

# An Interview with Senator Joe Neal

## *Chapter One:*

The Road from Mounds, Louisiana  
to Carson City

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

January 24, 2006 Interview

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The Boyer Las Vegas Early History Project

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The transcript received minimal editing that includes the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the material. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the narrator. In several cases, photographic sources (housed separately) accompany the collection as slides or black and white photographs.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project. Additional transcripts may be found under that series title.

Claytee D. White, Project Director  
Director, Oral History Research Center  
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# Preface

Senator Joe Neal shares many memories of his childhood in Mound, Louisiana. He recalls his mother leaving him and his older brother Willie with a woman named Bea so that she could go to Alexander to get a job. He and Willie were ages 2 and 4, respectively, and were frequently left on their own. Willie would leave periodically for hours at a time and come back with food. He eventually took Joe to meet the couple who were supplying the meals, Mary and Gowens Prayder. This couple took the two boys in and over time, the boys began to call them Momma and Daddy.

School for the black children of the plantation was held in Shady Grove Missionary Baptist Church. Joe attended classes there through fourth grade, and then was bussed to Thomas Town High and Elementary School. He gives many details of the experiences he had and the teachers who taught him. He also recalls signs and symptoms of the racial prejudice blacks encountered down South in the thirties and forties.

Joe's birth mother came out to Las Vegas and was followed by her oldest son in 1951 or '52. He returned to Louisiana in 1954 to bring Joe out West. Senator Neal recalls the stark dustiness of the landscape and the rental home he shared with his mother and other boarders on D Street. He tried his hand at several menial jobs and then took his brother's suggestion to join the Armed Forces in order to get a college education.

Senator Neal relates the many opportunities that he experienced in the military, including working as an AP, undergoing desert survival training, and working at Holloman Air Force Base in Alamogordo, New Mexico. After 4 years in the Air Force, Joe enrolled at Southern University in January of 1959. He had decided that he wanted to work for blacks in government after learning about Rosa Parks, the bus boycott, and the Little Rock situation.

Joe shares his opinions on government principles, views on Hurricane Katrina and the aftermath, details his running for a seat in the Nevada legislature and serving 32 years there as a state senator. He is proud of having authored and sponsored the state fire law, has strong views on whether to increase the grade point average for University students, and expresses his intention to see that government works **for** the people.



## JOSEPH (JOE) M. NEAL JR.

Democrat

Clark County Senatorial

District No. 4

Retired

[Email](#)

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**Born:** July 28, 1935; Mounds, Louisiana.

**Educated:** Southern University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, B.A., Political Science and History; postgraduate work in law; Institute of Applied Science, Chicago, Illinois, civil identification and criminal investigation.

**Married:** Widower.

**Children:** Charisse, Tania, Withania, Dina Amelia, Joseph.

**Military:** United States Air Force, 1954-58.

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**Legislative Service:** Nevada Senate, 1973-99--three special and 14 regular sessions; Member, Interim Finance Committee, 1985-86; Assistant Majority Floor Leader, 1985; Assistant Minority Floor Leader, 1987; Minority Floor Leader, regular session, 1989; President pro Tempore, 1991; Member, Legislative Commission, 1997-98.

**Affiliations:** Order of Elks Lodge No. 1508; Clark County Democratic Central Committee; Nevada State Democratic Central Committee; Phi Beta Sigma; Member and past Chairman, Clark County Economic Opportunity Board.

**Personal and Professional Achievements:** Outstanding Community Service, Local Branch, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, 1976; A.A.U.F. of the Year, 1977-78; Outstanding Civic Work, First A.M.E. Church, 1978; Nevada Legislature - In Appreciation, CCTA TIP, 1979; Friend of Education Award, NSEA, 1986; Service to Community, Forty-second Western Province Council, Las Vegas Alumni Theta Sigma Chapters, Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., 1989; Honorary Member for Continuous Support and Dedication to the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Committee, 1989; Century Club Member for Outstanding Support of Nevada State AFL-CIO C.O.P.E., 1989; Appreciation for Outstanding Services, Loyalty and Support to All Mankind, Affirmative Action Committee, Lower Colorado Region, Bureau of Reclamation, United States Department of the Interior, 1990; Guest Speaker, Lewis F. Cottrell No. 339, 1991; Reverend Jesse Louise Jackson Distinguished Political Award for Service Rendered on Behalf of All the Citizens of Nevada, NAACP, 1991; Elijah Lovejoy Award, Order of Elks Grand Lodge IBPOEW, 1992; Support and Dedication to Working Men and Women, Local Joint Board, Culinary Local No. 226 and Bartenders Local No. 165, 1992; Outstanding Support, Alpha Temple, Paran Lodge 1508, 1992; Liberty Award, National Alliance Against Race and Political Oppression, 1992; Distinguished Service to Libraries, Las Vegas Library District, 1993; Appreciation for Support, Alpha Temple No. 1180, 1994; Outstanding Achievement for the Community in Celebration of African American Month, Clark High School, 1994; Appreciation and Gratitude Award, Friends of Clark County Law Library, 1995; Lifetime Achievement Award for Public Service, Reno-Sparks Branch No. 1112, NAACP; Lifetime Commitment Award, Nevada AFL-CIO; Civil Liberty Award, American Civil Liberties Union-Nevada; past Chairman, Greater Las Vegas Plan.

**This is Claytee White. It is January 24th, 2006, and we're in the home of Senator Joe Neal. Have you given us permission to use this information for educational and research purposes?**

Yes, I have.

**Thank you. First, let's just start by talking about your coming to Las Vegas. Tell me where you're from and what life was like there and a little about your family.**

Originally, I'm from Louisiana. In fact, I was born in Louisiana, a place called Mound, Louisiana. My family was originally from Arkansas, around the McGehee area in Dumas, Arkansas. My father, who was a part of the Tenants' Farm Union in the 30s, got run out of Arkansas and he came down to Louisiana. I was born in Louisiana. My older brother, Willie, was born in 1935 during the Depression. Now my late brother, was born in Arkansas. I was born in Mound after they came to Louisiana. I

Somehow my mother and father were separated, and he went back to Arkansas I guess when I was about one or two years old. As I remember, in about '37, they had set up the CC camps under the Roosevelt Administration. My mother had left us with another lady by the name of Bea. I don't know what Bea's last name was. When I say left us, I mean my older brother and me. Our mother went to Alexander to get a job. Of course, Bea kind of left my brother and me on our own. We were living in a place out in the field. The fields were all plowed up around us, you know, high furrows from the plowing of the fields.

I could remember that my brother used to leave quite often when no one was at the house but the two of us. He was four and I was two. He would go and come back with food. I never knew where he was coming or going or where he had gotten the food. Of course, during that period the house was two rooms separated by a fireplace in the middle. We had a stand of cane,

like the fishing pole cane, that was near the house. I used to go out and get those and put them in the fire. Because of the separation of joints between the canes and the air, you put them in there and you like to hear them pop. I was popping cane there one day in the fireplace. A hole had worn into my pants, and they caught on fire. Fortunately for me, my brother was present. I started screaming, and he came and put the fire out. I was burned really badly.

I found out later where my brother was going. He was visiting a woman that had a family that I came to know as Mary and Gowens Prayder, or Gowens and Mary Prayder, if you want to put it that way. One day my brother came and got me, and he said, "I'm going to take you with me." He brought me to this woman who was waiting across the railroad track down at the fence. And she said, "Come on, baby." You know, picked me up in her arms and took me into her house. They treated me for the burns and somehow they got in touch with my mother, who came back to visit us.

She then gave permission to let us stay with this particular family. And I stayed with them until, oh, I was 18, until I got out of high school. So that was about 16 years. I worked with them on the plantation there at Mound where I was born. The old man, Gowens, he was -- I always kind of get teared up on the start of the story. Old man Gowens was the person who herded the cattle for the Yeager plantation. On the side, they had 5 acres of land that they planted cotton on. So that was part of my brother's job and my job, to work there in the fields. When we were not at school, that's when we worked in the fields around the house.

Of course, during this particular period, from the late 30s and going into the 40s, I used to go with Gowens. I began to call him daddy. I used to travel with him when he had to go feed the cattle. During that time in Louisiana, during the wintertime, particularly in the northern part of Louisiana, they used to have the big snowstorms. You had to load the wagons up with hay and go



out and feed the cattle, and I would go with him on these ventures. He also had a job of killing cattle for the company store

### **Slaughtering them?**

Yeah, slaughtering cattle. I never did think too much about that. It was just fascinating, you know, to see how it was done. You just tied the cattle up and took a sledgehammer and hit them on the side of the head, hang them up by the feet, gut them, and skin the hide off of them. Then you would dress them down and take them to the store where they would be butchered into steaks and other types of meat. Of course, during that particular period, we also raised most of our food.

Now, Momma Mary, she worked for one of the brothers. There were three brothers that owned this plantation. Their names were Edward, George and Andrew. She worked for George Yeager as a cook. Of course, she would bring food home, leftovers and things like that.

Of course, Daddy, as we called him, had the job of herding the cattle. But also early in the morning, he had the job of milking the cattle. I can recall that one morning he got up and I followed him to where he was milking the cattle. He didn't know it because it was kind of foggy that morning. I guess I missed him because I got lost and couldn't find him. So I just went out on the main road, which was across from where he was working early in the morning. I was just sitting there on the fence watching the hands gather up the mules and hitch them up to the wagon and go work wherever they were going to. I remember when the sun came up, I was there sitting on the fence watching all of this, and there was somebody calling me. [They called me Brother.] He said, "Where have you been?" I said, "I've just been here." So he just put me on the back of the horse and took me back to the house. Momma was all upset because she didn't know where I was and thought I had disappeared somewhere.

When time came for me to go to school, we had church school down on the plantation. Our school was held in a church called Shady Grove Missionary Baptist Church, and the teacher was a woman by the name of Minnie Coontz. If you know about the northern part of Louisiana, you've got an interstate highway just running right straight through it. Now, it's Interstate 20 that runs there alongside of Interstate 80. Mrs. Coontz used to live right across from us on the main highway. I remember that she had, I think, up to the fifth grade. We didn't have such a thing as kindergarten at that time. You just went into first grade. You just went to school. I remember my first day of school -- she just wrote my name up on the board, Joseph Neal, and told me to copy it. Then we got into it, and I just copied what looked like my name. Then they had these old copying books. You used to have to do the circling, you know, and it taught you how to do the letters and all of that. She gave me that.

Now, you have to understand that in the late 30s and early 40s, as I came to understand, this is when Huey Long was governor. At the school that we went to, they always had some type of fruit for us. I had prunes, oranges, apples, or some type of grapefruit juice that you could have each day that you went to school. It was kind of an enticement to a lot of kids because you just didn't get fruit.

I went to that school up until the fourth grade. In the fourth grade, they decided that they would close the school and send us about two miles up the road to Thomas Town High and Elementary School. Many of the church schools that were on the plantation, of which they had three, all closed. Then they bussed the kids two miles away, even though right there by the plantation they did have a white school that went up to the eighth grade. But we could not go to that one. Of course, I found myself catching the bus. We had long seats on the bus, not at all like seats that you have now, but long seats down the side of the bus and in the middle. You sat

back-to-back in the middle. So we used to catch the bus and go to Thomas Town. The guy had to pick up people, I guess, about five or six miles away from where I lived. Then the bus would come back around and make a circle in another part of the area there. Before we went to our school, he picked up a lot of students. The bus would be crowded.

Thomas Town was kind of new to me. It was one of the schools that were built under the Roosevelt Administration. It was a school that had a gymnasium. It had indoor toilets. It had showers and all of this. In fact, it was the only black school in the northern part of Louisiana in the late 30s, early 40s that had those types of facilities.

It was kind of strange because as I went to school there and became somewhat familiar with the area, I realized that the whole area associated with the school -- you've heard about the 40 acres and the mules -- was farmed by blacks who had had land given to them. They were farming it, their little 40 acres or whatever it was that they had, and that school was built in conjunction. Most all of them had white houses. That was kind of new to me, you see, because I came from the plantation side. To run into people who owned their own land and farmed their own land was real, real new to me.

I was interested in seeing all that, watching the kids, and seeing how different they were compared to myself. Of course, we were kind of -- well, not kind of poor -- we were very poor. I had just one pair of jeans and probably two shirts that I had to wear. You'd wash them at night and hang them up by the stove so they could dry so you could have them the next day to go to school. Of course, not having bathing facilities like they had at the school -- you know, you had that number two washtub that you had to get into and try to wash. And you probably did that just about once a week. Of course, if you went to school and you were smelling up the place, then the teacher would send you with soap to take a shower. Of course, a lot of us during that particular

period used the deodorant called Mum, the little white sticky stuff that you put under your arms to keep from smelling.

My fourth grade year was with a teacher that we called Ms. Wilson. She was a young lady that came out of Tallulah, Louisiana. Now, Thomas Town was about nine miles east of Tallulah.

#### **And how far is Mound from Tallulah?**

Mound would be 11 miles. So Ms. Wilson transferred from Tallulah. The principal was a woman. In fact, somebody told me the other day that she's still living now, and she has to be about 90 something. Mrs. Hayes was the principal, a very strict person. She had a vision of what she wanted from the students. I don't know where Mrs. Hayes was from. The only thing that I do know is that she had a master's degree, which she received from Atlanta University. That's going way, way back in the 30s. I think she was married a couple times during the time that we were in school. She wasn't married, I guess -- or was married because that's where she got the Hayes name because we called her E.M.T. Hayes. That's the initials that she used. But she was the principal of the school up until I graduated from the school.

Of course, those years were very, very good years for me in trying to understand something about the world in which I was living. I came to realize early -- around the seventh or eighth grade -- that I didn't really have a home, you see, and that the place that I was living on was a plantation, that the house that I was living in was owned by somebody else.

Of course, my momma, not my real mother but Mary Prayder, used to take my brother and me with her when she'd go to Mississippi because that's where her family was. Her family lived around Terry, Mississippi. She used to go over there to visit her parents and her relatives. Sometimes she could take us. I remember one time -- I must have been around four at the time -- when she took my brother and me with her to Mississippi. We went over to visit her mother. I

can remember this field, which had kind of high brown grass and then a big wooded area behind it, pine trees and all of that.

Of course, getting to her mother's house was down a dirt road. We had been picked up by a relative. I think Momma said it was a cousin of hers. I don't recall his name at the moment. But I think he was driving, and the car got stuck in the mud. Then we had to get out and walk up to the house.

But coming back, after we had been there for about a week, we had to take a bus out of Terry to Jackson, Mississippi. Then you take a bus from Jackson, Mississippi to Mound, where you would get off the bus stop. I never could understand why Momma had felt that she needed to get up early to catch the bus and get into Jackson until we got into Jackson. Later I realized that one of the reasons was because at that time, bus transportation was segregated. They had the partition which blacks had to sit behind, the same thing they talked about in the sixties, the Rosa Parks type of thing.

This was right after the Christmas holidays, and we were trying to come back to Mound. Momma accidentally bumped into a white guy, bumped into his leg. He just turned around and called her all kinds of sons of bitches, you know. I just sat there and looked at him, and I saw his face. That image of his face just welded itself into my mind. If I saw that guy today, I still could remember him. But then some white lady said, "Well, look, she didn't intend to bump into you." This guy just cursed Momma.

After getting to this bus station about 8 o'clock in the morning and waiting there all day, we finally got on the bus about 5 o'clock in the evening, and were able to come back to Mound. That was kind of a troubling experience for me. It's something that, I guess, would affect my thinking throughout my life.

So going back to Thomas Town now, I'm in grade school. Of course, I said Mrs. Hayes was a very strict woman. I remember when I was in the fifth grade, I saw this beautiful little girl who had a tank top on. Her stomach was showing and I was standing in the door, which is right across the hall from the principal. And I said to her, "Oh, I see your stomach." No. What did I say? I said, "I see your belly." That's what I said. "I see your belly." Mrs. Hayes came out. She said to me, "What did you say?" I said, "I told her I saw her stomach." She said, "No. You told her you saw her belly." And for some reason, she took me in the office, and she gave me a whipping. She had one of those little old paddles. She just spanked my butt good. I never could understand what I had done wrong.

It took me some 20 years -- was it 20 years? I guess it was about 20 years later because I had gotten out of high school and I spent four years in the Air Force. Now I'm back at Southern in a biology class and we're talking about belly being a scientific term. So I got hot with the principal. You know what I'm saying?

But she was nice. She was good. She had an interest in the students, and she wanted us to do well. In her particular situation, say for instance, when I was in the fifth grade, we had something like about maybe 50 students in the fifth grade. In the sixth grade, that number would drop off by one or two. By the time we got to the eighth grade, we had something like 30 students, and by the time we graduated, there were only ten of us, six boys and four girls. It's kind of different. Usually, it's the other way. It's kind of strange. All of us did well and went into some profession or became teachers or something.

One of the things that Mrs. Hayes had set up was that once you got to the 12th grade in high school at Thomas Town, you had to have mentored somebody, you see. You had to select a kid who was down under you, four years back, and you mentored that kid. He became, or she

became, your kid for the time that you mentored them. Whatever you had when you left school, you gave it to that person. But you mentored that person.

The person that mentored me was a guy by the name of Albert Luster. Luster was one of those persons that lived near where I lived in Mound. He was a good student. Of course, when he graduated he had four people, two girls and two boys, in his class. Albert went on to Southern, and he became a member of the ROTC and went into the military. He retired as a colonel. He was a helicopter pilot in Vietnam. He had mentored me, but I didn't go right out of high school to college, even though I could have gone on a track scholarship. That's another part of my life that we have.

Thomas Town, when I look back on it, was kind of an unusual school. We used to have a May Day celebration. Well, the May Day celebration was -- as I've come to learn lately -- a communist ritual. I didn't know this.

**Was that the maypole?**

Yes. We had to wrap the maypole. We had field and track, you know, everything all centered around there. That was a day that you had to yourself. Then we had another day that we called our field and track day where we'd participate with other schools. I excelled in track, and of course I played basketball. Our basketball team was never any good in terms of winning games, you know, because --

**(End side 1, tape 1.)**

Most of us who were on the basketball team weren't trying to get out of school. We were trying to get an education. We were not like the guys who actually went to school in Tallulah who were champions, so to speak, because we played just for fun. But when it came to the books and dealing with the issues and learning things, that's where we excelled.

**When you were in that little church school, about how many students were in that school?**

We must have had about 25 students.

**Now, were all of those students in the church school you attended from the same plantation or separate plantations?**

Yes. No, no. They were from the same plantation, from the same general area.

**So how many people are we talking about on a plantation?**

Well, see, at this particular plantation, we had about three parts of it. One we called the Carolina part and the other was the Mound part of it. We're talking easily about -- when you look at it in terms of families, you're talking about 150 families, yes, which is a lot of families, a lot of people.

**How many acres?**

Oh, my God. Oh, if I were to estimate, you would be talking about pretty close to -- and I'm basing it on Southern. Southern's campus was 500 acres. And that plantation was something like about five times that of Southern, you see. So we're talking about pretty close to about 3,000, maybe 4,000 acres.

**Even when you went to the larger school, why was the dropout rate so high?**

The girls were getting pregnant and boys were going to work on the plantation, you know, trying to make money. Those were the two things that were propelling that particular dropout.

**So even those principals like Mrs. Hayes couldn't stop that?**

No. They couldn't stop it. You have to understand that one of the things about working on the plantation or living on the plantation is that the powers that be controlled the school system. And see, our school time was different from that of the whites, you see. We would start, say, in



January. And probably in May, we would kind of skip out. We would get out, you know, in the fall to pick cotton or something like that. So we wouldn't start until late in the fall. That was still going on when I graduated from Thomas Town in 1954.

So that's what it was, and that's why I said that I realized when I was beginning to get up in the eighth grade, seventh and eighth grade, that I didn't have a home. My whole direction was directed towards saying, hell, I've got to get out of here. And by this time, of course, my older brother Willie had gone to work at the age of 16 on the railroad there.

**As a porter?**

No. As a railroad section hand, working the rails.

**Okay. Actually laying the railroad?**

Yes, and maintaining the railroad. And he worked that job up until my mother came back during this particular period. See, my mother came out here to Nevada in 1947. I'm talking about my real mother.

**Your birth mother?**

Yeah, my birth mother came out here in '47. Well, she came out here because Daddy Prayder's stepfather had come out here in probably 1945 or '42, something like that. I think it was between '42 and '45 when he came out here. He worked on the railroad. His wife, who was Daddy Prayder's mother, had come out here. And that's when they were living in tents. She couldn't stand it. So she came back. And, of course, finally he came back. Then my mother, well, that's okay, she would go and try it. So she came out here. She was the first one on our side of the family that came to Nevada, even though I had an uncle that came here very early in the 30s, came to Hawthorne, Nevada. Yeah, he came to Hawthorne. I didn't find that out until later.

See, my daddy had a twin. And we called him T. Arthur, Uncle T. And his name was T.

Arthur Neal. He came here because he was one of the radical people who wanted to form the Southern Tenants' Farm Union, and he got run out of Arkansas.

**How much do you know about that union?**

I don't know too much about --

**(Indiscernible) tell stories?**

No. I just found out about it by just listening to him talk about it. You see, if I just go back just a moment, see, when I was 14, I became very curious about my father because he had friends that he wrote to that were on the plantation. They would, in turn, talk to me about it. And they'd say, "Well, you look like your daddy," you know, and all of this stuff. So I decided that, well, okay, you gave me my daddy's address. I'm going to write him. So I wrote him a letter when I was about 14 and told him that I wanted to come visit him. At that time he was living in Dumas, Arkansas. So I caught the train, and I went to visit him.

**You and Willie, or just you?**

Just me. Just me. I was 14. Just me. I caught the train and went up to visit him. I stayed up visiting for a week. And, of course, he was sharecropping. That's what he did. He was sharecropping, and he would rent land, and he would do the thing. I guess he made money off of it. He didn't complain about it. I got an opportunity then to see the paternal side of my family because he lived in the area with his mother, which was my grandmother, Grandmother Ollie Neal. Well, they all lived in the same house, really, at the time. I had Aunt Mary, who has since passed. Of course, Grandmother Ollie, she's passed too. My father passed in '63.

But during this period that I visited my father, as I said, he was a sharecropper and I just drove around with him. Of course, I went out and they were picking cotton, so I went out and picked some cotton. I told him, "Well, you're going to have to pay me for picking cotton." Of

course, he did. He did.

I stayed up there about a week. Then I was coming back home. He took me down to the train station. I tried to engage the conversation as to why he and my mother were not together. Of course, he would not talk about it. He never did tell me why. Of course, by then, nobody would tell me either. I never did find out what that whole story was about. I didn't much care at the age of 14 because as my living went, it seemed to be pretty good. I wasn't hungry and Momma Mary and Daddy Prayder were taking care of me very well. Of course, I met a lot of my cousins and people that I stayed in touch with, kept in touch with, and found out where they were from.

At one time when my brother was working on the railroad, he bought a car. He decided that he would drive my mother, who was at the time living in Tallulah, up to Arkansas to see some of her family. So we got an opportunity to meet her family. We went someplace -- I don't recall exactly now -- that was outside of McGehee, Arkansas. See, my mother was not reared by her family. She was reared by another lady who lived in McGehee who worked for some white folks in Arkansas. That's when we went back and looked at the census report, and that's what it seemed to indicate. But she had family that lived outside in the rural area and we went out to visit those folks. I'll never forget. This was like about -- I think it probably -- because she had gone out to Nevada in '47. See, my mother never was a field hand, okay.

**That's great.**

She never was a field hand. She never did work in the field. She had lived in a couple places. She had gone to Chicago because she had gotten married to another guy by the name of Montgomery in the early 40s. Then she had gone to Chicago to live. Somehow something happened. I don't know what happened to the relationship, but she came back. She came back to Tallulah. In the meantime, she then came on out here after that. But it was during that period, that

early period when she came here to Vegas, that she stayed for a period of time and then came back. She never did come back to Vegas until after Willie came out here.

**Do you remember the year that Willie came?**

Willie came out here in -- let's see. If my mother came out here in '47 -- but she didn't stay that long. And she came back to Louisiana. Then she went back to Vegas. It must have been around about '51 or '52. That's when Willie came out.

See, I was moving on, you know, with my life. I had new friends that I had developed in school. I didn't pay too much attention about where Willie was at that point. Of course, she knew that I was graduating from high school. So she sent him back to pick me up and bring me out here. So this was 1954 when I came out here, in May 1954. I'll never forget it. That was the strangest place.

**What did it look like?**

Whew. See, Willie, you have to understand, loved to drive. He had his friend, and they were in a '49 Ford. I'll never forget it. Two-door. Willie came through Kingman and it looked like we had a quarter tank of gas. Well, I don't know where Vegas is, you know, but I know that I don't want to walk anywhere to get any gas. So he came around, you know, he just kept driving. I said, "Man, we need to get some gas." He said, "No. We'll make it. We'll make it."

So he came out. And I'll never forget when we came over that hill off of Boulder City there and you look down into Vegas, there was nothing. There was Fremont Street with nothing. And then I looked over to the side. There were two hotels at the time. The place just looked like white dust. No trees. Nothing. And I was somewhat disturbed over the fact that I'm moving here and coming from Louisiana where you had green grass and all of that stuff. You get here, and you don't have any grass. You had to go back out to Boulder City to see the only grass there was.

At the time when I came here, my mother was living up on D Street, right behind the old Westside School where KCEP is located. She was renting a house from a gentleman. She had renters too. At that particular time, my mother would take in any and everybody.

She must have had about three or four other people that she was renting rooms out to. And they were working. I came in and said, "Oh, my God."

We had a fellow that I knew back in Louisiana who had also moved out here. And I didn't even know that he was here. We called him AJ. I don't know what AJ's last name was. But he was considerably older than me. He was about my mother's age at the time. AJ had a job working for Polar Ice Company. He would deliver ice. They didn't have ice machines. Polar Ice Company, you know, you had to chip up the ice, and you delivered it to the hotels. That was his job at the motels along the street.

They had the old El Rancho. I remember he told me, "Come go with me. I know you want to get out of this place one day and work with me. I'll give you a little something." And a little something, you know, probably a couple bucks. I didn't mind. I was about 18 at the time. So we went to deliver ice -- I'll never forget this -- to the El Rancho Hotel. The El Rancho was situated on that plot of land which was just across from the Sahara Hotel. They had a swimming pool out front. So I just walked around by it. And AJ looked at me and said, "Hey, boy, come back here. You might think you're not in Louisiana, you know, but the place is the same."

So I worked with him a few days. And another job that I had -- he was a good friend of mine. He just lives up the street. His name is Ernest Douglas. Ernest had come out here. Ernest is the only other person that I know who was born in Mound, Louisiana, that lives here now.

**Okay. And he still lives right around here?**

Yeah, he still lives up the street. He lives up by the school there. Ernest had just gotten here. Ernest had a job at that time. That was 1954. It was the old Cadillac Arms. They were just building those apartments, Cadillac Arms and Berkeley Square. They built those apartments. Ernie had the job of watering the lawns, so he had to get up early in the morning. He was staying with my mother, so he told me, "Hey, come and go with me. We'll go out here and water the lawns." I said, "Okay, fine." And I guess I must have done that with Ernie like in May, June, July and August, those months. I came here around about May 19th and stayed for June and July.

By July, I'm getting a little bit frustrated with everything. You know, things are not working out for me, and I couldn't see myself getting into any type of permanent job or anything. I kept telling Willie, my brother, I said, "Man, look, I want to go to college." And Willie was the type of brother, you know, who always had a solution for everything. He says, "Well, if you want to go to college, I'll tell you what. Why don't you go down and join the Army, and they'll pay for your education." I said, "Okay, that sounds good."

So down on Fifth Street they had a recruiting office for Marines, Army, Air Force, and Navy in that office there. So I went down and I talked to a recruiter. And the recruiter said, "Well, I'll tell you what. In the Army and the Marines, you have to go to basic training for 18 weeks. Air Force, you go for 11 weeks." And I wasn't thinking about the Navy. I said, "Well, I'll tell you what. Why don't you sign me up for the Air Force? I would love to go into the Air Force." So he signed me up, and I didn't pay any attention to what was going on.

Now I'm getting acclimated to the community. I'm over on the Westside School playground playing basketball with the kids, you know, having a good time, making friends now. Old Jefferson Center is open. The swimming pool is there. So I'm swimming every day and having a good time, learning people and beginning to feel at home. I was over on the basketball

court, and I looked over to the house there. There's a recruiter knocking on my door. And I went over and talked to him. He said, "Well, are you Joe Neal?" I said, "Yes, I'm Joe Neal." He said, "Well, we've got a ticket here for you to leave tonight to go down to L.A. to have your physical and be accepted into the Air Force." I said, "Okay, fine."

So my mother took me down to the bus station. At that time the bus ran from Las Vegas to Los Angeles. It took about eight hours because they had single-lane highways, you know, with all those twists and turns. So I got on the bus. They told me where to go and all of that stuff. So I followed the directions and wound up there about 7:30 in the morning. I walked on over to the recruiting office and went through, got all the physicals. They were calling people alphabetically. The guy said, "We got the quota." I said okay. I said fine. So they give me a ticket, I get on the bus, and I come back home.

About a week later, you know, I'm back on the basketball court, playing with the kids and having a good time. I still haven't gotten a job or anything. I looked up again. There's a recruiter on my doorstep again. This time he said, "Okay, you're going back." So I go back. This time he said, "Well, don't bring anything." I said, "Okay, fine."

So I didn't bring anything. I just took the clothes I had on my back. I went down and lo and behold, I found myself raising my hand, you know, being sworn in to the Air Force. They take me down to Union Pacific station in L.A., put me on the train with a bunch of California kids, and we head to Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, on a two-day train ride. That was something.

Coming from the South, there are certain things that you acknowledge. One of them is just "yes, sir" and "no, sir." During my high school days, we had one of our teachers that put us through some drills, you know, parade rests and all of that stuff. So we're kind of familiar with this. So when we get to San Antonio and our TI -- what's it called -- they call them DI in the

Marines, drill instructor. But you call them TIs in the Air Force. I heard him mention to one of his friends, "Say, we've got a lot of these boys from California." I didn't know what that meant, but I soon found out. You know, California boys, black boys, didn't say "yes, sir"" and "no, sir." They just said, "Hey, what's up, man?" They didn't know parade rests and all of that stuff. They just spoke out. I'll never forget that we were in the -- they marched us to our door. And I was standing there and they said, "At ease." So I just went into parade rest, and wrapped my hands behind my back. I didn't know what that meant to him when he saw that. That guy looked at me and walked over to me. He said, "Have you been in the service before?" I said, "No, sir, I haven't been in the service before." He said, "Where did you learn to stand like that?" I said, "In high school." He said, "Oh, okay." He thought I was a plant or something, you know.

**Oh, yes. Okay. Now, going back to Las Vegas, tell me what kind of work the men were doing.**

Men were mostly working as porters at that time. They had the test site [*\*Nevada Test Site*] that was going full bloom. People worked at the magnesium plant [*\*Basic Magnesium Incorporated*] in Henderson, Nevada, which is now Titanium Metals of America. You had some that worked at Nellis Air Force Base.

**So now, why did you find it hard to get a job at 18 years of age?**

Well, really I just didn't know anybody. Just didn't know anybody. Didn't know where to go. And see, the places that I went, you know, I always was turned down. I wasn't here that long. I was here about three months, and then I was off into the military. I guess you might say that I was being propelled by the guiding hand of fate because normally what happened -- during that particular period, when a male of my age, 18, comes from Louisiana or any parts of the South, the draft board usually catches up with him once he gets settled. It's almost like they would wait until



you got settled in a job, you know, in a family. Then they would send you a draft notice and draft you into the military. When I volunteered, I beat all of that.

Now, I go into the service, and I spend my four years. I get out and when I come back, I get confronted with a draft notice, you see, because it gives you opportunity. You know, now you're settled. They just sort of disrupt your lives.

My older brother was in the same situation. He was out here in '52, okay. In '56, they drafted him into the Army. Now, he wouldn't think about, you know, running for the Army. He was having a good time. But they drafted him. Of course, he went in and served his time and went in after I did and then got out before I did because he went into the Army. I went into the Air Force. I had a four-year commitment.

**And he had two?**

And he just had two, yeah. But that's what was happening at that particular time. A lot of kids got messed up with that. They came and they started establishing a family. Some of them had good jobs. And all of a sudden, they were lifted out. Boom, you're off to the military, you see.

I'll never forget the woman who sent me a letter. I wrote a tough letter back and told her, "Hey, look, I spent four years in the Air Force. Don't send me no damn draft notice." She wrote me back and said, "You didn't have to be so nasty about it."

**Now, your mother didn't do field work back East. How did she look at the work in Las Vegas for black women at that time?**

Well, she worked as a maid.

**So how did she like that kind of work?**

Well, in her particular case, it was this. She would always have two jobs. She would work

in people's home, and then she would work in the hotels. That was her. That was her work, the thing that she wanted to do. At the time it made sense to her and that's what she did. Of course, my mother was never out of a job up until she retired because she would go in people's homes and work in their homes and then she would go to the hotels and work in the hotels as a maid.

I can still recall when Hughes [*\*Howard Hughes*] bought the Desert Inn. That's where she was working. That was the last job that she had. She was working as a maid, and when she retired she just took her little check and came home and stayed until she died.

**Did she ever know anything about Howard Hughes?**

Oh, yeah. Yeah, she knew about him. But nobody out there ever saw him. They always dealt with his underlings, you know, the people who actually were running the hotel.

**Did they ever have anything to say about black people working for Howard Hughes?**

No. No, no, no. Not that I recall. You see, I had about eight years away from Vegas --

**(End side 2, tape 1.)**

As I was saying, you see, I had about eight years out of Vegas after coming here in 1954. I went into the Air Force in '54. I got out in '58. In '59, January '59, I went to college at Southern University, which put me back into Louisiana.

I guess the way it happened, see, my mother then was living, when I got out of service, on Madison Street. One of the young ladies that I knew from Southern -- not from Southern, but from Thomas Town -- was now going to school at Southern. She came out here to work during the summer. So naturally, she called my mother and asked could she stay with her while she worked out here. My mother said, "Oh, that's fine." So she put her up. During the time that she was here, she filled out my application to go to Southern. Her name was Ernestine Madison. At the time her name was Nichols, Ernestine Nichols. But she had married.

Of course, she went on to get her doctorate, and she became the provost of Washington State. She went to school and got her master's at Mississippi Valley College or whatever you call it down there. She went from there to out here. In fact, she retired out here and went back to Mississippi. She's back living in Mississippi now. But she filled out my application while I was here.

I was fortunate, when I was in the Air Force, to be stationed at Lackland Air Force Base -- not Lackland Air Force Base, but Holloman Air Force Base. After I got out of Lackland in my basic training, they assigned me to Holloman Air Force Base in Alamogordo, New Mexico. Well, that's when my education about the country and the world really began. Holloman Air Force Base was what you call the ARDC base, Air Research and Development. They were doing everything at that base. That was the forerunner of the space program. I had an opportunity to see and work with Von Braun [*\*Wernher Von Braun*] and all of them. We had an opportunity to see the development of the ICBM missiles and all of that. That was also the place where they tested the first atom bomb at Trinity Site. So that was a key assignment for me.

When I was in the service, I was assigned to security and law enforcement. They call it the APs now. But ours was a little bit different than the regular APs. We had both the security and the law enforcement part, which meant that my career field was Langley Field in civilian life. That's where you had to go from there. During the time that I was in the Air Force, I studied law enforcement. I got a diploma from the Institute of Applied Science. That gave me expertise in firearm identification, handwriting, fingerprinting, you name it. I was a one-person lab, you know. So that kind of set me good in working there.

But I did not want to have that as a career. Of course, it set you up with a lot of things. It put you in a position to know a lot of things. When you're on the cutting edge of technology for a

country, then you come out with certain knowledge and you've got a broader view of a lot of things. Of course, some of our training there was magnificent.

I think at the time they were even preparing us for the war in Iraq now because we had desert training and all of that stuff. You know, they'd drop us out in the desert after giving us training about the desert, what's out there, you know, the bugs, the snakes and all of that stuff. And they've given you ration equipment, enough to get from point A to point B, and that's where you have to be. You had to be able to survive. It's what we called desert survival training. And they put us through all of that stuff.

I came out very well. I came out very well adjusted after that, too, because some of it was kind of odd. But it put us in -- put me at least in a position to understand a lot of things. Of course, they wanted to keep me in the service. But you have to understand that we had the Rosa Parks affair in '55, the bus boycott in '56, and in '57, you had the Little Rock thing. All of this occurring, you know, at the time that I'm in service, you see. And I'm watching all of this stuff.

I guess I made the mistake of saying, "Well, you guys have trained me well, so I'm going to go back. You know, my people need me more than the Army needs me." Of course, I shouldn't have said that because they put a tag on my butt for almost five years after that. They kept up with me, so to speak.

### **What were race relations like in the Air Force?**

We didn't have a problem. It depended upon your knowledge and who you were. Now, you had some guys at your level, you know, that you'd have a run-in. I remember they had an old boy. His name was Wooten and he was from Georgia. There was one, I guess, named Hayes, this little boy. I'll never forget this kid named Hayes. Hayes put his age up to get into the service. He was just a kid mentally. I remember having some problems with him, but that didn't matter too

much.

But I remember this guy Wooten ran into an old boy, a black kid from Iowa. His name was McNair. And I'll never forget this. Wooten had said something to this kid along the racial line, you know, and called him names. And McNair said, "I'm going to get you." I didn't think anything about it. This was at Holloman Air Force Base in Alamogordo, New Mexico, and it was in the wintertime. There was snow on the ground. We were going into work around about 11:00 at night, and we saw this shadow over on the side. So we stopped to check it out, to see what it was. It was this guy Wooten. He was all bloodied up, you know. McNair had almost beaten that boy to a pulp.

We dropped him off at the police barracks and called the commander. We just stayed around, just watching to see what's going to happen. The commander said -- well, he knew McNair. He told the guy, "Go down and get McNair and bring him up here." So he went down and got McNair. They brought him into the room, and the commander talked to McNair. Then he talked to this guy Wooten. He decided that he was going to put McNair in the stockade and told the two officers to go get McNair. Well, they had to search McNair. And McNair pulled out one of those carpet knives with the hook blades on that knife. And that knife, it's about this wide with the hook blade on it. Now, here are these two officers, you know, with guns and a nightstick. They almost got caught in the door running back out from McNair. They said, "Oh, my God, this McNair."

Well, see, I could talk to McNair. And I told him, "McNair, look, baby, you don't want to be doing this. You're already in a little trouble, and they're probably going to put you out of the service." McNair says, "I don't care. I'm just tired with them messing with me." I said, "Okay, fine, but you don't want to be doing this."

That was the only racial thing that we actually ran into. And the other thing, during that particular time you would think that would be the case. I saw a situation where we had this old white boy from Tennessee. He used to sit up, and he used to tell this story, and I heard him tell this story. He said, "Look, I'm in the service because, man, at my house I could lay up and I could just see the stars, you know, just looking out through my roof. Here, I've got a roof over my head." And here is this kid from Chicago, okay. You've got the clash of the two cultures here. So this kid, the white kid, he didn't bother anybody, but he was kind of -- he wasn't docile or anything. But he knew how to take care of himself. You know, he came from the woods and everything.

### **A loner?**

Yes. He knew how to fight. So I saw this kid from Chicago challenge him one night, and this boy just whipped him. We had to take him off of him. I looked at him and said, "You know, maybe Joe Louis was big during that time, well, Joe Louis can handle himself in the ring without us, but this ain't the ring, baby." You know, this kid is out here fighting.

So those are the type of things that we actually experienced. I never did have any great experience of racial segregation in the service because I guess they didn't let it happen. Maybe some of the other servicemen did, but I did not see it in our outfit. We were attached to the police squadron in the service, so we had an opportunity to see a lot. Of course, we had the guard assigned us, too. So we had to be with them. And that was another thing --

### **So is this similar to what the Army calls the MPs?**

The MPs. They called them APs at the time. But, you see, ours is a little bit different. They have now separated the two duties. It used to be security and law enforcement. And see, you either worked one side or the other. But you had to have both of them during that particular

time because the Air Force was only created in 1947. Before then, it was the Air Corps. So we were going in, in '54, when they were just trying to get everything together. So that's why our career ladder, as I indicated, led to Langley Field. You could very well see why once you worked there -- you see, we had to work with the FBI and scientists because you were dealing with scientists.

I remember one time I was following this scientist, one of Von Braun's people. It was funny. Now, you have to understand this. This black kid was on the gate, and the scientist is coming up to the gate in his car. The kid does this [salutes similar to the way a salute is executed in World War II Germany]. Now, to a German scientist, he thought maybe he was playing with him or something. You know, like "Seig Heil." He kept driving. And, oh, Lord, this kid turned around and put a .45 right through the window. I had to run up and say, "Hold it, hold it, hold it, hold it. Look, man, don't shoot." Of course, this is a scientist, now. This guy could not speak English for about two weeks after that. He just had a flashback, you see. But it was so funny. We had to put in the report as to what happened. Of course, everybody kind of laughed at it, you know, because this guy walked out, and this means stop, you know. But to a German, he said, "Seig Heil." You know, he thought he was playing with him or something.

**Wow! I want to jump forward just for a little while because we only have a few more minutes today. I'm going to ask you a little bit about the beginning of your political career. But just to get into that, you're from Louisiana. How do you feel about Katrina and what's happening with that right now? And do you think that the government should be doing more, looking at your own political background?**

Well, yes. It's a bad thing about Katrina and the way that happened. You see, those of us in government, like myself, work from the basis of five principles of government. Those five

principles are found in the Preamble to the Constitution. It talks about the "establishment of justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessing of liberty to ourselves and our prosperity."

What has actually happened, starting with Reagan where it became very evident, they wanted to erase from the government that portion of the responsibility that deals with the general welfare. As a result of that, you would get a Katrina because the Bush Administration does not see that as a government function -- or did not see that as a government function until the tragedy occurred. Money was taken out of the budget to build the levees, which could have withstood the storm and the surges of that. They did not do that.

We can see that whole aspect of the general welfare not being a part of this administration, how it's affecting even the coal miners right now in Kentucky and other places because you do not see individuals. You only see profit and the people who make it. So as a result of that, people suffer. That's one of the things that you see with the big fight with Alito that's going on in Congress right now. He is of the opinion that his decision goes towards protecting the wealthy against the poor. Katrina falls into that particular category. That's why you can read certain statements, such as the one from the guy that they had in charge of Katrina, Brown. He was told that, "Hey, we've got a problem here. The water is rising. We've got these people at the convention center. We've got to move them." His reply was, "I'm having dinner." There's no sense of responsibility to people in general, only to friends who are wealthy.

So that's what is happening with Katrina, and that's the bad thing about it. And until you change the administration, you're going to continue to have this. You see, what Reagan did was to wipe out all of those things that Roosevelt put into play in the 30s. Roosevelt provided for the general welfare of the citizens. He did that in such a way that we had the conglomerates which



were able in the 30s to dictate to individuals and control their lives. He put in regulations to control them. Then you get the deregulation coming under Reagan and Bush and all of the other people.

And you get things such as the notion that, hey, we need free enterprise. Free enterprise, yes, can do certain things. But free enterprise is supposed to be used to take care of those things they can develop outside of the government, which would enhance government and enhance the general welfare of the nation. They have not done that.

**What made you decide to go into politics? And was 1978 the first political run?**

1972.

**'72. Okay. Tell me about that.**

No, '72 was not the first political run. My first run for the state legislature was in 1964. Yes. And that was done because, after getting out of school and coming back here, I saw something that disturbed me. There were black people running, but they didn't want to put their picture on the poster, you know. They wanted to put the name out there, just like saying white folks didn't know who they were. So I decided that I'd spend some money, get me 50 posters, put my name on it and just go ahead and tack them up around town. And it just scared the living daylights out of folks when that happened. And I ran in '64.

**What did you run for, which office?**

The assembly. At that time they had nine seats. That was shortly after reapportionment, the first reapportionment. I ran again for the senate, which had five seats at that time, in 1966. In 1968, I did move here.

**To North Las Vegas?**

Yes, into North Las Vegas. And they had two seats up. Each time I knew that I wasn't

going to get elected. But this time, the plan was a little bit different. See, what had happened, in the early 60s they had built this community to attract blacks out of Las Vegas.

### **Out of the Westside?**

Yes, out of the Westside, because at that time blacks, if they wanted to, could have taken over the mayor's job. They had this many votes. You see, in the early 60s, 1960, when I look back at it, and '62, when I was here studying and still going to school, and when I came back in '63, you had pretty close to 8,000, 9,000 votes just in the Westside alone. When you look at that, and consider the fact that it only took about 25,000 votes at that time to elect the governor, that was a hell of an influence. And you had the mayor and everybody else coming to the Westside trying to get the votes.

So they decided that they would build the houses just across the North Las Vegas line, and that would pull that population out. And it did. It was effective. But what it did, it put North Las Vegas in jeopardy.

When I came down here, North Las Vegas had two assemblymen. They had Dave Branch, and they had a guy by the name of Paul May. They ran staggered terms. I decided that I would run against Paul May just in the black community, now, not run in the white community. My campaign would just be in the black community. I almost beat Paul May. But I was talking about reapportionment; one man, one vote, single-seat district.

At this time, I'd gone to work for Reynold's Electrical Engineering Company. I went to work for Reynold's in February 1966 as a compliance officer. Paul May came over to my office and said to me, "You've been talking about this reapportionment." In fact, this was 1970 when I actually ran against Paul. Yeah. He said to me, "You were talking about this reapportionment. What is it that you want out of this?" I had a blackboard in my office, so I went to the blackboard

and said, "Here's what I want. I want one senator, two assemblymen. I want a hospital trustee." We had a hospital trustee at that time. I said, "I want a school board representative. I want a county commissioner. I want a board of regent, and I want a state board of education person out of that." And he said, "Okay, I'll work with you on this."

Well, in the 1970 election, the Republicans actually took over in the assembly. But the Democrats took over in the senate. So I'm associated through Reynold's Electrical Engineering with the Atomic Energy Commission who is associated with EG&G. EG&G had a guy by the name of Frank Young who ran for the assembly as a Republican. So I went to Frank and I said, "Frank, you guys, Republicans, want to increase your numbers and hold on to the seats?" He said, "Well, yes." I said, "Here's the way you can do it. You can support single-seat districts, and you can get that on." Frank said, "Well, yes."

It so happened that Frank Young became the chairman of the Election Committee. So he and Paul May put this plan together, which included just what I said it should. And they pushed it through the assembly. It went to the senate. And the senate passed it. Now, this is 1971.

In August, after the session was over, the Democratic Party sued the legislature over the single-seat districts. Now, why did they do that? Because to create single seats at that time meant that you would take Democrats' votes from the enlarged number of seats that they were running in Clark County, which was nine. They could only get one person elected, and that was Woodrow Wilson. You see, they have nine seats up. Blacks would come in and support those nine people, and they would lift Woody over the (indiscernible). So Woody ran for three terms. He was the first person that got elected.

So when they did that, I went and got me some Republicans to counter-sue. And we got together with a law firm -- it wasn't a law firm. I guess it was a gentleman and his daddy, Doug

Beener. He had a son. His son died, but I think Doug, the old man, is still living. So we got him to counter-sue and to go for single seats across the board, in both houses, the senate and the assembly, knowing full well we're not going to get that. But the court more than likely now would go with the legislative reapportionment, which gave the blacks their single seat.

On December the 13th, 1971, a three-judge panel met in Reno, Nevada, in the federal court and ruled that the reapportionment of the legislature would stand. That gave us the senator, the two assemblymen, the board of regents, the state board of education, the school board trustee -- I forgot that -- and the hospital trustee. The law changed that and wiped out the hospital trustee because, you know, they used to elect a board to the hospital, but they changed that. And so we were left with those particular seats. So I ran for the senate in 1972. That's how it got started.

Of course, following that election, now, George Franklin sued the county commission and stopped the reapportionment of the county commission. Now, why he did that is --

**(End side 1, tape 2.)**

The legislature could not reapportion the county commission. They had to do that themselves. So the first person who got elected to the county commission was Aaron Williams. And then he gave up his seat. And some guy -- I forgot this guy's name. I think his name was Bowers -- ran. He was with Channel 8 at the time, and he got elected during the time when Franklin sued. And then when they changed it back over, we ran Woodrow Wilson against this guy and took the seat back, you see. And, of course, Woodrow Wilson got into problems, you know, with taking money.

**So now, that was in our recent history, sort of, that Woodrow Wilson got into trouble?**

No. That was kind of in the late 70s. Yes, the late 70s when Woody got into trouble. You

know, they ran the sting on the legislature, the FBI – what do you call that thing? It was named after the FBI agent that was in charge. I can't think of his name right now.

**We'll find it.**

But Woody got involved in that. And, of course, I guess he should have known better. And that ruined his career. That just put him out. But that is the story about the reapportionment, yeah.

**So I'm just going to ask a couple more questions. According to some information that I read about you, there was a statement that you "will remain engaged with the great issues as you have been throughout your life." They were talking about once you retired, you were going to still remain engaged. So what do you mean by these "great issues"? What have been your great issues?**

Well, it's a matter of fairness -- making sure that people are not mistreated and seeing that government works for people. I was just out at your university on the grade-point-average thing that they wanted to change. And I had some statements to make about that. Those are the types of issues that I'm concerned about, to utilize the knowledge that I have and the understanding that I have of the issues to help people fight the system.

**Okay. So with your strong stand on education, how do you feel about increasing the grade point average?**

How do I feel about it?

**Yes. What are your thoughts?**

I don't think that you have to increase the grade point average because that does not do anything for students. This is an issue that arose out of an error in which there was a great attempt to segregate the schools, to have segregated schools in this country. What happened then started

with Richard Nixon trying to win over the South in the election after he was defeated by John Kennedy in 1960. He was running against Hubert Humphrey in 1968. He made this deal with the South that he would do certain things in terms of trying to reverse the effects of the Brown versus Topeka, Kansas case [*Brown v Board of Education*], and that he would appoint judges and do certain things that would hamper that whole move towards integration.

Now, how did they do that? They interjected the idea that education should be modeled based on syllogism, have a syllogistic model of education rather than a cognitive model, which is based on cognition. What does that do? When you teach people syllogistically in education, then you plant seeds in the minds through association. The 311 Boys are an example of this. They have to associate with people of like minds, and they count out other people. It creates a type of thinking in the mind, say, such as when a policeman would see a black kid or a Hispanic kid walking in a prominent neighborhood. The association says he's not supposed to be there, and he would be stopped.

But, also, it had a greater effect. It had a greater effect because syllogism is not a scientific mind-set. Only cognitive thinking is a mind-set. Cognitive thinking is saying if I had a hole in the wall here and you saw all black rats, you know, syllogistic thinking tells you all black rats reside in there. But cognitive thinking would tell you to examine that to see whether or not it's true.

So that's why I am concerned about this because what you are now getting from educators, in particular your chancellor, is looking at education as being a product. Education is not a product. It's a process, you see. You never stop learning. If it's going to be a product, then it tells me what he wants is a clone. That's a product, you see. Once you get a clone, people think like him, you see. That becomes a product. But if you want thinking people, then you don't need grade point average. You just need to teach. You just need to teach. That's all. And if you teach,

people would learn.

See, I'll tell you something that I discovered here about a year ago. You have an Indian teacher, from India, who has a doctoral degree out here in one of the schools. It's not Eldorado. It's one of the high schools. He teaches calculus, geometry, you know, all what you call the hard subjects. He's got kids at that school breaking his door down trying to get into that class. He can't take all of them. Why? Because he makes it easier for them to learn. He has structured calculus in such a way that he makes it interesting for them to learn it, you see.

**He's a great teacher.**

His name is Kahn. He called me up one day, and he said, "Come out and take a look at my class." So I went out, and I was astounded to see the number of students that he's got. He sent them to the board, you know, one after the other, just picked them. He said, "Get up to the board. Work this problem." They go to the board, not afraid, you see. If you understand the Institute of India, it is one of the greatest institutions in the world. People who flunked out of that come to MIT and Harvard and get straight A's.

**Right. They showcased it on *60 Minutes*. You're right.**

Yes. So that's what we need to do. And I think that once you put education on a cognitive model and relieve it from that syllogism, then you're going to have (indiscernible). And you don't have to have grade point average to do that. You just have to have teachers that said, "Hey, buddy, you don't have to showboat. Show me what you got." And he put it out there, and the kids would learn it. But if you try to make it difficult, the kids are going to look at you and say, "What is it?" They're not going to try to get in there with you. But if you try to make it easy on them, they're going to learn it. And they can.

You look at these kids getting out on the dance floor and doing all these complicated dance

steps, shoot, you know, hell, they can learn math. You know, what they're doing, they're doing the trigonometry, geometry all at the same time when they start doing those movements, you know.

**I agree. I agree.**

Yes.

**The last question that I'm going to ask today before we stop is: What was your toughest senatorial race over the 32-year period?**

I have never had a race that I didn't not think I was going to win, okay? I've had some surprises. And some of those surprises were -- I guess two, one when we ran against Ruby Duncan's son.

**Dave Phillips?**

Dave Phillips. And the other one was against Yurie Clinton. But that was not a race against Yurie Clinton. See, we made that a race against the gaming industry. So it wasn't a race against him. It was a race against the gaming industry. That's what we were running against. And we knew that we were going to win that race, you know, because we had structured it so. But my surprises would not be in getting elected. My difficulty, I might say, would not be in getting elected. My difficulty was in the senate itself, you know, trying to get people to understand where I was coming from on some of the issues that we had to deal with. And my perspective on where the state should go was not necessarily where the people who always voted would think the state should go.

One example would be where I had control of the state fire law. Yes. The state fire law. Now, that was an area of great concern to me where I authored and sponsored a bill for the high-rise hotel because of my thinking about the general welfare of people who actually come here. When I was allowed to do those things, you see, the state was better off for it. As it turned



out, the hotels gained a lot in terms of insurance premiums, not having to pay those huge insurance premiums and not having any deaths in the hotels since that bill was passed. See, that bill turned out to be one of the -- well, the best fire law, fire protection law in the world. But I had control of it because at the time I was chairing the committee to which the bill went.

**Which committee?**

That was Human Resources Committee. When I introduced the bill, we put it on the desk and asked all of the senators if they wanted to sign on. We had one senator, a guy by the name of Bill Ernsted, who used to have a TV station out here in Henderson. He's the only one that signed on that bill. So I took the bill into the committee, fast-tracked it for hearing, got our state fire marshal over to testify. He told me things we should do. We put it together and sent it down to the Assembly. When we sent it to the Assembly, all of a sudden it was discovered that this is a major piece of legislation. So List, the governor at that time, tried to derail it and put his bill in the Assembly. But fortunately for me, I had a good friend that I had developed over the years named Jack Jeffries who headed the committee that my bill went to. Jeffries came to me and said, "Joe, we've got List's bill down here. What do you want to do?" I said, "Take out all of the good things that pertain to fire safety, put it in my bill, send it back, and we'll pass it." That's what happened.

That bill is now on the books, and it's being copied all over the world as one of the best fire protection laws for high-rise buildings in the world. The fire marshal who worked with me on that bill left after ten years and became a consultant on it.

**Oh, that's fantastic.**

Yeah. But, you know, they still try to take that away from me.

**That bill?**

Yes. They just did a 25-year recount on the MGM fire, and they tried to give credit to

Kenny Guinn. I had to write them a letter. If you look at yesterday's paper -- or the day before yesterday's paper, you'll see the letter that I wrote in the paper.

**I will be sure to read it.**

Yes. I had to write a letter about it. And the guy (indiscernible). Of course, the editor told me, "Look, Senator, I was not here, so we let Joan" -- whatever her name is -- this right-footed political thing over there -- "do it because she was here." He said, "I was not here." So when I gave him the information, he put it in the paper and said okay. Best fire law in the world.

**That's great. I really appreciate this. We can make another appointment so that we can really start putting it in some detail.**

Okay. All right.

**(End side 2, tape 2.)**