on the Central Committee with Ruth. After Slim had lost his election—this is another long story—he sought appointment to an open Senate seat in the Twenty-ninth District. John McCutchen had died and he was seeking reappointment to the Senate. A list from the Democratic Party which would come from the county commissioners, and the county commissioners did not want to appoint him, because they were under pressure from the Legislature—Bob Greive, who was the leader in the Senate, and others—to keep him out, to keep him off that list. Also, the county commissioners were fearful that if he got on the list they’d be forced into appointing him because he was politically powerful within a certain segment of the Democratic Party.

We had this caucus. When there is a vacancy, the party precinct officers meet and then nominate three candidates that go to the county commissioners. The leadership of the party had essentially devised rules in the way to keep Rasmussen off as long as all the precinct officers would stay there. But because they had

about ten people seeking the office, and they hadn’t sorted out who their three would be, that meeting went on until about 1:00 a.m. By the time the last vote was taken, so many people had left that Rasmussen finally had a majority and was able to get on the list as the third candidate, the third nominee. Then he went to George Sheridan, the chair of the county commissioners, and said, “George, if you don’t appoint me, I’ll run against you.”

**Ms. McLeod:** This was 1970?

**Mr. Baarsma:** It might have been ’71. We could see how this would be difficult for Sheridan so he took the easy way out and the commissioners appointed Rasmussen back to the Senate.

**Mr. Baarsma:** It was during that time that Ruth and I, and a number of other people who were political progressives within the party, would meet and socialize together: Anne Jacobson and Paul Jacobson, and Carol and Darrel Larson, and Jerry Vaughn, and Jan Perez, Frank Jacobs, Ron Culpepper, and Bob and Doris Evans, and Norm Anderson, and Margaret Anderson, some of whom now are deceased. And as I said, we would meet and socialize and work together on campaigns.

**Ms. McLeod:** What was Ruth doing at that time?

**Mr. Baarsma:** I think she was a homemaker. I don’t think she was employed at that time. She may have been working in Bill’s office at that time before they divorced.

**Ms. McLeod:** Her husband Bill who was the dentist?

**Mr. Baarsma:** Yes. Her former husband.

**Ms. McLeod:** Can you describe Ruth at the time you met her, how she operated, what kind of political power she was earning or gaining at that time?

**Mr. Baarsma:** She was active in Democratic Party politics, obviously, and was well liked and supported. Even though Ruth was a straight talker, and you always knew where she was coming from, there was something refreshing about that. Sometimes people are perceived as abrasive or difficult to deal with, but Ruth, even though she could be abrasive at times, and even though she was strong willed and had strong opinions on issues and individuals, her honesty was appreciated by people. Also, she was very smart. She was one of the best read people I knew at the time.

I've been an academic, in academia, for thirty-some years, and I don't know of anyone who was a more voracious reader than she was. I don't know when she had the time to do all the reading, but she did. The only problem I had with Ruth was her chain-smoking. That was the only problem I had with her.

**Ms. McLeod:** You were not a smoker at the time?

**Mr. Baarsma:** No. My dad had died of lung cancer, and so I hated it. I hate the smell and such. So that strained our relationship because sometimes I'd want to go over and talk to her, but I could only be there a short period of time before I had to bail out because of her smoking.

**Ms. McLeod:** This work that you did on the recall, can you give me a little bit of the scene where these things were taking place? Where you were meeting?

**Mr. Baarsma:** Yes. It was at Lucille Hurst's house down by where I live now in the North End. That was campaign central. Well, it was a little more complicated than that. The initial organizing meetings that we had were out of Lucille's living room. And Donna Gilman was another person whose name is popping into my head. So we would meet in Lucille's; she has a big house, and a big living room, and a great view. She was always a gracious host, like Ruth in a sense, because she was another person whom you didn't have to second guess; you knew where Lucille was coming from. She was also that kind of personality and very smart.

So we'd meet there, but we also had a campaign headquarters during the time we were getting the signatures and as the election was ongoing. That campaign headquarters was at Bill Fisher's dental office. He had a basement, I believe it was, and that was where our campaign headquarters was located. We hired as our campaign coordinator, Jim Salatino. Jim later became a state legislator and County Council member. I think it was Jim's seat that Ruth ran for later on, so everything's all connected. And Dennis Flannigan now is in Ruth's seat. It's all interconnected.

**Ms. McLeod:** At that time, you mentioned you felt that these people who were on the council, including Mayor Rasmussen, could do damage, including financial damage, to the city. I read somewhere that he was creating animosity between the City of Tacoma and those federal agencies that could potentially grant

federal monies, such as Urban Renewal money. There was a Model Cities grant and other opportunities that Rasmussen failed to achieve.

**Mr. Baarsma:** That's right. That's exactly right.

**Ms. McLeod:** Somewhere this acronym, ACT, comes to mind in relationship to the recall campaign, which you and Ruth and others formed.

**Mr. Baarsma:** Right. There was a group called Action Committee for Tacoma.

What happened there was there was a group up in Seattle, young professionals, primarily Republicans—I think maybe this is where Senator Slade Gorton started—and they had elected Slade to the City Council. So there was a group of people down here, Larry Faulk was one, Dale Carlisle was another, and local attorney, Dick Turner, was another. There were a few others that I don't recollect. But Larry knew me through my campaign in support of Booth Gardner when Booth ran against him for the State Senate in 1970. Actually, I had developed a friendship with Larry because he was seen as a Dan Evans progressive Republican. So, I was at one of the original get-togethers. Dale Carlisle was president of the Young Democrats at the time, now on a member of the Library Board. But they were primarily progressive Dan Evans Republicans. But when they opened up the organization and recruited more members, they were soon overwhelmed by progressive Democrats. And Larry, who was assistant director of admissions at UPS, and Norm Anderson from the school board and Ruth Fisher and, of course, myself and Jerry Vaughn and others got involved with Action Committee for Tacoma. The aim of ACT was to recruit candidates to run for City Council and lend support for candidates. Dennis Flannigan was one and Harold Moss was another and Gordy Johnston became a candidate. There was a guy by the name of Al Brisbois. Al was a favorite of the progressives, but there was a deal cut and he ran against an incumbent who was supported by the downtown establishment. So Al didn't get the kind of support that he had hoped. It was either just after this that Booth Gardner ran for the Legislature. But Booth was involved to a lesser degree in this effort.

Action Committee for Tacoma then commissioned a survey that I helped conduct with some UPS colleagues. The survey turned out to be almost eerie in

its accuracy in terms of what was going to happen in the election of 1969.

**Ms. McLeod:** Really, how?

**Mr. Baarsma:** We did two surveys. One, we wanted to measure the attitudes of Tacoma voters relative to Rasmussen and find out where that support was. That was the first survey we did. The second survey was an actual trial heat, candidate against candidate. I wish I had it here, you could see it. But it was really eerie. In fact, Gordon Johnston ended up winning the election by less than one percent, and the survey had him leading by less than one percent. And Harold Moss ended up losing by an overwhelming margin and Harold Moss was behind by a large spread in the survey, so it was really eerie.

**Ms. McLeod:** It sounds like it was a well-written, well-conducted survey.

**Mr. Baarsma:** Yes. It was. We had a great sample. And it wasn't a phone survey. We actually set up appointments and interviewed people.

**Ms. McLeod:** Really? How did you go about it?

**Mr. Baarsma:** Through ACT.

**Ms. McLeod:** When you working on the recall campaign, when you were gathering signatures for the petitions and you were meeting in Ruth's basement at the dental office, did you go door-to-door to get the petitions signed?

**Mr. Baarsma:** No. We always carried petitions. Some volunteers did go door-to-door. And the committee used one of those temporary homes that you could move from place to place as a location where people could sign.

**Ms. McLeod:** A mobile home?

**Mr. Baarsma:** Yes. We had it parked up by the mall with a big sign on it, "Sign Your Recall Petitions here," as I said, we had people go door-to-door, too. So we had a combination. And people would stream in. We got a big area where people could park, and many of us worked in that office, mobile home office, and people would come in and sign on a regular basis. We ran radio ads, and we sent out mailers, and we had campaign leaflets and so on, much of which I have I gave to the library Northwest Room. So it was a real good campaign.

**Ms. McLeod:** Also, simultaneously, on the national level, you had the Civil Rights movement, the Women's Liberation movement, Vietnam War protests, and there's all these different uprisings. You had the death of John F. Kennedy in...

**Mr. Baarsma:** Sixty-three. He was in Tacoma in '63, too.

**Ms. McLeod:** Oh yes, before he'd gone to Dallas.

**Mr. Baarsma:** Just about a month or so.

**Ms. McLeod:** Right. And then Robert F. Kennedy dies in '68 and Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, both of them had been to Tacoma.

**Ms. McLeod:** When you presided over Ruth's memorial you told a story that illustrated the nature of your friendship and your relationship. It also highlighted Ruth's character. I think it was related to what had become a Supreme Court case with Warren Burger as Chief Justice... Can you tell me the story of going to D.C. with Ruth?

**Mr. Baarsma:** It turned out that we were involved because of the attorney—God rest his soul—Chuck Goldmark wanted people on the case who represented a wide range of interests within the Party, so he wanted the chair of the Pierce County Central Committee. I happened to be the chair, and he wanted the chair of King County, Karen Marchioro, and he wanted the chair of the Spokane County Central Committee, and he also wanted members of the state committee or former members of the state committee, Ruth Fisher, and someone who'd been elected to the newly created state committee who was refused the opportunity to sit.

The background of the case was this: the national party passed a charter and then the state party decided to establish a charter commission of its own. And that was through the convention. And the charter commission came forward with, in its charter, an expanded state committee that included representation not only from the counties but also from legislative districts, which balanced the committee to be more representative of the state's population. Because under the old scheme, Ferry County, with a population of twenty-five hundred, had the same number of state committee votes as King County, which was ridiculous. But if you add the legislative districts in there, they're apportioned based on population, you then get a more

accurate reflection of the population. And that was our position. Furthermore, we felt that under the first amendment right of assembly that the Party, through its charter, was supreme, and that the state Legislature had no business deciding how this political party should be organized.

So, that was the issue, and we prevailed, and so we elected our legislative district representative. Ruth was on the state committee at the time. We elected our legislative district representatives. Doris Evans was one out of the Twenty-seventh District. There was another one who was on the list, and then I was the county chair. It was very tense, I had a real headache, real tense meeting, because we went to the state committee and we requested that we be seated, and we were denied. The legislative district reps were denied the opportunity to be seated, even though the convention had passed this charter. So we sued—those of us who were parties to this action—the state committee because Spokane, Pierce and King County were unrepresented on the state committee. And Doris Evans was denied her seat.

So we prevailed at Superior Court and then we went on to the State Supreme Court and on a five-to-four vote the State Supreme Court overturned the Superior Court decision, Jim Dolliver writing the majority opinion. Jim was a friend of mine—God rest his soul—and I would debate him about it after the fact.

But in any event, Chuck Goldmark, who was our attorney, and the rest of us talked about appealing to the U.S. Supreme Court under the first amendment right of assembly principle. We had some fundraisers.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did you have fundraisers at Ruth's home?

**Mr. Baarsma:** Oh, yeah. And there were events at Ruth's house. I can describe kind of a funny event for you. It's an amusing event at Ruth's house involving [former Congressman] Norm Dicks.

Chuck wrote the brief. Of course, you know that the Supreme Court only hears about three percent of those cases that are appealed, or less. And so we were hoping, but we weren't sure that that would ever come to pass, and by golly, they took the case. And so then we were plaintiffs in a case to be heard before the U.S. Supreme Court. So I got a grant from the UPS. They have grants for research and experiences, enrichment grants; I got an enrichment grant to go to

the Supreme Court from the university. So off I went. Threadbare suit. The pay was lousy, and I think at that time I was paying child support and I was just scraping by. Didn't have any money.

**Ms. McLeod:** Wasn't there something about your shoes?

**Mr. Baarsma:** Oh, yeah. The shoes were so bad that I actually would glue them back on, the soles on, or put rubber bands around them. The pay was terrible, too. And I had pretty hefty child support payments. So, in any event, we go back to Washington, D.C. It was a great experience. In fact, Chuck even called me and said, "Would you do a little research?" I actually did some research on Alexis de Tocqueville, the guy who wrote the book about early America. Anyway, did some research and sent it on to him. Of course, in a Supreme Court hearing you don't make an argument, you just answer questions. So it was just one question after another to two attorneys. And after it was all over Karen Marchioro and I were asked to have a panel discussion with a group of students from New York City who had been following this case as an assignment. And they were actually granted an opportunity to sit, not where we were sitting, and they actually met with one of the Justices, John Paul Stevens, who ended up writing the opinion.

**Ms. McLeod:** Were the justices sitting up there as we imagine?

**Mr. Baarsma:** Right. And the attorneys make the presentation. They're standing at a podium before the court and then the plaintiffs are seated behind. Then, of course, we're instructed that if we smile, or look cross-eyed, or do anything that's distracting, we're yanked out. And we're told that. So, when you stand and the justices come in and sit down, boy, you're looking straight ahead. You're not saying anything.

**Ms. McLeod:** Were you nervous? How did you feel?

**Mr. Baarsma:** I wasn't very nervous—well, I guess probably I was. This was an historic moment. How many people have a case heard before the U.S. Supreme Court? And you're sitting there as a plaintiff. Burger is sitting there. Burger and Thurgood Marshall and John Paul Stevens. This was a very good court. There was one missing, Lewis Powell, who was ill at the time, so there were eight members. So after the trial we meet, and Goldmark's wife, who

was French, and she had a friend from Paris who had this restaurant, and he was a renowned chef.

**Ms. McLeod:** This is the lawyer's wife's friend?

**Mr. Baarsma:** Right. As I recollect it. That's my recollection. I'm not certain on this, but this is my recollection. So, in any event, I was asked, would you like to go to this? I said, "Sure, sure," figuring that this is being paid for. For some crazy reason I figured this was being a hosted event. I don't know why, but I thought, well, it's a friend of the family; they're putting this thing on. So we go out there and it's Karen Marchioro and Chuck and his wife and their friends and there's some other lawyers there I guess, and Ruth and Doris and myself. And so we have this multi-course dinner, and after it's all over we get this bill. I don't have a credit card. The only money I have left is enough to pay for the cab fare out to the airport the following morning. So I turned to Ruth, and I said, "Ruth, about this bill..." And then she says, "Everybody, listen. Let's help out good old Bill Baarsma here. He has some financial challenges, and I'd like to pass the hat. Let's all collect." So everyone chipped in.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did you die, or did you just start laughing?

**Mr. Baarsma:** I think I laughed—afterwards. So they took care of my tab, whatever it was. At that time it was an awful lot. Today it wouldn't be that much. It was like thirty bucks or thirty-five bucks, and to me that was like one hundred and fifty bucks today.

**Ms. McLeod:** Yes. I'm sure. How old were you then? What year was this?

**Mr. Baarsma:** This was 1978 or '79. So I was in my thirties at that time. But financially I was really struggling. They were paying me peanuts.

**Ms. McLeod:** That's a great story. What happened with the case?

**Mr. Baarsma:** It was a very interesting case because, when the synopsis of the decision was conveyed, it upheld the state court. We'd thought we'd lost. But Goldmark said, "Look, don't count your chickens quite yet. Let's get the whole opinion. This is just the synopsis. Because we want to find out the justification." So the opinion was written by John Paul Stevens. They'd decided they didn't want to touch it

because there were so many other states potentially involved. They didn't want to get involved with all these state organizations. So what they did in essence was—John Paul Stevens said, in essence—you can accomplish your ends, but you've gone about it the wrong way. Here's what you need to do, and you can do this at your next state convention. Words to that effect. I'd have to refresh my memory as to the specifics.

The way the original proposal was there would be two representatives from the county and one representative from each legislative district. When the Supreme Court case came down, and we were heading to the convention, Neal Chaney, the chair, and those people who had resisted, were now willing to compromise. So I got involved in discussions trying to get party unity going. But Karen Marchioro decided to go a step further. And rather than have a two/one, she decided on two/two.

**Ms. McLeod:** Who was Karen Marchioro?

**Mr. Baarsma:** She was chair of the King County party organization and she was aiming to be state chair. At that time, the now deceased Joe Murphy, was well meaning but not up to it, really. Great guy—a guy who'd been active in the labor movement—but this was not the right position for him. I really liked him, but he just was not up to this.

I'd been working with Neal Chaney and others to come up with a party unity stance. All of a sudden, boom—and I was chair of the Pierce County Democrats—all of a sudden this two/two thing came down, and Karen decided she wasn't going to talk anymore with Neal Chaney or anyone else, you know. So I got up and spoke in favor: "Look, this is a first step, and this is why we went to the Supreme Court. This is what our original charter called for." And there are a lot of people who were involved in writing the original charter who were with me who were punished politically for this. I wasn't, but people in King County were because they went against Karen, politically ostracized, I think, as a result. It's the game of politics. It's the way it goes. And the two/two passed.

Afterwards I thought, that's not a bad deal. But I kept my word. I talked to Neal. Afterwards I said, "Neal, I would have gone with two/two, but I gave you my word. My word's my bond." He said, "I really appreciate that. I really appreciate that, Bill. You gave your word and you kept it."

**Ms. McLeod:** What was Ruth's role, or contribution or thoughts at this time with this case? Do you recall?

**Mr. Baarsma:** Other than being a strong advocate, I was the guy who really took the lead because I was on the charter commission on it and I was chair of the Party. She was a cohort and a willing ally and not particularly a leader on this one.

**Ms. McLeod:** You mentioned that there were fundraisers for certain activities. I know that Ruth hosted a lot of fundraisers.

**Mr. Baarsma:** She did.

**Ms. McLeod:** And those were hosted at her home in Tacoma overlooking the Narrows. What part of town?

**Mr. Baarsma:** It's the West end. West Slope. They had a swimming pool, too.

**Ms. McLeod:** Yes. I heard about that. That sounds like it would have been fun. I know at Pantages Theater, at Ruth's memorial, Congressman Norm Dicks, from the Sixth District of Washington State, shared a story about running for Congress. He mentioned that he needed to first be interviewed by Ruth, cut the mustard and get support that Ruth could garner.

**Mr. Baarsma:** Progressive wing of the Party.. She referred to herself as the den mother of the progressive wing.

**Ms. McLeod:** So, anyway, you mentioned this a moment ago, there was something you wanted to talk about related to Norm Dicks and one of Ruth's fundraising parties.

**Mr. Baarsma:** Oh, yes. Norm Dicks. This is typical of Norm. Actually, we had, as we do now, we had two. We have Adam Smith and Norm Dicks. In those days the Sixth District—and I forget the other district's name—the southern part of Pierce County included the Third District that Congressman Brian Baird now represents. At that time the district was represented by former Congressman Don Bonker who was from Vancouver. People in the Second Legislative District—who were also in Don Bonker's district and not in Norm Dicks' district—prevailed upon me to bring Don in as a more active partner with the Pierce County Democrats. I liked Don. He was very, very good at international trade and such, and very smart. Had been, I think, the county auditor and

ran once and was defeated, and ran a second time and was elected

So I prevailed upon Ruth to host a special event for Don Bonker. Special in the sense that it would be the Pierce County Democrats hosting a meeting with Don where he would be a more informal setting and would have the opportunity to meet people. And we'd have hors d'oeuvres and wine. I don't remember it being a fundraiser, just kind of a get together.

**Ms. McLeod:** This was before Ruth was in the House?

**Mr. Baarsma:** Yes. This was when she was a party activist, 1979 I think, before she was elected to the House. And so it went just great. We had a lot of conversation exchange. People got a chance to get to know Don and I introduced him. I said, "A lot of folks don't know Don, and Ruth and I and the Party leaders wanted you to have the opportunity to meet. Don does represent his district. It coincides with Pierce County and he's got a voice for the interest of Pierce County and we really want to get to know you as one of the members of our delegation," even though most of his district was outside of Pierce County. And he appreciated that, and I think he had statewide ambitions, too. So we had a very nice meeting. After it was all over and Don left, we were sitting around talking and all of a sudden there was this (knocking sounds) on the front door. Who's that? (knocking sounds) And we all looked at one another, I think we know who that is, and it was Norm Dicks. He'd been waiting until Don left so he could come in. Because I guess in the back of his mind he wanted to make sure that everyone knew that he was really the Congressman from Pierce County. It was funny. Ruth and I joked about that. We laughed and laughed about that.

**Ms. McLeod:** What was Ruth's relationship to Norm Dicks?

**Mr. Baarsma:** It was good. Norm was in the doghouse for a while. Really in the doghouse.

**Ms. McLeod:** Ruth's doghouse or the progressive Democrats' doghouse?

**Mr. Baarsma:** Ruth and all of us. And it was over a couple of things that Norm did that really angered us.

**Ms. McLeod:** So for the progressive Democrats he was on the wrong track with some issues?

**Mr. Baarsma:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. And it was unfortunate for him because this all happened when the State Democrats met in convention in the City of Tacoma at the Tacoma Dome.

**Ms. McLeod:** What year?

**Mr. Baarsma:** 1984. He had supported the MX missile—it was a first strike weapons system and supported by the Reagan administration—and the Democrats had staked out a position. We had—Ruth and many of us, Ron Culpepper and so on—had urged that the Party send Norm a letter indicating our position. What happened was Norm made a mistake, either that or his staff, although his staff wouldn't do anything without Norm's urging. But the executive committee wrote a letter together and it was going to go before the Central Committee and Norm pulled out all stops so that the letter wouldn't be sent. Well, that was a mistake, just let the letter go. But the letter had to be stopped at all costs, and so Norm's staff was there and all these people we'd never seen before showed up at the Central Committee and they voted not to send the letter. Well, that just escalated things to a higher level. And so many of the progressives said, "Okay, we'll take this all the way to the state convention," which we did. And it was much tougher because it then became a resolution instructing the state committee to search for Democratic candidates to run against anyone who supported the MX missile, never mentioning Norm's name.

Norm, prior to that, had voted for the Reagan tax cut which led to Norm being referred to in David Stockman's book as "Dizzy Dicks." They didn't expect him to do that, and that angered us. And so he was really in the doghouse for a while. But over time, things changed and we redeveloped our relationship. Norm became very active in helping in environmental issues and historic preservation issues and other things important to Tacoma. But for a while, he was in Ruth's doghouse and my doghouse. Even though, back in '76, Ruth and I and all of us on the progressive side were strongly supporting him for Congress. He had a very tough primary. He'd run against Mike Parker—who had an unlimited source of money from unknown places—who was a state legislator. And former mayor of Tacoma, Gordon Johnston, he may have been mayor at the time, term-limited out. Gene Wiegman who had been president of PLU [Pacific Lutheran University] was also on the ballot. And there

was another guy who was an environmentalist. So it was a crowded primary, and Dicks had never run for office before, and he was running against Gordy and Mike Parker, both of whom were running for office and were better known. So he really needed support, and we were there for him one hundred percent. We all worked very hard for his election in '76 when it really made a difference. And he won. Then he had a close election and then decided to join with the Boll Weevil Democrats on some key issues. The only one north of the Mason-Dixon Line to vote along with the Boll Weevil Democrats on the Reagan budget, and that really angered us. It angered labor. In fact, people called me and wanted me to run again against him. One guy called me and pledged ten-thousand dollars to run against Dicks. Labor was angry at him, and then the MX missile angered the Democrats.

**Ms. McLeod:** Yes. I wanted to talk to you about the good part of the relationship, which you mentioned, Congressman Dicks' work to fund Tacoma projects and Ruth's involvement as well. I think that the renovation of Union Station was a project of Ruth's, which Norm Dicks might have helped with getting federal money?

**Mr. Baarsma:** Right. I know that story well because I was right in the middle of it. At the time that the Save-Our-Station efforts were ongoing, I was working for Governor Booth Gardner. This was before Ruth was in the Legislature. I was working for Booth Gardner as an intern, because I was on sabbatical.

**Ms. McLeod:** There are photos of Ruth with other politicians, showing them the state of disrepair of Union Station at the time.

**Mr. Baarsma:** Right. At that time it was early on in her career and she wasn't the person of influence that she became. But, no, she was an advocate. Ken Madsen who now is the county auditor, and Dan Grimm and Lorraine Wojahn and people in the Senate and the House were all very supportive of this. Really, the key was saving the station, finding a way of saving the station. It was the state that was involved. I remember a meeting with Chuck Clark and Paul Isaki from the governor's office with Ken Madsen and a group of architects and engineers that we had hired through a state grant to scope out what it would take to stabilize Union Station and do the work necessary to renovate it. I remember Paul Isaki looking at these

folks and saying, “How much do you need in the capital budget? Do you need five-hundred thousand, seven-hundred and fifty, one million, one point five, do you need two?” I think he came up with two million, or two point five, which they put in the capital budget, and that was used to stabilize it.

Then there was this letter to the editor that was written that Norm Dicks read about why not make it into a federal courthouse? The idea was it was going to be the site of the Washington State History Museum. Well, it wasn’t big enough. The History Museum came later.

So Ruth was certainly one of those supporters, and I’m sure she was on the list of Save-Our-Station. Of course Ruth was very committed to historic preservation and certainly very committed to the University of Washington, Tacoma and all those things that made Tacoma special. She was a strong environmentalist. She was good on every issue from my perspective. Good on every issue.

**Ms. McLeod:** So, the era that you were just talking about was one in which a lot of changes came to Tacoma. I’m thinking not only about the renovation of Union Station, but about the Glass Museum and the Washington State History Museum. People have remarked, and I’ve noticed in my reading and my studies, that there were several people in key positions in the Legislature who were from Pierce County at the same time in the early to mid-eighties.

**Mr. Baarsma:** Right.

**Ms. McLeod:** And they were known as the Pierce County Mafia.

**Mr. Baarsma:** Right. The governor, Booth Gardner was also from Tacoma, Pierce County.

**Ms. McLeod:** Can you tell me from where you stood, how the legislators, specifically the “Pierce County Mafia,” came to benefit Tacoma and Pierce County?

**Mr. Baarsma:** I was working for Booth at the time. The way I describe it is that the stars were perfectly aligned for Tacoma and Pierce County. There was a moment in history where those stars were aligned, and, as a result, there was an opportunity, finally, for Tacoma to be recognized and the potential for Tacoma to be recognized by the state. Really, you had the governor of the state, you had the Majority Leader of the

Senate, Ted Bottiger, and you had the Majority Leader of the House, Brian Ebersole...

**Ms. McLeod:** He became mayor of Tacoma [1996-2001].

**Mr. Baarsma:** He became mayor, and had, prior to that, served as Speaker of the House. You had the chair of the House Ways and Means Committee, Dan Grimm, and the chair of the House Revenue Committee, Art Wang. You had Marc Gaspard who was chair of the Education Committee, very powerful within the Senate. Also there you had Ken Madsen and you had Ruth Fisher and Wayne Ehlers, also from Pierce County, who was Speaker at the time and then Joe King came along as Speaker. I don’t know all the sequences.

**Ms. McLeod:** He was Speaker from ’87 to ’92.

**Mr. Baarsma:** Right. And maybe Brian was the chair of the Ed Committee and then became Majority Leader. But whatever the case, during that period of time in the eighties, it was Pierce County’s opportunity. And my golly, we took advantage of that opportunity. And as a result of that, you see the University of Washington, Tacoma. You see the restoration of Union Station. You see the Washington State History Museum. You see the reclamation, the reclaiming of the Foss Waterway, also the Thea Foss Bridge, the cable stay bridge across the Foss. So, during that period of time the table was set by key decisions that I’ve just mentioned, rather than tearing down all those historic buildings, actually reclaiming those historic buildings. So you have a university that has been around for fifteen years that’s in buildings that have been around for over one hundred and sixteen years. Hundred and seventeen years or even longer. So you have that sense of history and that ambience and that reclamation, reclaiming, of that part of Tacoma.

As I say, there was a time in which the primary product in that part of Tacoma was black tar heroin and you could shoot a bazooka down that part of Tacoma and the only thing you’d hit was pigeons. An incredible transformation occurred, and Ruth certainly was a player in all that, and was a part of that team that had made things happen.

But Ruth had a vision that went beyond the city of Tacoma. She was criticized by some for that because some people felt Tacoma should have gotten more for HOV lanes, really. But the HOV lanes

were needed primarily in King County initially. Ruth recognized that, and Ruth focused on the Growth Management Act, which included the entire state, and Sound Transit, which included the entire Puget Sound Region. So Ruth was a big-picture person and was not a person who quote, unquote, delivered the bacon, so-to-speak, necessary to Tacoma, although she was always very supportive. But she was primarily a big-picture legislator and looked at her responsibility as a trustee for the interests of the people going beyond just Tacoma and Pierce County, but to include the entire region or the state, for that matter. That's why she was such an important member of the House, and that's why, in my judgment, in the history of the Washington State Legislature she was among the greats.

**Ms. McLeod:** Can you tell me about the significance of the development of Sound Transit? Isn't the headquarters of Sound Transit in Union Station?

**Mr. Baarsma:** In Seattle. But they meet in the Ruth Fisher Room.

**Ms. McLeod:** In Union Station Sound Transit has a boardroom, right?

**Mr. Baarsma:** Right. A board room called the Ruth Fisher Boardroom. It's named after her. She was the person who essentially made Sound Transit happen. And if it had not been for her in the Legislature as chair of the Transportation Committee, committed so much to that, it would not have come to pass. There are other things now that we considered that would not be on the table if Ruth were still in the Legislature.

**Ms. McLeod:** What?

**Mr. Baarsma:** A cross-base highway, for example. She was vehemently opposed to that.

**Ms. McLeod:** Where is the cross-base highway?

**Mr. Baarsma:** It's across McChord Field in Fort Lewis. Vehemently opposed to that. If she were still in the Legislature, she would kill that in a heartbeat.

**Ms. McLeod:** Why?

**Mr. Baarsma:** Because it's laying concrete, when in fact if you want to move a product we've got Tacoma Rail. To move a product from Frederickson, we don't

have to add more diesel trucks, we should put in more rail and other transportation options.

**Ms. McLeod:** According to Ruth's perspective, transportation issues, the cost of rail, in proportionate to laying concrete, is just much more economical.

**Mr. Baarsma:** Right. And she was a strong supporter of Tacoma Rail. And as a matter of fact, she put money into a transportation bill for Tacoma Rail. Always thinking about the importance of that project. And she was a great champion of that project.

**Ms. McLeod:** Also, weren't the first light rail transit track laid down right here in Tacoma?

**Mr. Baarsma:** For light rail? That's a different issue all together. Yes, you know Tacoma's railroad, short line railroad, it's the city that operates that. It's three railroads, and we move the product, we move the containers off the ships. Those are city employees who do that. And then move that back to the main line so that the Union Pacific and Pacific Northern then can take it to Chicago or points west or south. So she was a strong supporter of that.

But, yes, the first light rail was, of course, the Tacoma Link, which you can take. When I go to the University of Washington—I'm on the board of advisors there—often I'll just take the light rail down to the UW. Or if I'm going to the museum, or if I'm doing my Christmas shopping for my spouse, which I always do at the museums, I take Tacoma Link. But in any event, it really is the first. And we have the true first inter-modal transportation node where you have heavy rail, light rail, buses and cars. Greyhound buses, Sound Transit buses, the Sounder and light rail all converging. Then big parking garages where people can park their cars and take the Sounder and stay off I-5. Or park their cars, take the light rail in Tacoma and go to work.

**Ms. McLeod:** In regard to Ruth, in what ways was being born and raised in Tacoma, doing early political work in Tacoma, seeing the things that she saw, the recall of the city council, all these experiences—how do you think that was a formative experience for who she became as a legislator?

**Mr. Baarsma:** Of course, she graduated from Stadium High School. She was a true Tacoman, through and through. I think Tacoma people are people who really get down to the basics—people who

don't do the dance. Who pretty much tell you where they're coming from. Who can be sometimes pretty raw and pretty basic in their thinking, but kind of get to the basics. A lot of blue collar experiences like the one I had with my dad working at the smelter and the smelter going on strike and having to struggle as we did.

Ruth had some tragedies in her life as you probably know. One offspring died tragically, which she never talked about. Other people who knew about it would share that with me, but she never said a word. Her son, who was always struggling and...

**Ms. McLeod:** Steven?

**Mr. Baarsma:** Steven. Sickly. And then Joan had some issues and problems later on in life. And Ruth's husband divorced her and created some issues for her. So she had all of these events. And then at the end, of course, because of her heavy, heavy smoking—and we could all kind of sense that it was coming—and dying of lung cancer as my dad did. It's not anything pleasant, by any stretch.

The sad thing there was that Ruth lost her sense of dignity there at the end. I called her and I said, "I'd love to come by and see you," and she said, "Bill, I'd prefer that you not come by and see me." It was just her closest friend, Carol Larson. So she had a very difficult life enduring all sorts of challenges, tragedies and emotional turmoil. And I think that—I'm just surmising here—but all those things that could have played into kind of this very tough exterior that she had. "I'm tough," and such. Yet I think there was another side to her—that she had this exterior that she had that covered that emotional hurt inside.

And so the Legislature was a great, great therapy for her because after going through all of that difficulty and all of that trauma and sadness, she was in something that she really enjoyed up until the end when she had her falling out with the Speaker.

**Ms. McLeod:** Over the Second Tacoma Narrows Bridge, the one that's being built now?

**Mr. Baarsma:** That's right.

**Ms. McLeod:** What was your knowledge of that falling out?

**Mr. Baarsma:** I don't know all the details except that she strongly believed in the prerogatives of the Chair and that she had worked out this arrangement

over a long extended period of time. And one of her close friends, Jim Metcalf, was involved in this with her. And then the Speaker—after all the T's were crossed and the I's were dotted—the Speaker just came in and said, "No, we're not going to do it."

**Ms. McLeod:** Yes, because she wanted a public/private partnership for the funding of the Second Narrows Bridge.

**Mr. Baarsma:** Yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** Wasn't Jim Metcalf a lobbyist at that time?

**Mr. Baarsma:** Yes. And a good personal friend. Jim now passed fairly recently.

**Ms. McLeod:** So she had set this up, and she felt that she knew the business of these bridges and how they should be built.

**Mr. Baarsma:** Then Frank Chopp is the kind of guy that when he says no, it's no. That's the way he is. Just ask those of us who want to see tax increment financing.

**Ms. McLeod:** Yes. This Alaskan Way viaduct issue, too.

**Mr. Baarsma:** Yes, that too. So in a way you had two intractable people at loggerheads. But Frank—who was less senior than Ruth, kind of the new kid on the block, but was the Speaker—prevailed. And I think that was it for Ruth.

The other irony of this is that, at the end, when Dennis Flannigan wanted to run, Ruth would not support him.

**Ms. McLeod:** Oh, that's right. He was running for her seat.

**Mr. Baarsma:** Right. She supported Bill LaBorde. I asked her about that. A couple of reasons... One, she felt Bill was far more versed in transportation issues, and two, there was something that really galled her about Dennis. Sometimes little events, something happens that affects a person's perception. You'll always be a friend, but it's something that really kind of... It was during the time that Dennis was running for either the Legislature or, it may have been the City Council. She hates to doorbell, but she was out doorbelling for Dennis, and it was rainy and she was knocking on doors and putting in a lot of hours and

her feet were hurting somewhat. She came by the headquarters, and there was Dennis, sitting. He was putting pins on a map, and he hadn't spent a minute doorbelling, and that just really upset her. And she said he's basically lazy. One thing Ruth was not was a lazy person. Dennis, I think, maybe procrastinates and he's a different kind of guy, you know.

**Ms. McLeod:** Very smart.

**Mr. Baarsma:** He's incredibly creative. He'll sit around, and his mind will work, but one thing he will not do is doorbell. He just won't do it.

**Ms. McLeod:** He was more interested in writing the ad campaign?

**Mr. Baarsma:** Writing the ad campaign. Doing cartoons and putting pins in maps and thinking about this, that, and the other thing while the rest of us were out knocking on doors and getting all wet and dealing with dogs and nasty people. I've doorbelled tens of thousands of people. It's a little easier now because you're doorbelling active voters, but back in those days you'd hit every door. When you're doorbelling active voters generally it's easier. But you still run into being trapped in yards with dogs and things. That just galled Ruth, and that's something that she never forgot, and that was, I think, part of this. She knew that Bill would be out working hard, which he was. But—I digress here for a moment—the thing that helped Dennis was that Jerry Thorpe, who files every year for office, entered the Democratic primary. And there was one other person in the primary, so you had a four-way split. And Dennis Flannigan had served on the County Council and had run for office several times and was well known and well liked. All Denny needed was thirty-eight percent of the primary vote, and he got thirty-eight percent and was elected. That was it.

**Ms. McLeod:** The last thing I want to ask you is, I know when I talked to Joan she said that she'd asked you to Ruth's apartment after she'd passed because Ruth had such an extensive library.

**Mr. Baarsma:** Right.

**Ms. McLeod:** And there was political memorabilia.

**Mr. Baarsma:** Right.

**Ms. McLeod:** Could you give us a sense of what her library looked like?

**Mr. Baarsma:** The issue was, and Joan and I talked about this, what do we do with the library? Should we donate it to where Ruth went to school, UPS, or CPS [College of Puget Sound] in those days? I said, "No, I think that Ruth would want this library donated to the University of Washington, Tacoma." That was part of her baby, UWT. So I called up the University of Washington, Tacoma, and they then came over and went through the books and selected those. They're response was, "Oh, this library. This is incredible."

**Ms. McLeod:** Was it around four thousand books?

**Mr. Baarsma:** Yes. And they were just awe-struck. And Joan said, "I'd like to have you take a few books, Bill." So I did, and some political memorabilia I took as well.

**Ms. McLeod:** What was it?

**Mr. Baarsma:** I think there was a poster of Carter and Mondale that I took, and I think I took some of the buttons that she had, campaign buttons. And then a book on LBJ. As a matter of fact, I still have a couple of books I never returned. She'd read them, and I'd say, "Gee, I'd like to read that book, Ruth," and she said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, take it, take it."

**Ms. McLeod:** So part of your friendship was about books?

**Mr. Baarsma:** Yes. If it was not the Legislature, it was about the latest book she read. And she was such a voracious reader that she read much more than I did, ten times as much as I did. She'd read one, two, three books a week. Incredible number of books. She'd get those big, thick books about LBJ written by Robert Carroll. She'd get through those books, seven, eight-hundred pages.

**Ms. McLeod:** Were most of the books about political figures?

**Mr. Baarsma:** Mostly yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** Are there any other memories or impressions of Ruth or stories that you want to leave people with?

**Mr. Baarsma:** Oh, yes. I do have one. After the Democratic Party Central Committee meetings, which were at the Tacoma Public Library, there were a group of us who would go over and meet at a local restaurant right across the street. We'd have a few drinks

and kibitz and so on. It would be Ruth and myself and Bob Evans and maybe Dennis Flannigan and Norm Anderson and Barbara Bichel. This was during the time that Scoop Jackson [Senator Henry M. Jackson], the war hawk, was running for President and we could not support him in good conscience. Scoop Jackson for President. One of the participants in this group was a guy by the name of Leroy Boyce who later became a judge and then became a disgraced member of the court and was ousted and moved out of state. We enjoyed him, and Ruth enjoyed him and Jim Metcalf was another person. We enjoyed him because he was also very good with repartee. And all of us were good with the repartee. It was just fun to listen. And Bob Evans. To listen to these people was hilarious.

Leroy had decided to declare for Scoop Jackson and be a Jackson delegate. And I remember him coming into the restaurant where Ruth and all of us were sitting around, and he said, "You know, all you folks, you liberals, will never get anywhere politically. You'll never be elected to anything, ever." So Ruth Fisher became a member of the State Legislature; I became mayor of the City of Tacoma; Norm Anderson became chair of the Tacoma School Board; Barbara Bichel was elected to the City Council and became deputy mayor; Bob Evans was elected to the City Council and became deputy mayor; Dennis Flannigan was elected to the County Council and became a member of the State Legislature. Leroy Boyce was elected as a judge, lost his reelection, was disgraced and left the state. So, that's my story.

**Ms. McLeod:** Thank you so much. That was great.



*Gene Baxstrom is a senior analyst with the Joint Transportation Committee in the Washington State Legislature. He advised Ruth on transportation issues during her tenure in the State House. This interview took place on February 20, 2007.*

**Ms. McLeod:** So tell me, when you met Representative Ruth Fisher, what were your first impressions of her?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Actually, when Ruth first came to the Legislature there were a whole bunch of freshmen legislators. I was on the staff of the Legislative Transportation Committee, and so I provided staff support for both the House and the Senate committees. The House committee was always very large, but I did more of the work for the Senate committee. So I don't remember my first contact or interactions with Ruth, but I would say that when I got to know her best was when the Rail Development Commission was established. I believe that was in the '87 session.

**Ms. McLeod:** Yes, it was.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** That was something she was very interested in, and I was the staff assigned to that bill. I'd been doing public transportation and other rail-related activities for both the House and Senate committees, and because it was the Rail Development Commission, I was assigned to work with her. She took a very keen interest in the deliberations of that working group, so I worked very closely with her during that two-year period when the Rail Development Commission was functioning.

**Ms. McLeod:** I do want to talk a little bit more about the Rail Development Commission, but can you just provide a little more context? When you say you work for a representative, or somebody like Ruth, what is your daily work like? How are you helping prepare bills, tasks like that?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** During session, a bill is introduced by a legislator. The committee staff may or may not have had a role in drafting that bill. Or it's an idea a

member may bring to a staff person who's assigned to an issue or area and say, I want to do something in this area or, here are my thoughts. Put this into a bill form, and let's talk further about it.

As I recall working with Ruth, my work included identifying the mission of the Rail Development Commission. What were the issues they were expected to deal with? What would be the makeup of the Rail Commission? How would it function? What would it cost to have that commission function over a two-year period? So, identify an appropriation that could go in that bill or go in the transportation budget. Set forth when the reports would be due, and, again, what the goal of the commission was and what its makeup would be. That's during session.

During the interim, there's a lot of variation among members. Some members take a very keen interest in the legislation that they've sponsored. That type of commission, it's a study group. So, they may be vitally interested in pursuing or following what the activities of the commission are. Going to every meeting, etcetera. In other cases, when a member introduces legislation, it's telling an agency to do something the agency is equipped to carry it out or implement. There's not the close interest displayed by the member. I mean they care about the issue, but they're not personally involved in what's going on. But with the commission, Ruth was one of the members appointed, one of the legislators sitting on the commission, and she went to all the meetings. So that was the reason I got to know her better, because I was helping set up the initial meeting of the Rail Commission. That's one of the roles of the Legislature.

When a commission is established, or a study group, we may provide support until they hire their own staff. So as committee staff, we staffed the first couple meetings, put together notebooks. I don't remember if the Governor appointed the Rail Commission, or if it was legislative appointments, but we would have helped identify who was going to get appointed, who the nominees or eligible people would be. Also, once they were established we would staff the first couple meetings until they decided what they wanted to do in terms of their own staffing. And they did ultimately hire their own staff for that effort, a two-person office.

So I attended their meetings and followed their deliberations, but I didn't provide direct staff support after they had their own staff on board. I believe there was a member from each caucus, typically a four-corner—House and Senate Transportation Committee D and R members—would serve on the commission, and Ruth was one of the members who was very interested in it.

So we went to the commission meetings together because they were mostly located, as I recall, at Sea-Tac or in downtown Seattle. She lived in Tacoma, and as staff we would be going up from Olympia, and so we often shared rides with other staff people or... Some members liked to get a ride, other members liked to drive themselves or had other appointments, but Ruth always liked to catch a ride to Seattle, so we would typically stop and pick her up at Toys 'R Us.

**Ms. McLeod:** What was she doing at Toys 'R Us?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** She lived in the north end of Tacoma, and that was the most proximate location for her to find a parking place and for us to pull off the freeway and pick her up.

**Ms. McLeod:** Can you explain a little bit about the structure prior to the switch to the Joint Transportation Committee, a process which began in 1999? I'm interested in the relationship between the House Committee on Transportation and the Senate Committee on Transportation and the Legislative Transportation Committee (LTC) and how it functioned.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** It was somewhat of a unique arrangement in transportation. It was that way when I came to the Legislature in 1973. At that time, there was a Senate Research Center, which provide staff support to all of the Senate committees, except for Transportation. Likewise, there was a House Office of Program Research, which provided staff support to all the House committees except Transportation. The LTC, Legislative Transportation Committee, employed its staff directly and provided staff support to the Transportation Committees, both the House and the Senate. The LTC, at that time, was made up of twelve House members and eleven Senate members. That was, apparently, a deal that was worked out from the mid '50s under Julia Butler Hansen. Senate members were the chairs through the '60s and early '70s and then the House figured out, or chose to exercise

their vote, that they had twelve votes and the Senate had eleven, and so in I believe '71 or '73 the House established the precedent of the chair being a House member. That continued on virtually until near the end of the existence of the LTC. There was a co-chairmanship in 1993, I believe, but other than that it was the House chair.

**Ms. McLeod:** Sounds like the House had a lot of power when it came to transportation. Is that true?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** In terms of the LTC activities, it was done more on a collaborative basis. But the chair was typically a House member.

In terms of staff, when I first came to the Senate committee after the '73 session, there was a commitment made by the Legislature to have ongoing staff support. Up to that time there was a much smaller legislative staff, and I think the Legislature was far more dependent upon the executive branch for information. The Legislature decided it was going to have its own independent staff. So there was a House staff and a Senate staff and then the LTC also was geared up. Before that, it had been largely an interim committee staff that did a lot of interim studies. That was one of the purposes of the LTC. Those weren't done, I would say for the most part, with a House or a Senate perspective. They were intended to be issues that House members or Senate members could identify, and the staff would work on those and address them and report back to both the House and Senate committees.

During session the committees were certainly co-equals because something, in order to be enacted, had to pass both committees. So whether the Senate chair was chair of the LTC or the vice chair—typically the Senate was the vice chair—in order for something to pass through the Legislature it required both the House and Senate committee approval in terms of transportation, so it really didn't matter. Though I think the House members liked the idea of being chair, as one would understand. It was a prestigious position to be chair of the LTC. You did get to control an independent budget and chairs exercised that in varying degrees. In many ways there was a very collaborative arrangement where all the members were involved in most fiscal decisions, and in other cases it wasn't. So it was sort of up to the chair and the make up of the committees from interim to interim.

**Ms. McLeod:** How did Ruth handle having the budget?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Ruth was independent, but I think for the most part if members came to her and wanted something, she listened to them. She had strong feelings of what needed to be done, but she was cognizant of other's needs or desires or thoughts on issues. But if she was determined to do something, she probably would do it.

Within the LTC staff there was both a House coordinator and a Senate coordinator, and those two individuals worked with the chairs of the committees. While they were employed by the LTC, there was arguably more allegiance for the coordinator to be more closely aligned or in tune and work mostly with either the Senate member or the House member who was chair of the committee.

But the other staff members would be moved. If there was an issue area that somebody specialized in, they would work with a Senate member or a House member and the coordinator would act as a conduit. The other job of the coordinator was to put together the committee agendas with the chair. The two coordinators had to work together to make sure that we didn't have the same bill up at the same time in the two committees where that staff person would have to be moving between committees or have a conflict in the scheduling. So we'd work our schedules in the two committees. I was a coordinator from '95 until 2000. We had to coordinate how the agendas were put together in the House and Senate.

For some, when they're chair of a committee, they like to have complete control or independence of scheduling their meetings and when they want it, and they want staff available. Some of them were more appreciative of the situation the staff was in and others didn't like having to compromise on that because when they wanted to bring a bill up for executive session, they wanted staff available to do that because timing may be of the essence at any one meeting. So having to compromise coordination of staff was something they weren't used to. Not from other committees. No other committee ever said, "Well, we can't hear that bill, and we're going to postpone that bill because staff isn't here. They're over in the House committee or they're over in the Senate committee." That didn't happen, and that created some consternation among members. Understandably so.

**Ms. McLeod:** Yes. What's the history there and what was unique about transportation issues that necessitated the LTC?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** When the LTC began, it was the Joint Committee on Highways. Highways were really important and those were political plums or things that you could get for your district—identifying new corridors or improved highways. It was a infrastructure in the state. I think being able to identify what those needs were, and then deliberating on those projects provided a direct connection between a legislator and his or her district. It was a way of bringing home the benefits of being in a position of power and influence.

So, I think part of it was a look at highways, where the corridors ought to be, what ought to be state highways. There were a lot of other issues around changing technology. License plates, law enforcement associated with transportation. Public owned bus systems were developed in the early '70s. As private bus operators were going bankrupt in the cities and counties municipal systems were going under. There was a look at what we needed to maintain these certain baseline services. There were, I think, a whole lot of services that were directly impacted by transportation that people wanted to make sure they studied and could maintain.

**Ms. McLeod:** The Washington State Department of Transportation wasn't formed until 1977, and that the precursor agency was The Department of Highways. Ruth joined the Legislature six years after WSDOT was formed, in 1983. In an interview published in the House newsletter in February of 2005, Ruth is quoting as saying, "Mass transit brought the Department of Highways and the Department of Transportation together. I did that." My sense, from that, was that after the Department of Transportation was formed, there was still a Department of Highways mentality. Ruth walks in with aspirations for mass transit, and we see a change. Is that an accurate characterization of the evolution?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** I think that's not inaccurate. The Director of Highways, Bill Bulley, was made the Secretary of Transportation, and then after Bill Bulley, it was Duane Berentson. The Department of Highways was a very engineering oriented group. If you remember the interstate system was authorized

in '53 or '55, in the Eisenhower administration, and a whole agency geared up to build the interstate system. To do that, you had to hire a lot of young engineers, and the main focus was doing design and construction. All the structures of I-5 through Seattle were built in the early '60s. It was a huge commitment of manpower and resources, and those individuals were the best of the best and they continued on. There was a desire to promote those people. If they were a great highway engineer, then they became a project engineer. The project engineer becomes the district engineer, and the district engineer becomes the assistant secretary in management services or budget and director. The law required that an engineer sign off on the contracts, and so the Director of Highways, or deputy director, had to be an engineer anyway, and it was a logical progression. So it was an agency with an engineering based mission and a lot of good engineers.

The Department of Transportation probably would have been established earlier. It was enacted in 1977, but there were bills passed in 1975 creating a Department of Transportation. It passed the Legislature, and the then Governor Evans vetoed the bill because he felt that he wanted the ability to appoint the Secretary of Transportation. There were three bills passed that session, 1975. It was a three-legged stool—An increase in the gas tax and the creation of the Department of Transportation. Evans vetoed the DOT and the gas tax increase.

There was significant transit legislation authorizing local transit agencies, cities and counties allowing the state to work together to establish regional transit districts. They're called public transportation benefit areas, and there's about twenty-four of them in the state right now.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did you have a sense when you met Ruth in '83 that she knew the answer to transportation problems was no longer to build another highway, and then another highway, but to create mass transit?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** I can't say that I knew that then, but knowing what I know about her, and having learned later, I would believe that was her feeling when she walked in the door. She had definite feelings on that.

One other thing. The critical element with transportation is funding. The eighteenth amendment to the state constitution says that all the money that's collected for fuel tax and vehicle license fees all have to

go into highway related purposes. Well, that doesn't allow a lot of room for mass transit. There were some HOV lanes being built, some supporting kinds of facilities, some sidewalks and those kinds of activities, but not really supporting mass transit. At the Department of Transportation, they were hamstrung by the amount of money. So when Ruth ultimately worked toward the passage of high capacity transit legislation and other funding for transportation, she was able—not just she, but numerous other legislators—to get funds, not only more money for highways through the gas tax, but also some funding for public transportation that was controlled by the state. That's really instrumental. With the purse strings come some influence.

I was just going to mention that I think one of the fundamental differences for the state fuel tax was that for all the others—like sales tax—as inflation grows, sales tax revenues tend to increase. If something costs a dollar one year and a dollar twenty-five the next year, there's twenty-five percent more sales tax generated from the sale of that same item, so it responds to inflation.

The state fuel tax is a volume tax. If you use a gallon of gasoline this year, if gasoline goes up three times as much in cost the next year, the prices go up three times as much, you're still collecting the same cents per gallon that you were before. So there's a pressure on the Legislature to continually adjust the fuel tax to respond to inflation, along with other needs. Consumption may go up, but it doesn't account for the increased cost for doing the same amount of highway construction, which costs more every year. It passes the straight face test for legislators to tell their constituents I voted for this tax increase, which they vote for more often than other tax increases regularly through history. But they are willing to vote for it because they can turn around and say every penny you pay in the gas tax goes into being able to drive on the roads. That's somewhat the degree of accountability for people. They can argue how efficiently it's spent and everything else, but at least that money isn't siphoned off to go to state parks or, if you will, education or other activities. It's going to go directly back to taxpayers as a user benefit.

**Ms. McLeod:** And that's not a General Fund?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** It's a user fee. I think that's a real safeguard for them. It works good for highways, but it doesn't work so well for other transportation needs.

**Ms. McLeod:** As a legislator who's advocating for mass transit, what did Ruth do to educate people to the fact that when you're sitting in your car, and you're gridlocked, the truth is that another road isn't going to get you out of this mess? How do you change public perception, and then can you attach the funding portion to that as well?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** I think that raises another issue. If you will, Ruth was chair when Senator Patterson—who was from Pullman, eastern Washington—was chair in the Senate committee. And they had a very, very strong working relationship. They came from different planets, if you will, Venus and Mars, in their perspectives in terms of what their constituents needed, what the needs were for their districts. But they were willing to acknowledge and work with one another, understanding each other's role and needs. Senator Pat Patterson would say, well, I need farm-to-market roads. My wheat farmers need to be able to get their product to the rail heads. They need dependable roads; they can't have them shut down for freeze-thaw conditions. People drive long distances. We need our highways. They worked together on some freight rail because some grain was transported by rail.

**Ms. McLeod:** They had the Grain Train, transporting grain from the eastern side of the state, beginning in 1994.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Yes, Senator Patterson was interested in that as well. But it was largely a roads focus in much of eastern Washington.

Ruth's position was that you can't build enough highways. You can't afford to build the highways we need to get ourselves out of congestion in urban areas, even if we wanted to. We need to be more efficient in how we move people. It's far better in your interests, you, Senator Patterson and eastern Washington members, to build public transportation or help public transportation succeed in Puget Sound, than to try and build enough roads, because we'll suck up every dollar in the whole state, and it still won't solve the problem.

So, I think that's a large degree of it, and much of the work that Ruth did like the high capacity legislation, enabled regions to tax themselves. So Senator

Patterson could say, look, all we did was authorize central Puget Sound to tax themselves.

**Ms. McLeod:** So you—his constituents—aren't paying for that.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Yes. Now there were some other taxes that are spread on multi-modal projects around the state, the beginnings of the inner-city rail passenger program, the freight rail program. You could not use eighteenth amendment monies for those. There had to be some other multi-model funds. Ruth was instrumental in establishing the multi-modal transportation account. Those were all generated by motor vehicle excise tax, which was deemed eligible for providing funds. Those monies did not come under the eighteenth amendment.

**Ms. McLeod:** Can you explain what motor vehicle excise taxes are?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** At that time there was an excise tax on the value of a vehicle. It looked at a vehicle when it was new. Early on, it was two percent, the tax of two point two. It was a tax that was rising very rapidly and generating revenue because of the increase in the cost of vehicles. Cars in the late '60s cost three-thousand dollars, and by the mid '70s they were ten-thousand dollars. So, the tax rate, two percent of the value of that, went up very dramatically. Then the value of the vehicle depreciated over time and so the tax went down, but as long as new cars kept selling and the cost of cars went up, it was a very strong tax source.

This tax was initially dedicated to schools. It was in lieu of property tax. Real property is houses and stuff attached to the land. The second most valuable asset that people had was a car, and so there was tax put on it. It's for the privilege of driving on the public roads. It was initially dedicated to schools, and then there were some distributions made to cities and counties. Transportation started getting some of that. In the mid '70s, transit agencies were allowed to impose a local one percent MVET, and the state forgave a like amount of tax. In other words, if the tax was two percent on a car, if the local transit imposed one percent, the state would only get one percent. So it became a state match for local transit districts beginning in 1975 with the local transit legislation, which I mentioned Governor Evans signed. That became a huge boon for public transportation and enabled them to

sell transit services to local taxpayers because there was a like match from the state. So, if locals contributed three tenths of one percent sales tax, that amount was basically matched by the state in terms of financial resources.

In '77 there was another two tenths added to the MVET for funding capitol improvements to the state ferry system and earmarked for bond retirement for building new ferry vessels. So an additional portion of the MVET that became an ongoing source for the transportation fund beginning in about 1991, I believe, the '90 funding package.

**Ms. McLeod:** Ruth sponsored, House Bill 1035, Rail Development Commission, in the 1987 session, as you mentioned. What did Ruth foresee might be an outcome of a commission like that, or what was she hoping at the time?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** She saw two roles for rail. The commission actually broke into two subcommittees. It was rail passenger and rail freight working groups. Ruth saw that rail freight was in need of support around the state. There was vast abandonment of rail lines. Washington was actually holding up better than some other states, seeing rail freight as ultimately something that's vital to the economy, especially in terms of maintaining competitiveness, if you will, for agricultural goods. Competition between barges, truck freight and rail freight. When you take out one of the competitors from a whole sector of the economy, there's a whole lot less competition that's going to occur. For example, if you're a wheat farmer dependent on wheat freight rates, you lose big time. I think she also saw that in the Port of Tacoma—she was from Tacoma. She saw the needs of commerce in the position of Washington in terms of the country and the transshipment role that the ports and the railroads have for containerized cargo and other cargos arriving in Seattle and going to points east. And, likewise, stuff from back East going to Asia. So I think she thought rail freight was really important. But she saw rail passenger service as also vital.

I think that passenger rail broke to break rail down into conventional rail, passenger activities like Amtrak, and then there are a lot of commuter rail lines. She also saw it as urban transportation service such as light rail and high-speed rail, like BART. It's called heavy rail, but it's similar to light rail in that it carries passengers exclusively. It operates on

its own separate rights-of-way. The D.C. system, BART, Atlanta, are heavy rail systems. Ruth saw light rail, like that used in Portland and San Diego and Sacramento, Saint Louis, as a means of carrying mass amounts of people in urbanized areas at less cost in total resources than what it cost to operate highways to carry everybody by that mode.

When I say resources, it's not just public investment, but it's public costs of private vehicles, the social costs of air pollution, the economic inefficiencies of gridlock. I think Ruth saw rail as playing an important role.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** I always puzzled about that, because to me the Rail Development Commission, some of the stuff that came out of there, dealt with high capacity legislation, which didn't have to be exclusively rail. It was like HOV lanes, busses operating on exclusive guide ways, bus rapid transit. Those are all part of high capacity, which came out of the Rail Development Commission.

**Ms. McLeod:** It's not something you'd necessarily expect out of the Rail Development Commission, high capacity.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Yes. It was more of a high transportation capacity issue.

**Ms. McLeod:** Do you think that the name Rail Development Commission was somehow more palatable or seductive to people, more concrete?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Rail was one of the principal ways of doing it, so it was labeled that. I may have even had a hand in why it was called the Rail Development Commission for that matter. I don't recall.

**Ms. McLeod:** Maybe once the study started taking place there were discoveries that, wow, this is a bigger issue, and we're really talking about high capacity transit.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Yes. I think it may have been a mix of both. But if I recall correctly—I suspect George Walk, Representative Walk, was chair of the House committee at that time. He probably said, "Ruth, go talk to Gene." I had an early meeting with Ruth, and we also had a staff coordinator and staff director for the LTC, Judy Burns, and she was friends with Ruth. Judy may have been the one who contacted me and said, "We have a member who wants to do this stuff, start working on it." Judy may have been more of

an intermediary in the process. As staff we worked with our staff directors. So Judy may have played a roll in that. I don't remember. I just knew when it happened it passed, and I knew I was very busy for several months after it passed helping to put together the commission. Bruce Laing was the chair of the commission.

**Ms. McLeod:** Who was he, and where is he from?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** He was a King County Council member. He was a moderate Republican on the King County Council who interested in land use kinds of things. He was a very fair-minded individual. He worked so hard in making that commission succeed. He was very good at collaboration. I think he became an administrative judge or mediator when he left the council because he brought people together and he kept the commission functioning when you had some really strong individuals who would have led the group down different paths. Bruce was instrumental in helping the commission succeed.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did you say, and I might be mistaken, that the four chairs, the four corners for transportation, more or less, also were on the commission?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** I think they were. Not necessarily the chairs, Ruth Fisher would have been the House D.

**Ms. McLeod:** In regard to high capacity transportation, I was told by a few people, including Ruth's daughter Joan and Ruth's legislative aide, Bev Callaghan, that Ruth did a lot of traveling outside the state, as well as outside the country, to observe other transportation systems. I wonder if you were aware of any of those, or if you went with her on any of those trips?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** I was on some trips with Ruth. She did not like to fly, so it was not a pleasant experience for her. But she would do it. She'd get real nervous.

**Ms. McLeod:** Maybe because she couldn't smoke cigarettes?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Yes, maybe that was part of the hardship, no smoking on airplanes, it was doubly hard for her.

I went on a couple trips with her. She liked to drive around the state. If she was going to go to Spokane, she would drive much more readily than ever fly. So, in many cases I ended up driving with her to different

places. Those were interesting times. I would learn a lot from her. There was always business, but we did spend a lot of time talking about other subjects. It wasn't always strategizing; it was more just intellectual discussion of merits of certain things or activities. They were really wonderful, enriching conversations. But I did travel with her, I guess, three or four times in different places in the country.

One time, she was invited to an HOV conference. We'd done a lot of HOV lanes in this state and she had to give a presentation to the Transportation Research Board. There were a couple of professors from the University of Washington who were going at the same time to the TRB conference, and Ruth was one of the speakers. So we flew the red-eye to Burlington, Vermont, I believe, and then drove up to Montreal. Then we drove to Ottawa because they had a bus rapid transit system there.

So we flew overnight, taking the red-eye, got in the car and drove one hundred and fifty miles to Montreal. Got there at noon or one o'clock in the afternoon, road the Montreal subway system, ate dinner, then crashed. Then the next morning we got up and drove to Ottawa to take a tour of their bus rapid transit system with the system's director. It was pretty impressive. I mean busses every two minutes, paralleling the freeway. They had suburban shopping centers that had about twenty-five or thirty percent transit mode split. The hospital had fifty percent transit mode split. Unbelievable tour and a very impressive system. We finished up in the mid afternoon, drove back and got to Burlington at about eleven o'clock at night and took a six o'clock flight out the next morning to go to D.C. for Ruth to give her presentation that morning at the TRB.

So this was a woman who was probably seventy years old at the time. She had more fire. The rest of us were dragging. She just had more coffee and another cigarette and she was raring to go.

One time she was invited back to a National Academy of Sciences presentation on tolling and public/private partnerships. We went there. Whenever she traveled she would avail herself of the opportunity to go out and see. We rode the D.C. Metro system to go to a museum. We walked around neighborhoods. She loved to go out and see things, experience and learn. Life was a never-ending learning cycle for her. So I think when she traveled she made the absolute most of it. Plus she needed less sleep, I think, than the rest

of us... this seventy-plus year old woman who was running the socks off much younger people.

**Ms. McLeod:** Was there anything in particular that she saw? Was there any particular model of mass transit she wanted? I'm sure there were plenty of things that she liked, and there were likely a lot of things that we couldn't afford, probably, or that would be impossible. But was there anything that she saw that she said, "This is it, Gene. I wish we could have this in Washington." Do you remember?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** I think she probably looked at the D.C. system like, "God, this is it." I think she probably, if I recall correctly, would reflect back on Atlanta. But she probably said, "Had Forward Thrust passed in the late '60s in Seattle, this could have been Seattle."

**Ms. McLeod:** What was in Atlanta?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** The money that was earmarked for Forward Thrust in Seattle, it was a federal set-aside of money for the Mass Transit Administration. When it failed twice in Seattle, that earmarked money went to Atlanta, and they built a rail rapid system. That money was earmarked for Seattle.

**Ms. McLeod:** And also, just a little follow-up. When you said she gave a presentation in D.C., you said the TRB.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Transportation Research Board.

**Ms. McLeod:** What was the nature of her presentation?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** It was an HOV conference, high occupancy vehicle lane conference. Washington had done a lot in terms of HOV lane development.

**Ms. McLeod:** So it was her opportunity to say this is what we've done?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** They wanted examples. The TRB, a lot of their programs are very technical, but they mix technical sessions with much more policy-oriented sessions. So they liked to have political people come and talk about how do you gain political acceptance for something? A design engineer may give a presentation in a different session on how you design the facilities, what are the parameters for geometrics on this design. But they also like policy driven stuff. How do you keep a constituency together? How do you keep those lanes from being reassigned to general

purpose, or what pressures do you have that happen? How did you put together a coalition to fund those lanes?

**Ms. McLeod:** How do you control those lanes?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Yes. How do you enforce them? How do you integrate the bus system with those lanes? She also probably talked about community trip reduction programs, which Ruth was the prime sponsor on significant community trip reduction legislation passed in '91. Commute trip reduction enhances the effectiveness of HOV lanes because it encourages people to carpool who then utilize the lanes. Also, the availability of the lanes encourages people to carpool.

**Ms. McLeod:** I'm leading up to the high capacity transit legislation in 1989 that she proposed, but I don't think it was passed until '91. Can you tell me the relationship—if there is one—between a 1987 Rail Development Commission and how long was that commission together and what was the result of the commission's recommendations, reports and the relationship to high capacity transit?

**Ms. McLeod:** Okay, so just to repeat my question on the other side of the tape. And we've already talked about this some. I wanted to know the results of the Rail Development Commission. How did it lead to high capacity transit legislation, if it did, which was passed in 1990?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** The commission had some recommendations. Some addressed that the state ought to have a policy of supporting rail passenger programs and that the Department of Transportation ought to help with planning and supporting them, operating stations, or whatever needed to be done.

Another recommendation was for funding for high capacity transportation. That it ought to be on an exclusive guide-way, or a separate right-of-way. It was identified that it would be most beneficial for urbanized areas. So that's why there was more focus on regional transit authorities in big, urbanized areas rather than high-speed rail lines everywhere else around the state. That was going to be the biggest bang for the buck.

There ought to be taxing powers for local agencies. Those were granted in legislation that was drafted in 1989 and ultimately enacted in 1990, and that's House Bill 1825.

**Ms. McLeod:** And then two years later, in '92, regional transit authorities were established, creating among them Central Puget Sound Transit Authority or Sound Transit. That was House Bill 2610, signed by Governor Booth Gardner.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** In 1992 the high capacity transit legislation was amended to authorize formation of a regional transit authority in central Puget Sound; that's what ultimately was the legislation that was used to form Sound Transit.

Chapter 81.104 RCW was the general authorization for high capacity transit, Chapter 43 Laws of 1990. It set in place a planning process for central Puget Sound. It had two different policies: one for central Puget Sound planning and one for other areas of the state. It basically authorized transit agencies in other parts of the state in large urbanized areas to enact certain taxes for high capacity, which meant stuff that operated principally on an exclusive guide-way, unlike ordinary busses. It's bus ways, light rail, heavy rail, other kinds of approaches to transit besides just busses that operate in the streets.

In central Puget Sound it created a process for the three counties to work together to plan a system.

**Ms. McLeod:** Which counties?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** King County, Snohomish County and Pierce County. Then, in 2002, regional transit authorities were authorized and that was Chapter 101 Laws of 1992, and that had the county councils of the three counties get together and it set up an eighteen-member governing board. At least half the members of that board had to serve on transit boards within their respective jurisdictions. County execs appointed the members, the representatives. This was done on a prorated basis on population, and they could create an RTA. They had to develop a plan that went out to the voters. So that was the authorizing legislation in 1992. And they met in the summer of 1992 to form that.

Then in 1995 the plan was put together. It was put out to a ballot, and I think it was February of '95, and that failed on the ballot. It was shrunk to a ten-year plan, rather than a sixteen-year plan. It was scaled back by several billion dollars, and it went out to a vote and was approved in 1996.

**Ms. McLeod:** And was that Sound Move?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Sound Move was the name of the ten-year plan. Sound Transit is the name of the agency they adopted. They are technically a regional transit authority by statute, but they call themselves Sound Transit.

**Ms. McLeod:** Right. I read Sound Move was a three point nine billion dollar plan for Seattle-Tacoma light rail and rapid transit, standard gauge commuter trains, expanded HOV lanes, and express busses.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Yes. It was initially supposed to be a twenty-mile light rail line running from the University of Washington. They hoped to get it to Northgate—twenty miles is Northgate to SeaTac. They had significant cost overruns, underestimated costs. It was restructured in 2000, and they're now building the segment—it's almost built now—to SeaTac. It's supposed to begin operations in the summer of 2009 with the extension to the airport that December. They're trying to get a federal grant to enable the extension of the line from downtown Seattle transit tunnel to the University of Washington at Mountlake with existing local revenues.

**Ms. McLeod:** How did federal dollars play a part in this, and did Ruth take part in trying to get federal money for transportation projects in the state?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** I don't know. I know she had some conversations with federal legislators, but Ruth didn't always have the patience to want to play games—not games, but to play the steps that were necessary to go after federal monies. She'd rely on the Department of Transportation and the local agencies to do that. She would help, obviously, if it meant phoning and saying this is important. Maybe she played a bigger role than I'm aware of.

I do know that when the high capacity legislation passed, the fuel tax passed, there were, in that tax package, several other authorizations for local governments to raise local revenues for roads and for other transportation purposes. In the Growth Management Act there were a lot of elements of that related to transportation and trying to link land use and transportation planning and development facilities.

We put together a booklet, the staff did, and the legislators from the committee, the leadership of the committee, went back to Washington, D.C. and briefed the congressional delegation on all of those pieces of legislation. That was a fascinating thing

to see from a staff point of view, and also to see the interaction of legislators with the congressional delegation.

**Ms. McLeod:** Who was on the congressional delegation at the time, do you remember?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Norm Dicks from Ruth's district. Brock Adams, who I believe was chair of the Subcommittee on Transportation of the Public Works Committee in the United States Senate. There probably would have been Slade Gorton. Jim McDermott was there. Sid Morrison, I think, was in the congressional delegation at that time. That's who I remember. In some cases we met with the member, and in other cases we met with the member's staff.

**Ms. McLeod:** That was related to the Growth Management Act?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** It was related to the whole package of stuff that passed in '90—the high capacity legislation, the gas tax, the local funding initiatives and the Growth Management Act.

**Ms. McLeod:** Was Growth Management Act the, in part, a vehicle to get some things passed that maybe Ruth had wanted to see come to fruition? Describe what the relationship was between those issues and other parts of the Growth Management Act.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Part of the transportation problem is a disconnect between land use and transportation facilities, and where people live and where people work. Where people drive sixty miles between where they live and where they work everyday, there is a transportation crisis almost by definition. L.A. plays that out. The bigger it gets, the more facilities there are, the more jammed it is because there are so many opportunities for moving around and traveling longer distances from home to work.

There's a commute tolerance of an hour. If you have to walk to work, you still have to live pretty close to tolerate an hour walk or bicycle, or whatever. But if you have freeways and you can drive sixty miles in an hour, you'd travel an hour. Sixty miles of freeways used by every citizen in an urbanized area every day uses up all the capacity, so the linkage is critical there.

One of the goals of the Growth Management Act was to focus growth so that it was more economical in terms of public facilities that were needed, schools

were built ahead of time. That way you could focus growth in certain areas, and you could reduce the reliance on public investment necessitated by growth. You could preserve rural areas; you could preserve farmlands; you could preserve sensitive areas. So all that was kind of the main objective of GMA.

For transportation it was that you developed a transportation plan that made sense in terms of land use management. There was an element of GMA on transportation, concurrency that said you don't approve changes in land use that enable huge growth unless there are plans to meet the demands that are going to be put on the transportation system and you have funds identified over the next six years to build those facilities. Otherwise you don't develop a housing development. You can't do it. You can't build a shopping mall unless you have access taken care of. That's kind of the fundamental objective.

But in regard to the transportation elements of GMA, there are metropolitan planning organizations in several areas of the state. There were eight at that time or seven. In the big metropolitan areas the feds said you have to do planning, metropolitan area planning, and have a transportation plan. But there were a lot of other areas of the state where there wasn't any requirement for transportation planning, so a portion of the GMA bill related to transportation planning, and there was an authorization for local counties to get together and do joint planning of how they were going to build their facilities. So when one county built a highway or a county road improvement up to the county line, the other county had been working with them and they knew what was going to happen. The road didn't just stop at the county line. If you're going to have transit service, you coordinate between the counties.

So this was to get people to work together, and there was some money put into the multi-level funding I mentioned earlier. In that early budget, there was like two million dollars a biennium to regional transportation planning organizations as a financial incentive to get local agencies to start working together to jointly plan how they want transportation to occur in the future.

**Ms. McLeod:** Were there other parts of the GMA that concerned Ruth?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Ruth may very well have wanted to see farmlands preserved. I suspect she would have.

Critical areas, watersheds, park lands, all of those things. I think a lot of people want to see all of those things protected. So doing it right in terms of preservation and addressing those critical areas and making transportation be part of the solution to addressing all of those. It really requires that all of them work together. So that was her element, but she probably was vitally interested in all the rest of it.

**Ms. McLeod:** On a more personal level, what it was like to work with Ruth and travel with Ruth? What did you observe about her relationships with other people? I have heard from people who worked closely with her that she had high expectations, and could sometimes be hard on others. What was it like for you to work with Ruth?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Ruth was very bright and very quick. I think she didn't always exhibit patience with people. She didn't like anybody who pandered to her or patronized her. If people would come in and sing praises to her, she detested that. For her, it was more like, I know I did a good job on that, or I know I didn't, but I don't need any reassurance for you to tell me that. People would bring her flowers...

**Ms. McLeod:** She didn't like flowers?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** She liked flowers, but it could be viewed as patronizing at times. She could be hard on them. She spoke her mind, and if you were pitching something that she didn't agree with, you knew in no uncertain terms that she thought you were all wet. That's the way it was.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did that ever hurt her politically?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** I think it did. She carried it off with more class than anybody I've ever seen, though. Because she was so outspoken I think underneath all that veneer there was a kind heart. She had this hard shell veneer, and I think people warmed to her. They'd come out of a meeting just having been beaten up and they'd say, that's Ruth. It was an accepted occurrence.

There was also a bit of humor, or a lot of humor obviously at committee meetings and other times. But sometimes it came at people's expense.

On a personal note, I always thought the world of Ruth in terms of her intellectual capacity, and she always treated me very respectfully. I would say we were very good friends, but there was sort of a pro-

fessional line that neither one of us ever crossed, and I always respected that. I felt that she cared deeply about me, but she would never put me in a position, nor put herself in a position, that compromised our professional relationship. And I felt the same way. If I thought she was overlooking something, I would tell her that, but it was in a respectful, professional way.

**Ms. McLeod:** How did she respond?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Sometimes she didn't like it.

**Ms. McLeod:** Did you ever change her mind?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** No. But she crossed the line with me once in terms of respect. When I explained several amendments before the committee, Ruth said, "That's about the worst explanation of anything I've ever heard in my life."

**Ms. McLeod:** In front of the committee?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Yes. When I was testifying. She later apologized to me where she said, "I'm sorry."

**Ms. McLeod:** But what she had done to you was typical, right? You weren't the only one that she did that to.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** She would do that to others. She could be hard on people, and at the same time it was sort of like a drill sergeant. That's the way it was. I know another staff person to whom she said, "You're fired." She'd fire him hundreds of times. He'd call it a good day when he said he'd only been fired twice.

**Ms. McLeod:** Were you ever in those situations where you felt you needed to defend a person?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** No. It's just like, "Ohhhhh." In committee, when it happened, there's no opportunity to defend. It just happened. At the same time, Ruth was a package, and people accepted that.

**Ms. McLeod:** I wanted to go back and talk about something you'd mentioned earlier which was the Legislative Transportation Committee, the LTC, because I know in 1999 that was the year that it was dissolved. Is that correct?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** No. That's the year it really started coming apart. Let me go back just a bit. The Senate had eleven votes, the House had twelve. So the chair was a House member. Representative Schmidt was a very strong chair in 1995.

**Ms. McLeod:** She was a Republican from Bainbridge Island, Kitsap County?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Yes, and she controlled the LTC, very tightly. The Senate members, and the chairman in the Senate at that time was Senator Brad Owen, who is now Lieutenant Governor, by the way. He'd been on Transportation in the House, but he'd been off of it for several years, and he was named chair of the Senate committee when Senator Vognild retired in '94. Well, Senator Owen with the committee staffing arrangement, the sharing of staff between the House and Senator Committees. Like what is going on? When I want to bring a bill up for executive session, or I want to start on the budget, the staff may be tied up with the House. Well, the House was initiating the budget that biennium, so the budget staff of the LTC isn't really available to me to the degree I want them available, and it's important to the Senate to start working on the budget. Well, they're all busy with House members. Representative Schmidt—it was the Republicans first year in control of the House—had a lot of freshmen. They wanted to work the budget very thoroughly, Saturday sessions, and Senator Owen wanted to do that too.

**Ms. McLeod:** Senator Owen, was he a Republican, too?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** No, he was a Democrat.

**Ms. McLeod:** So was there a Democratic majority in the Senate?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** In the Senate, yes. So, he said, I don't like this arrangement. I was coordinator for the Senate at that time and he'd call a bill up in committee, and I'd say, "We have to wait, the staff person is over in the House." He didn't like that, because for every other committee he'd ever served on, staff was directly assigned.

**Ms. McLeod:** You can understand that.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** I do understand that. It was not a good situation, and it required both parties to agree if they're going to accommodate each other. Senator Owen was not unreasonable; he just didn't like it.

He also didn't like this LTC thing with eleven senators. Why were only House members chair? So, the Senate member raised this issue at a retreat and the Senate members said, This is really important that we be treated equally and that we maybe have rotating

chairmanships like every other interim joint committee, Joint Legislative Audit Review Committee, or the Legislative Evaluation and Accountability Program. Their chairs rotate House and Senate members. They're bipartisan and include an equal number of D's and R's, and they keep it balanced between the two houses and between the parties. The Senate passed bills to make it twelve Senators and twelve House members. Of course, the bill has to pass the House, which it didn't.

Anyway, in 1999 Senator Haugen said, "Well, we're not going to be part of this anymore."

**Ms. McLeod:** And Senator Mary Margaret Haugen had been a Representative from '83 to '92—part of Ruth's freshman class—and she'd become a Senator in '93, right?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Yes. She said, the staff for the Senate Transportation Committee is going to be appropriated in the Senate budget, and we're going to have our own staff if we can't get accommodation. There were several issues, including votes on the committee, the sharing of staff. But she just said, "We're not going to keep sending this bill over and have it die. We want to be treated equally." So, the budget in 1999, which took effect July 1, 1999, had an appropriation that funded the Senate transportation staff within Senate Committee Services. Basically, about half of the LTC staff went to work for the Senate.

The LTC remained in place, also handling staffing for the House Transportation Committee in the 2000 session. But what's odd about that, if you think about it, the LTC is a joint committee, so you have Senate and House members making personnel decisions about staffing the House Transportation Committee. That continued on for three sessions, 2000, 2001 and 2002.

Then, in 2003, Representative Ed Murray became Transportation Committee chair when Ruth left. He said, "We're going to change this. We're going to move the House staff to Office of Program Research. It's going to be in the House budget."

The LTC was not the same vital LTC that it was before because, while the House staff was paid by the LTC, the LTC coordinator didn't have a role with the House and Senate, like you're running both staffs, etcetera. The role of the LTC diminished, and, so, ultimately in the 2003-2005 interim the House and

Senate members didn't get along any better, and in 2005 they decided to abolish the LTC.

But they liked certain functions, and this was part of the role of the LTC initially, was that they liked the research capacity of the LTC. They liked that it could do studies. They liked that it could do travel. If there was a need to go and visit the state of Oregon, you didn't have to get the House and Senate to approve the travel, you could just do it. If you wanted to have an interim meeting, they could pay the per diem for members and travel. Senator Haugen is on the NCSL Transportation. As chair of the NCSL, National Conference of State Legislators Transportation Committee, the LTC could pay for her travel there. So they created the Joint Transportation Committee in 2005, which took effect July 1, 2005 and the LTC was abolished effective June 30, 2005.

**Ms. McLeod:** When I interviewed Senator Haugen on the subject of Ruth, she referred to the break up of the LTC as the ugly divorce. It sounded like it was quite stressful on her professional and maybe personal relationship with Ruth. Did you see the impact of that as well? How did that impact the relationship between the Senate and the House and transportation issues?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** It became very strained starting in 1993, and remained so in '95. I learned a long time ago that there are differences in people, and it wasn't about party affiliation necessarily. D's and R's can fight, and D's and D's can fight, R's and R's can fight, House and Senate members can fight. You can find ways to fight and things to fight over. Similarly, you can find things to agree on and alliances are formed for a whole strange number of reasons.

It was real strained. I was Senate coordinator; so part of it may be my sensitivity from working more closely with Senate members during that time. But they just said, "What's the deal? The House can't run this." And I'm not sure the House always ran it, but it's the perception. As long as somebody has the ability to put their thumb on you, whether they do or not, you know it.

**Ms. McLeod:** It seems that one of the advantages of the LTC may have the administrative efficiencies. There wasn't the bureaucratic holdup in order to get something approved that there might have been in another situation. Was some of that lost?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** We had a luxury in transportation in many respects. I think that's partly why Ruth was able to have real success. If she needed to get something done, she could get it done. Flexibility and authority enabled one to accomplish a lot. If everything is bureaucratic and hamstrung—and those are natural human tendencies—and you just get worn down by the process. And she was one to think, "Why do I want to get somebody else's approval? I know what I need to do." And she generally did.

**Ms. McLeod:** It doesn't seem to me, historically, that she was very off the mark very often in terms of transportation issues. It seems that if someone were to come to her, and and says, okay, after your years of doing things this way, now we're going to add this little hurdle, that she could become quite incensed.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** "That's crap," she said. And that's putting it mildly. Ruth didn't really curse much. As strong as she felt, usually somebody who's that candid has more colorful language to get their point across. More often they do.

**Ms. McLeod:** I'm wondering, in the big picture, what happened to the relationship between House and Senate over transportation?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** The Senate became Republican in 1997. Then you had a Senate member, Senate chair and a Republican chair in the House. But that didn't do much better between the House and Senate. I mean it didn't sit any better. The Senate still said, "Well, what's going on?" So when the D's took control in the Senate, Senator Haugen was made chair in 1999.

There were a whole bunch of funding bills and other things that were being negotiated, contentious legislation that further irritated the already sensitive feelings between the House and Senate.

**Ms. McLeod:** Wasn't 1999 the year of Initiative 695, too, as well?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** 1999 was 695, yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** As part of my research I looked at gas tax. And so I pulled up news articles that dealt with the gas tax from the time Ruth came on board in 1983 until 2005. I would read about the next proposed bill for the gas tax and the revenue package, and the build up to it, and then it would fail. And then I read about the next build up, and it would fail. Then there was Initiative 695, which repealed the motor vehicle

excise tax and replaced it with thirty dollar license tab fees, I believe?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** And that was a Tim Eyman initiative?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Yes. That was 1999.

**Ms. McLeod:** That passed, however, part of it, the part where voters should approve each new tax or some complicated part of 695 was ruled unconstitutional. But the repeal of the motor vehicle excise tax was left in place. Was that right? Am I correct on that?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Yes, for the most part. The 2000 Legislature enacted the excise tax repeal portion of 695 that was ruled unconstitutional.

**Ms. McLeod:** Okay. I'm glossing over many years of struggle, but I wonder what, for you, were the memorable moments and the frustrations and the successes in those many years of getting the revenue package passed for transportation in the context of your work with Ruth.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** The big one was '89 when the package was put together in the high capacity bill, 1825, and the gas tax. I don't remember the number, but it passed the Senate and it was coming up on the House floor and the governor said we're going to hold off on it in '89.

**Ms. McLeod:** Was it Booth Gardner who was governor?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Yes. So then it came up again in 1990 and was enacted. I think Ruth was on cloud nine when she did the high capacity legislation. The gas tax. The transportation fund. Parts of Growth Management Act.

Then, in '91, she sponsored the commute trip reduction stuff. In '92 she did the Sound Transit authorizing legislation. She was on a run. And then in '93 Lowry became governor and he wanted more funding for transportation because there had been such a dry spell before 1990 and there was too much backlog and transportation congestion, well, the best analogy was offered by this professor I worked with at the UW, Scott Rutherford. He likens traffic congestion to filling up a wine bottle. You can keep pouring water in, and it fills up, and it's not a problem until you get near the neck where it's almost full and then

it goes whoop, and a little bit more water spills over. Congestion is the same way. You can keep adding more and more traffic to big enough highways, and you don't notice any difference until it gets nearly full, and then congestion just seizes it and the capacity actually goes down. That's really true.

So Governor Lowry wanted to do more, and he pitched a gas tax. They didn't do a gas tax increase, but Ruth was on board on that one.

The Senate moved a funding bill out of committee, actually. They didn't move it off the floor, but anyway there was a lot of sentiment to do more. The Republicans were elected partly on a no-tax-increase platform in '95, and sort of scared everybody off gas tax increases. Karen Schmidt was not deterred, but her leadership certainly was not going to be in the mood to entertain tax increases.

So in the '98 session, if I recall correctly, Republican leadership developed a phase-out of the motor vehicle excise tax for general fund activities. They were trying to cut taxes, so they were cutting general fund taxes, but they recognized they needed more money in transportation as well. So they were dedicating more money out of the motor vehicle excise tax to transportation. So Referendum 49 was put on the ballot, and that lowered the excise tax on vehicles by like twenty or thirty dollars per vehicle. It was called a homestead approach.

**Ms. McLeod:** I think it was thirty dollars.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Yes. It cut everybody's MVET. If you got a three hundred dollar tab fee it's two hundred and seventy. If you have a thirty dollar tab fee, it's zero. If it's twenty dollars...

**Ms. McLeod:** Doesn't matter if you drive a Lexus or a Honda Civic.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Yes. Everybody gets thirty dollars off. It's just minus thirty dollars. All that extra money that was left over from the cuts to the general fund distributions was dedicated to transportation and funded a bond program for transportation. Well, the voters approved that, Referendum 49, in the fall of '98. So, then it takes a delay to see that come through everybody's license fee because if you'd just renewed your tabs, you don't see that for another year. So about half the population had seen the change in their tabs and Tim Eyman came out with this initiative to cut everything to thirty dollars. So people thought

well, if we've passed this transportation funding program and now we can cut our taxes, we like that, too. I think the tax reduction, the bond program, and then 695 made the whole issue confusing.

**Ms. McLeod:** They didn't understand the relationship.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** No, I don't think they did. But it's complicated. They didn't see the connection. You just said you wanted to take the money away from the general fund, and you want to put it all in the transportation. You want to sell bonds for transportation, and now you're saying you don't want to pay any of that. There was a contradiction.

But, that's the voter's prerogative and understandable. Some of these are so complex that it's like, what is all that about?

**Ms. McLeod:** How did Ruth experience Initiative 695?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** It wiped out transportation account. All the things she wanted to do in transportation, provide financial incentives for the commute trip reduction program, rail passenger program, the RTPOs funding, the money you give out to help planning occur. All of that was just wiped out in one fell swoop. Not all of the money went away, but most of it went away. Transit lost big. The transit agencies lost half their money, many of them.

**Ms. McLeod:** That must have been a real difficult time for Ruth because wasn't there was a split in the House at that time, Republicans, Democrats, 49/49?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** Then the beginning of the dissolution of the LTC, it all kind of came down together. Did you notice that taking a toll on her?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** I was coordinator for the Senate, so I went to the Senate in 1999. I was Senate staff. I didn't see her often. I'd chosen to go to work for the Senate, which I'm sure she was not thrilled about. The other side. She had enough personal respect for me that...

**Ms. McLeod:** It was okay.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Yes, and I went to work for the House after one session in the Senate.

**Ms. McLeod:** She regarded the Senate as the other side, though, didn't she?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** I think it's because House members, they were fun. They were lively and accountable. They were elected every two years, and it was a wilder place. When you go to the Senate it becomes more sedate and more...

**Ms. McLeod:** Would she think that those who joined the Senate became stuffed shirts?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Yes. She felt like the action was in the House.

**Ms. McLeod:** Yes. And she was in the House for twenty years. She kept getting reelected, but you didn't see her make that move to the Senate that other representatives do after ten years.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** No. I think there's always a kind of bad humor there, but House members do it respectfully because they know they may run for the Senate where they can serve a four-year term. There's more power because you're half as many. More influence. It's sort of like sparring with your best friend, there's some tongue-in-cheek with the humor there. It's not contemptuous, not generally. You may get mad at somebody, your bill died over there, but it cuts both ways.

**Ms. McLeod:** Yes, and there are lots of instances where you're still working collaboratively.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Yes, and to get anything passed around here, you have to work collaboratively. And it was really hard in the House. That was one of the things that Ruth often said to me, "What the Senate doesn't understand is the D's have to compromise a lot of the things we want to do with the Republicans. We're compromised out."

**Ms. McLeod:** You mean during the split in the House?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Yes, during the split, the 49-49 tie. [She would say], "And then we have to go to the Senate, and we're supposed to compromise again. I'm not in the mood to compromise anymore."

**Ms. McLeod:** Yes. The original issues, the original bills get watered down.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Pretty soon it's nothing left.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** The House D's and House R's know what they feel and they only wish the other people could appreciate what they feel. But it cuts both ways.

**Ms. McLeod:** In terms of bipartisanship and Ruth's relationships, what was your observation of her relationship with Transportation Committee co-chair or chair Karen Schmidt?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** I think it was really extraordinarily strained to start with. When they were co-chairs, I'm not sure it was as strained. At some point they made up. Karen had to represent the more strident member of caucus. They took stronger positions. Ruth was tough on Karen when she was the minority, and I think Karen turned around and was tough on Ruth. But at some point they made up, and I don't know over what. I say made up, it may have been some particular instance, it may have been a candid conversation they had, it may have been something that evolved over six months that I wasn't privy to or aware of. But at some point they became really close, good allies. Ruth felt she owed some loyalty to Karen because Karen had been loyal to her at some point for on some issue. I don't know.

**Ms. McLeod:** I wonder if the issue of public/private partnership came up when they were—I'm trying to remember historically—co-chairing that committee and where Karen might have fallen on which side of that issue.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Karen probably liked public/private. But I don't know. I don't know that that would have had anything to do with it.

**Ms. McLeod:** I also wonder. I'd heard that Ruth had a particularly good relationship with Clyde Ballard who was Republican Speaker of the House. I wonder if you knew anything about that, if you were privy to that.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** She spoke highly of him. It's not that she decided to speak highly of him, but there was some deference to him, respect. That's one of the things that people don't fully appreciate or understand about the complexity of the Legislature, it's all about issues, and it isn't. It's about personalities, and it's about what someone has done. It's not necessarily a trade of one position for another. Maybe somebody's child was deathly ill and somebody called them and offered to drive them to the hospital. You owe some debt of gratitude for some tiny thing that somebody has done for you at random. It's as strange or as understandable as that.

**Ms. McLeod:** There was another issue regarding transportation funding and the Republican/Democrats. In 1998, there was a lot of support for this new tax plan, gas tax, or some kind of revenue package. There was someone named Dale Foreman who had run for governor the year that Gary Locke was elected, 1996. Foreman lost in the primaries and then he became chair of the state Republican Party. Just prior to session the Republicans were attending a pre-session retreat in Ocean Shores, and Foreman mandated that they could not vote for a gas tax. Do you remember when this occurred?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** That was probably prior to the session when Referendum 49 was authored. That's how they decided to do the MVET instead of the gas tax. Part of the issue for the Republicans is that a good deal of their constituency, a majority, wanted gas tax. These businesses said, "This is killing us. We'd gladly pay a nickel more gas tax if it meant less congestion."

If you take an anti-tax pledge, how do you accommodate that? That was one way because you cut the general fund MVET taxes, and it's going to the general fund and surpluses, and you can move it all into transportation.

**Ms. McLeod:** But when parties are struggling to have control of a certain house, they don't want to take vote on a tax because they think they might not keep that majority and that will be blamed on them, they voted for a certain tax.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Yes. Or if they made a pledge to take a tax vote and they don't do it.

**Ms. McLeod:** Traditionally, that's been the case. It also seems that it's very important when gas taxes are approved that it's a pretty equal split between Republicans and Democrats, so someone can't point to a Democrat or a Republican and say, "This is your fault."

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Traditionally, that's been the case. The Ds said we need the transportation revenue and projects. The D's in '93 took a bunch of tax votes when the Republicans had said no. With the gas tax, they usually try and work the projects and work members. They want some balance. They try and come up with a package that's acceptable to, not necessarily equal number, but often times, if you have forty percent of the members, we want forty percent of the votes out of your caucus or it "ain't goin'" anywhere.

Because you know darn well that your constituency wants that project the tax increase gives you.

And with fuel taxes, again, I said these periodically have to be adjusted. So you don't want some party mailing saying they voted for a gas tax increase because the next mailing will say, well, so did X percent of your membership, so don't tell us that.

**Ms. McLeod:** Ruth was quoted a couple of times that I read, commenting that it's time to step into the twenty-first century, and let's fix this Eighteenth Amendment, which dictates that the gas tax be used on roads, not on forms of mass transit. Do you remember any attempts to alter the Eighteenth Amendment?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** She may have authored stuff earlier. I don't remember that. There were members that wanted to repeal the Eighteenth Amendment. The stuff never went anywhere. But Ruth was a pragmatist as well. It's like, "I'm not going to knock my head up against the wall on that one." What she'd say is, "Look, there's such a dire need for transportation increased funding that let's make the pie bigger and the amount that goes to highways is not enough for highways either." Just as long as we make sure there's enough that can go to places where she wants it to go and what she regards as equally or higher priorities, why knock your head, what's the difference? Why pick fights you know you can't win?

**Ms. McLeod:** There is something. I think she could have said this around 1999. I should be more careful when I quote her because what she said may have changed depending on the era. I think she also believed that the restrictions on the per gallon tax on gas could be avoided by extending the existing retail sales tax to gasoline. In what ways was that tried?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** I think the general consensus is that the sales tax on gasoline may not be bound by the Eighteenth Amendment. So that frees up a lot of money to do multi-modal. You could take some of that money and put it into highways, you could put it into trains, you can put it into mass transit, you can put it into improved planning, land use coordination; commute trip reduction. You can do all sorts of things with it. I think that would have been consistent with her philosophy. It's not encumbered money.

**Ms. McLeod:** But that didn't happen?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** No. In retrospect it's a fairly volatile revenue. Where gas goes to three dollars and then it goes to a dollar fifty. It went to two dollars and then it went to less than a dollar. Can you imagine trying to sell bonds on a tax revenue that doubles and then it goes down by half?

**Ms. McLeod:** In this era our gas is so expensive now.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Yes. I think it's fairly remarkable that the gasoline tax was upheld by the voters, the nine and one-half cents.

**Ms. McLeod:** That was passed in the 2005 vote, wasn't it?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Yes. In some respects I say that it was remarkable, but in other respects I think that people recognized if you want to do something, it takes money. You can keep denying it, but it just takes money to do certain things. There's only so many efficiencies that can be extracted out of the system. Otherwise you have to pay the piper. There's no free lunch. Things get so bad that we've got to do something. And this is something. The Legislature addresses a nickel gas tax change. Spends years evaluating it. OPEC can increase the cost of fuel by fifty-cents a gallon overnight. Just have an OPEC meeting and say let's do it. It's sort of mind-boggling. And I think that's been one of the counters to, or one of the ways of supporting a fuel tax increase is, look, because OPEC—and we just did a study on long-term transportation finance—the rate of fuel tax among the states doesn't necessarily dictate the price of fuel within those states. States that have higher fuel taxes don't necessarily have higher gas taxes. The states that have high gas taxes don't necessarily have higher fuel prices. They can be border states, and they'll be the same when one state has a twenty-cent a gallon difference. So you can choose to impose the tax and enrich your infrastructure, or you cannot choose to impose the tax and enrich the oil companies. I think Ruth had a degree of understanding of that. You just do what you need to do.

**Ms. McLeod:** Right. In 2002 the voters defeated Referendum 51 which would have raised the state's gas tax by nine-cents a gallon. This was addressed in 2005, but at that time passing Referendum 51 would have helped to produce seven point eight billion over ten years. More than seventy percent of that would

have gone for state highway expansion, repairs and improvement. The rest going to various public transit, rail and local government. What do you recall, regarding Ruth feelings about Speaker Chopp's push to put this out to a vote as a referendum?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** As I recall she didn't want to put it out to a vote.

**Ms. McLeod:** Was she vocal about that?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** She was supportive of it, once it went out there. But, yeah, here sentiment was that we're paid to make decisions and we ought to be making them.

**Ms. McLeod:** Yes. And I think that just relates back to what you said about Ruth's dedication to doing the right thing, doing what you have to do in order to generate this money.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Did she get voted out of office?

**Ms. McLeod:** No. I see. She would go down in flames doing the right thing.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** She was in Chicago and protested at the Democratic convention. She was a strong-willed person. Yes. She was not easily intimidated.

**Ms. McLeod:** But Speaker Chopp, at that point, was being more strategic because he wants a strong Democratic party in the House, and he didn't want the party to take hits because they voted in a gas tax. And so he and Ruth had a different opinion how this should happen.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** And then balancing the leader versus the troops. If you make her a lieutenant as opposed to a sergeant or a private, he's still the general. In balancing that, there's always the tension. There was tension among committee members and the chair, and the chair and the Speaker, etcetera.

**Ms. McLeod:** Ruth was largely credited with pushing forward legislation that led to the construction of the second Narrows Bridge, which is currently in process. However, her efforts to do so ran aground when there was a split in the House over funding, specifically the public/private partnership, which is a bill Ruth originally introduced to fund six crucial transportation projects. Speaker Chopp, however, proposed a bill that would put the project back in state authority

making the Transportation Commission the tolling authority.

Can you describe the complexities of public/private partnership and what Ruth was hoping to achieve with public/private partnership that couldn't be achieved when something was state authority funded?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** I think she initiated that legislation in '93.

**Ms. McLeod:** Yes, I think so.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** I believe it was '91 when they identified all the projects that were going to be done, and it became 1995 and people became aware that meant toll roads on their roads. That the roads were going to be improved, perhaps they thought they were going to be improved with general charges. When the full realization hit that that meant tolls to fund those improvements, support evaporated.

But I think Ruth was committed to that process, and Tacoma Narrows was the only survivor of the projects. The rest of them were off the table. I think she was wedded to the process. Committed to it, and saw that as a way of getting stuff done in the future.

**Ms. McLeod:** What's the advantage of a public/private partnership over state's authority?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** You don't have to use state bonding authority to do it. In public/private they design the structure, they finance it, they build it, they collect the tolls on it for X period of time. Then there's no public obligation with it.

**Ms. McLeod:** Right. Yes. And you don't have to put it up for bid...

**Mr. Baxstrom:** You do the selections ahead of time in terms of who's going to be authorized to go ahead with the public/private. The competition is on the front end. I think the risk with that is that the cost of the structure and a lot of money is made through the financing of it. These are risk-takers. I understand both sides because the risk-takers may make more profit out of it so it may cost more in tolls and the public gives up the right to control the facility and to control the tolls. But the privates bear more risk.

Others feel that a public facility should remain under public control and that it could be financed with lower cost bonds because they're publicly backed. We'll control the tolls, and it will cost everybody less,

and the tolls will be off sooner, or it's going to be lower tolls.

Another question is how much infrastructure can you build all backed by the government? Now, with the bigger tax base like the nickel in 2003 and the nine and one-half cents in 2005, we're building nine-billion dollars in bonds putting those out. That money is going to be dedicated to bonds, most of it, for the next twenty-five years. But we can support it. The fuel tax is a relatively stable revenue source, so it's likely okay. A recent finance study confirms, yes, that bond level is okay.

**Ms. McLeod:** In what ways other ways was the tolling aspect met with resistance?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** For the people who live in Gig Harbor, it's like why this new bridge, and we're going to pay for it, versus everybody else? Or there's a new bridge somewhere else or improvements on a highway somewhere else, they're not paying. It's partly because you can identify a market. It's easy to toll, and it is a significant improvement in a defined corridor.

**Ms. McLeod:** Yes. You've got to take the bridge.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Yes. And I think the other element, and that's the fact that it's a very expensive corridor and there was a huge amount of public money put in to that corridor besides the toll bridge. The bridge is one piece of it, but all the approaches, the widening of State Route 16 to I-5, the rebuilding of I-5 at Thirty-eighth Street, that whole interchange.

**Ms. McLeod:** We really isolate the bridge as if it's the only issue, but there are all those other issues.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Yes. It's all those other things. But the people who live there, the people who have to take it everyday still have, I think, a legitimate complaint. It's like, why us? I didn't really hear tolls as such an awful idea, it's just why toll one thing? Toll other improvements. Then we're at least treated like everybody else.

**Ms. McLeod:** We're talking about the Narrows Bridge, but I want to ask you if you observed Ruth advocating for a better architecture than standard architecture on bridges, and now I'm going to forget the names and certain kinds of architecture, suspension bridge versus the cable stay?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** The Foss Waterway is a cable stay bridge.

**Ms. McLeod:** Do recall any of Ruth's opinions of what bridges should look like, or her ideas for these bridges?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** She had very strong opinions about them being beautiful versus a monstrosity or whatever. She appreciated architectural integrity.

Ruth didn't dress really fancy, but when one looked at her quality, it was exquisite. She would wear a sweater that was knitted by a Southwestern Indian craftsperson. It could be worth hundred's of dollars, but it was very subtle. She just had exquisite taste, and so I think for public kinds of things she thought art was important. Chihuly glass, she marveled at that. In the D.C. subways all the stations are built identically. I'm not sure that she was particularly fond that they were all built identically, but she understood the artist's or the designer's or architect's intent with making them all uniform, like in the Atlanta subways. She just marveled at the tunneling that was done there. So a good bridge was probably equal to good art.

**Ms. McLeod:** Right. Just because it's a government funded project doesn't mean it has to be a dull mess of concrete and cable.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Millions of people are going to look at for one hundred years, why not make it pretty? Why not make it attractive?

**Ms. McLeod:** What was she advocating for like the 520 Floating Bridge or the Tacoma Narrows Bridge? In terms of what kind of architecture?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** I don't know what kind of architecture. She might very well have left some of that up to the architects and the designers. She would have probably supported something that had architectural excellence, design excellence, rather than mediocrity.

**Ms. McLeod:** Does public/private partnership allow for that more than state authority? Does it give you more options in terms of your design?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** I don't know that it's biased one way or another.

**Ms. McLeod:** I just wondered.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Design/build is where you can design something and build it. You're not given a set of plans as with design/bid/build, and then you have to build what the plans are. It's designed by someone else, and then here's the plans. I think she typically was supportive of design groups or design committees, making sure it would be a tribute to the structure as opposed to an eyesore.

**Ms. McLeod:** I know the Alaskan Way Viaduct, which is damaged and falling apart, has been such a big issue for so long, and it's in the news now. There's quite a difference of opinion between Governor Gregoire and Mayor Nichols over whether it should be torn down in place of a tunnel or if the state should redo the Alaskan Way Viaduct. And wasn't there an earthquake that damaged it further?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** In 2001.

**Ms. McLeod:** Two-thousand one. That would have been near the end of Ruth's time in the Legislature, but I wondered if the Alaskan Way Viaduct funding was just one more big project on the bill of the many things that needed to get done in terms of transportation?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** The backlog of infrastructure, yes. We're talking multi-billion dollar projects.

**Ms. McLeod:** When she retired, her daughter said that Ruth sat down and said, "I didn't get done all the things I wanted to get done." Was she referring to the backlog, or what were the transportations project that, if someone were to leave after having been in the position of authority for so long, wished that they could have done?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** I think she would have liked to have seen more intercity rail passenger service. She would have liked to have seen Portland light rail be extended to Clark County. She would have liked to have seen Sound Transit do better. It was a disappointment when it was going through its struggles in the late 90s. I mean, it was very serious. It was a question of whether the light rail was even going to be built. As one might expect, she was very disappointed in that.

**Ms. McLeod:** What was the history of what was happening? Can you expand on that a little bit?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** They were taking on a lot. There were four new lines of business: the commuter rail,

which is negotiated with the private rail companies for the use of their tracks, and having to contract for service. There were trains from Lakewood to downtown Seattle, then from Everett to downtown Seattle through environmentally sensitive areas. Expanding track that's full already is very difficult. They were adding direct access ramps and express bus service, although they were doing five hundred million dollars worth of construction on the state highway system, and contracting with the DOT to do it. Such as, HOV direct access ramps like in Federal Way where the ramp comes directly on to the HOV lanes. And, up North at the Alderwood Mall, there's a direct access ramp, and it's in the middle of the freeway. It's direct access to the park and ride. It was all a huge undertaking.

They were contracting with five bus companies to do a lot of the expanded regional bus service. Then they were building a light rail line that was tunneling under very geologically treacherous and geo-technically treacherous areas, or difficult areas. And building light rail from Northgate through downtown down to SeaTac. Those were all tough jobs. And they didn't do them all right. If you have successes, and failures, it's the failures that stand out.

**Ms. McLeod:** Is it harder to approve funding and provide more support for something that failed?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** Yes.

**Ms. McLeod:** In an interview with Denny Heck on TVW's Inside Olympia, taped in February of 2001, Ruth refers to Sound Transit's problems. Basically her comment is to let them figure out their troubles first, become more stable, and we'll come back and see what's going to happen.

**Mr. Baxstrom:** For a state legislator, how do you retain credibility if you say we need to put more money into this failure because it's failing at the time? But also, she was probably strategically thinking if she'd had been playing for more money going to Sound Transit during the early years, with money legislators want accountability. It's hard to play both sides of that coin. If you're going to give them money, then you want some control. Well, if we don't give them money, at least you can more effectively argue to stay out of their business; they'll figure it out. Leave them alone. So, that may have been fortuitous on her part to have done that.

**Ms. McLeod:** Earlier, I mentioned my review of all those articles about gas tax, the revenue packages, and the many failures and struggles of the legislature. In reading them chronologically, I got to the end and read about the April 24, 2005 vote. It was before the state Legislature adjourned for the year and a bipartisan majority in the House of Representatives approved a sixteen year eight point five billion transportation revenue package, and it was the largest transportation infrastructure in the state's history according to the article. The program was funded by a nine point five cent increase in the state gasoline tax, also the largest in history. I wonder, even though that was three months after Ruth's death and two years after she left the legislature, if you felt she was still part of that package via the work she had done?

**Mr. Baxstrom:** I give a lot of that credit to Representative Murray and Senator Haugen who did a lot of work on it. There are a lot of other people. But

I think maybe what Ruth would have contributed was to represent a mentor in terms of boldness and doing what you believe is right. She represented a commitment to do it and stay at it and persevere.

I remember Representative Murray during negotiations going on between the House and Senate on a funding package in 2001, I think. These were testy negotiations with the House and Senate. You walked in the room, and you could feel the temperature's dropped five degrees and the hairs stand up on the back of your neck. And Representative Murray walks into the room and says, I don't know if Ruth invites me to these because she likes me or she hates me.

It was that kind of thing. But I'm sure she had to be an inspiration for people. Ruth, in some respects, wasn't always good at mentoring others. She did what she needed to do, but maybe through osmosis more than her direct calling she inspired others. I certainly feel a debt of gratitude to her for that.



Peter Callaghan is a reporter and columnist who has covered the Washington Legislature since 1980. He began his career with the Associated Press, moved to the Everett Herald in 1982 and then to The News Tribune in Tacoma in 1986 where he still comments on legislative issues.

His mother, Bev Callaghan, was Rep. Ruth Fisher's Legislative Assistant for fifteen years. He has many memories of Ruth, including this one:

Pierce County was looking for a new auditor in the aftermath of a little scandal in which the incumbent was insisting on gifts to continue allowing licensed agents to sell license tabs. Someone of integrity was needed, someone who could restore some order to the office and Ruth was approached.

She told me later that she'd thought about it but decided not to. How come?

"Because if I won, what exactly would I have won? I'd have to be auditor and who wants to be auditor?"

And then she laughed that single syllable laugh of hers ("HAH") and lit another cigarette.

It is hard to separate Ruth from her smoking. She seemed to constantly have one burning, held between her fingers and rarely in the ashtray. After one long session I noticed that a few legislators were making it into my copy more than others. Ruth, Sally Walker, Bill Grant, Ren Taylor.

It helped, of course, that all four had attributes I found most attractive in a source - wisdom, experience and cynicism.

It dawned on me though, that they all shared something else - an addiction to smoking. That was when House members could still smoke on the wings and the smokers, more than the pure, spent more time there making them more accessible to newsies.

Later, of course, when state law and House rules both banned smoking in all indoor spaces, Ruth ignored it. My mother, then in her 70s, was her assistant. Mom had quit smoking in her 60's after a lifetime of two packs a day but was never one of those zealot converts and she put up with her boss's habit and law-breaking.

Still, we told her that she hadn't really quit smoking, she'd simply gone to work for Ruth.

# Longtime legislator Ruth Fisher dies

*Former state Rep. Ruth Fisher, for years one of Washington's most colorful and powerful politicians, died Monday night at her home in Tacoma. She was 79.*

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By Ralph Thomas and Andrew Garber  
Seattle Times Olympia bureau

## THE SEATTLE TIMES, 2002

Former Rep. Ruth Fisher, described as “very passionate,” influenced transportation issues.

OLYMPIA — Former state Rep. Ruth Fisher, for years one of Washington’s most colorful and powerful politicians, died Monday night at her home in Tacoma. She was 79.

Rep. Fisher spent 20 years in the Legislature, where she was known for her blunt speaking style and her tireless efforts to fix the state’s transportation problems.

Rep. Fisher, who smoked, was diagnosed in December with advanced lung cancer and cardio-pulmonary obstructive disease. Though her illness was terminal, her daughter, Joan Fisher, said her mother’s death came sooner than expected.

“I guess she just wanted to go,” Joan Fisher said.

She said her mother was sitting in her favorite armchair, surrounded by family and friends, when she died.

“I’m a very sick woman,” Rep. Fisher told a reporter earlier this month.

Her voice, which for years could bark at legislators she deemed too greedy, lobbyists too pushy and reporters too ignorant, had dropped to a raspy whisper.

“Her life revolved around politics and transportation,” Joan Fisher said. “That’s what she really loved.”

An ardent liberal, Rep. Fisher was a delegate to the 1968 and 1976 Democratic national conventions. At the 1968 convention, she became so incensed about the police crackdown on anti-war demonstrators outside the convention hall, she went out to the streets to join them. The 43-year-old marched around with a four-letter expletive scrawled on her forehead.

“I’m going to miss her,” said Bev Callaghan, who worked as Rep. Fisher’s legislative aide for 15 years. “I admired her a great deal.”

Callaghan said Rep. Fisher was fearless and “didn’t take any nonsense.” But she said Rep. Fisher also had a great sense of humor, which she sometimes used

to play pranks on fellow legislators who got on her nerves.

“She simply could not stand a phony,” Callaghan said.

News of Rep. Fisher’s death hit hard in Olympia, where she represented Tacoma’s 27th Legislative District from 1983 to 2002.

Rep. Dennis Flannigan, D-Tacoma, knew Rep. Fisher for 35 years and won her seat when she retired.

“She had an acerbic wit and an absolute impatience with the delay of government,” he said. “She pushed on it every day she was here ... to get about the public’s business.”

Flannigan noted Rep. Fisher’s bluntness was a rare commodity. “There is so little directness in American politics. Those who do it are compelling characters on the scene and she was such a person. Almost all of us slip-slide around not wanting to hurt anybody. She didn’t care. She just called it as she did.”

Rep. Fisher was practically an institution in the Legislature. She served as chairwoman or ranking Democrat on the Transportation Committee from 1990 until she retired. As committee chairwoman, she had substantial power over transportation legislation and the funding of projects.

She briefly joined the state Transportation Commission in July 2004, retiring in January of this year because of her health.

In a 2002 interview, when Rep. Fisher retired from the Legislature, former state Transportation Secretary Sid Morrison credited her with helping transform the Department of Transportation from an agency that focused almost exclusively on highways to one that also deals with other forms of transportation, including public transportation. Morrison headed the agency from 1993 to 2001.

Doug MacDonald, the current head of DOT, said Rep. Fisher was “a person who made a huge contribution, and it’s very sad to lose her.”

“She was feisty and direct and very passionate and committed to the things in transportation she cared about,” he said.

Rep. Helen Sommers, D-Seattle, longtime chairwoman of the House Appropriations Committee, said in a statement that “Ruth was a special friend and a fine legislator. Her frank, open leadership served 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.”

House Speaker Frank Chopp, who sometimes bore the brunt of Rep. Fisher’s sharp tongue, yesterday praised his former colleague.

“Ruth was an extraordinary person, and her knowledge of Washington’s transportation system was legendary,” Chopp, D-Seattle, said in a statement.

After a flare-up with Chopp in 2002, Rep. Fisher commented, “I think he is a dictator rather than a speaker.”

Rep. Fisher blamed Chopp for sending Referendum 51 — a \$7.8 billion statewide transportation plan, which included a 9-cent-a-gallon gas tax — to a public vote in 2002. The measure was rejected by voters. Rep. Fisher had argued against a public vote, saying legislators are elected to make tough decisions.

When she retired, Rep. Fisher said she’d been thinking about leaving the Legislature for a while. “Twenty years is a long time,” she said. “I’m 76. I deserve a few years of sitting on the porch.”

Before being elected to the state House in 1982, she served six years on the Pierce County Planning Commission.

Rep. Fisher was born July 21, 1925, in Tacoma. She graduated from Stadium High School in 1943 and attended the College of Puget Sound.

She is survived by her daughter Joan and son Steven, both of Tacoma. She was preceded in death by her son Sam.

The family said plans for a memorial service are pending.

*Seattle Times reporter David Postman contributed to this story.*





Ruth Fisher



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