



# **Nevada Legislature Oral History Project**

**ROBERT R. BARENGO**

**Democrat**

**Assembly, 1972 – 1982**

**OCTOBER 7, 2008  
RENO, NEVADA**

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**BARENGO LAW OFFICE**

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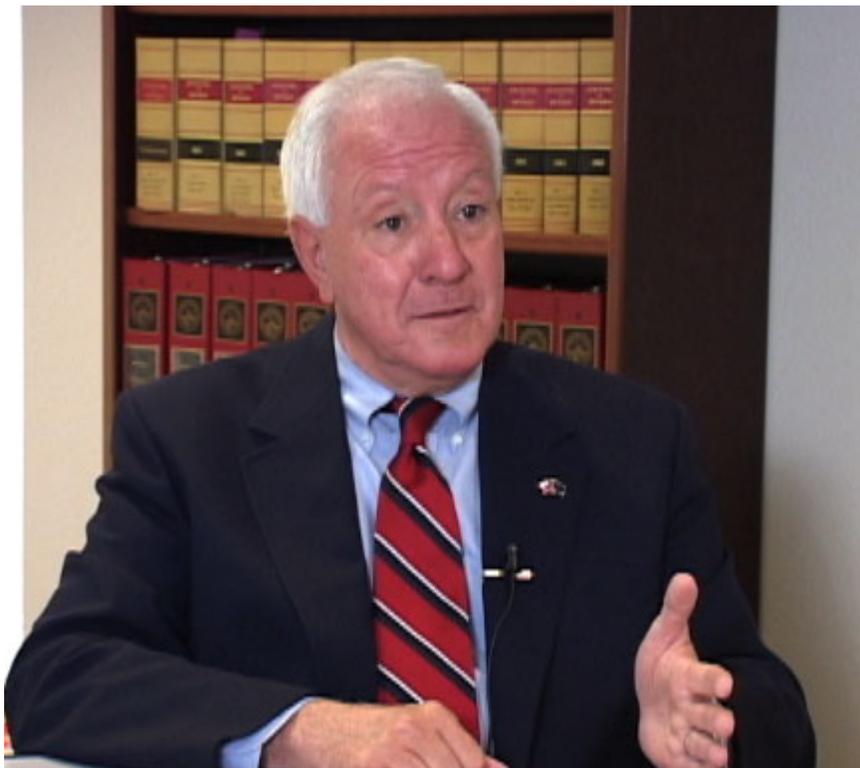
## **PROJECT INTRODUCTION**

The 2007 Nevada Legislature approved an appropriation for a project of conducting oral histories with former state legislators, and in the summer following the conclusion of the session, the Research Division of the Legislative Counsel Bureau (LCB) conducted a competitive bid process to identify and obtain a contractor to carry out the project. A committee consisting of LCB and other state personnel with expertise in Nevada history and politics evaluated and ranked the proposals received. In January 2008, a contract was signed between LCB and Get Consensus, LLC, for an 18-month program.

Administered by Donald O. Williams, Research Director, and coordinated by Amber Joiner, Senior Research Analyst, the Nevada Legislature Oral History Project consists of video- and audio-taped interviews, which have been transcribed, edited for readability, and indexed. An initial list of suggested interview subjects had been presented to the Senate Committee on Finance when it considered Senate Bill 373, which proposed an appropriation for the creation of an oral history of the Nevada Legislature. Using that as the starting point, LCB staff considered several factors—such as age, length of legislative tenure, contributions to the State of Nevada, and whether a formal oral history of the individual had been published or was underway—when identifying the former legislators who would be interviewed. The final list provided to the contractor revealed a careful balance of legislative house, political party, and geographic distribution among the interviewees.

After LCB staff acquired the written permission of each subject, the contractor would proceed with scheduling the interview at a time and place convenient for the former legislator. Each interview was simultaneously filmed and audiotaped. The audio recording was transcribed verbatim and then edited by the contractor for readability. Each interviewed legislator was provided the opportunity to review his or her edited document, and any misstatements or errors in the videotape were corrected in the text. The contractor produced three copies of each final product, which includes the text and a DVD of the interview film. Copies were presented to LCB's Research Library and the State Library in Carson City; the subject legislator also received a copy of his or her interview. The repository of record for all digital film and audio files is LCB's Research Library.

Together, these interviews make a significant contribution to the annals of Nevada politics and provide incomparable context to the state's legislative history. The official legislative record outlines the chronology for actions taken by Nevada's lawmaking body; these oral histories vividly portray the background and circumstances in which such actions occurred. Invaluable for understanding Nevada's politics in the latter half of the twentieth century, these interviews present interesting explanations, entertaining stories, and thoughtful observations that might otherwise have been lost.



**Robert R. Barengo**  
**October 7, 2008**

## **ROBERT R. BARENGO**

Robert R. Barengo was first elected to represent Reno in the Nevada Assembly in 1972. The lifelong Democrat chaired the Assembly Committee on Judiciary in 1975 and 1977; two years later, Mr. Barengo was Speaker Pro Tempore. In 1981, he served as Speaker. Born and raised in Reno, Mr. Barengo graduated from California State University at Hayward and received his law degree from the University of Santa Clara. A bachelor during most of his legislative service, he married Tamara Eccles in 1979; they continue to reside in Reno.

Mr. Barengo was interviewed in the conference room at his law office in Reno on October 7, 2008. He answered questions about topics such as his first campaign for the Assembly, how Assembly committees functioned, important issues of the time, and his personal perspective on key political figures. Mr. Barengo points out that 1972 was the first election in which Assembly members were elected from districts. Prior to that time, members were elected at-large and, in the larger counties, as part of a slate. He details how he was able to prevail, with the help of his father who had run for the Assembly two decades earlier, in a five-person primary against more experienced politicians. Mr. Barengo also remembers that most elections for Speaker were hotly contested and describes his race with Assemblyman Jack Vergiels (D-Clark) in 1981. After winning with bi-partisan support, Mr. Barengo appointed Assemblywoman Karen Hayes (D-Clark) as Speaker Pro Tempore, making her the first woman to hold a leadership position for an entire session.

Mr. Barengo recalls many of the ways in which the legislative process changed during his tenure as the Nevada Legislature modernized and became more efficient. He describes the old phone systems, the lack of personal offices, and the roll call voting system. He notes that the Assembly and Senate Judiciary Committees were on opposite sides of the same wall; committee members often visited back and forth through the connecting doorway. He also discusses many of the topics that came before the Nevada Legislature during his tenure, such as the Equal Rights Amendment, the death penalty, gaming law revisions, state financing, and landlord-tenant issues. One of the more contentious topics—abortion—arose during his first session. Mr. Barengo describes the meeting at the Fallon ranch of Senator Carl Dodge (R-Churchill) to craft a bill that conformed to the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade*. Ultimately co-sponsored by Assemblymen Barengo, an attorney, and Assemblyman Robert V. Broadbent (R-Washoe), a physician, the bill passed the Legislature in 1973.

Having decided not to seek a sixth term in the Assembly, Mr. Barengo ran for the office of State Treasurer in 1982, but lost that contest to Republican Assemblywoman Patty Cafferata of Reno. He reflects that the loss turned out to be for the best and allowed him to return to the legislative process as a lobbyist. He discusses the difference between the two roles and considers the various changes he has witnessed over the years. Although he had not intended to begin a lobbying career at the time of his defeat in 1982, he was pleased, many years later, to be inducted into the James A. Joyce Lobbyist Hall of Fame. Mr. Barengo no longer lobbies full-time, but testifies occasionally in his capacity as a member of the Nevada Tax Commission on which he has served since 2003.

**Dana Bennett:** Good morning, Assemblyman Barengo.

**Bob Barengo:** Good morning to you, Dana. Nice to see you.

**Bennett:** Good to see you, too. Let's think back to the beginning of your first session. It's January 15, 1973. It was a fairly mild day until a storm came in later in the day, and the newspaper said that the session was not supposed to be too remarkable. You're walking into the Assembly Chambers for the first time as an elected legislator. Do you remember what you were thinking that day?

**Barengo:** I really don't. We had had caucus meetings beforehand to elect leadership and to do those things, so we had been primed already. I don't remember much of that day other than that my family was with me—my mother and my grandmothers—and going through the swearing-in ceremonies and that kind of thing.

**Bennett:** Were you the first one in your family to be elected to public office?

**Barengo:** Correct.

**Bennett:** You're a multi-generational Nevadan, so that must have been remarkable for your family.

**Barengo:** They were very happy, yes, and very interested. It meant a lot to them as Nevadans.

**Bennett:** You were born and raised in Reno. [**Barengo:** Yes.] What was your impression of the Legis-

lature as you were growing up? Did you know any legislators?

**Barengo:** Actually, I knew quite a few. Reno was a small town in those days, and you knew folks. My father had actually run for the Assembly when I was maybe in grammar school. He was not elected. But we knew a lot of legislators and state senators. Len Harris comes to mind. He was a good friend of our family's. He was a State Senator and also Mayor of Reno. We went down to the Legislature as kids. I had been in the Legislature before I was elected, when I was with the District Attorney's office. I had been down there on various pieces of criminal legislation that we were working on, so I knew the process.

*Rosmino N. (Ross) Barengo won the Democratic primary for a Washoe Assembly seat in 1950, but lost in the Republican sweep of the general election. He reported a total of \$78.66 in campaign expenditures.*

*Leonard H. Harris (R-Washoe) was the Mayor of Reno from 1955 to 1959, an Assemblyman from 1962 to 1968, and a Senator from 1968 to 1972.*

**Bennett:** Why did you decide to run for the Legislature in the first place?

**Barengo:** Probably because I had worked on Spike Wilson's campaign two years previously. Seeing Spike get elected to the State Senate gave me an appetite to try to run myself for the Assembly. We used a lot of the same folks who were on Spike's campaign. They came over and worked on my campaign.

*Thomas R.C. (Spike) Wilson II served in the Senate from 1970 to 1986.*

**Bennett:** How did a campaign work in the early 1970s? What sorts of things did you have to do to prepare for your campaign and then to execute it?

**Barengo:** I had an interesting campaign. I had five Democrats in my primary. It was the first time that Assembly candidates had run for single seats, which was why that year was a very different year. It was the first time that the Senate and the Assembly were in districts. Before that, they ran county-wide, and you voted for slates. Now it was different. I had northeast Reno, which is where I had grown up and gone to high school. Manogue was there in those days. I ran for that area of town. It was not money that got you elected. It was getting out and knocking on doors and meeting people.

In the race that I was in, there was a former Assemblyman who had been appointed but never elected; there was a well-known lawyer from town; a person from the University community who had big support from the University; and myself. I forget who the fifth person was.

But in any event, what won it for me was that we had mail voting precincts in those days. They mailed ballots to some of the sparsely populated areas along the Fourth Street corridor—for example, along the corridor up on Valley Road where it wasn't convenient to get to. So on the days that the mailing went out, my father and I went to every single mailing house and knocked on their door practically as the ballot was being delivered to

*Barengo's Democratic primary opponents included Ann Beck, William K. Lohse, and Ray Crosby who had been appointed in 1959 to fill the unexpired term of deceased Assemblyman Oscar D. Jepson (D-Washoe).*

them, talked to the people, and got a significant amount of those votes.

**Bennett:** Was that for the primary or for the general?

**Barengo:** That was for the primary. In the general, I ran against Nick Lauri who was an incumbent and a good guy who went on to be on the city council for many years. In my district, I had to work harder, I think, in the primary, and so I won pretty well in the general.

*Nick Lauri (R-Washoe)  
served in the Assembly  
from 1970 to 1972.*

**Bennett:** What were the sorts of things that you hoped to do in the Legislature?

**Barengo:** I had about three things at that time that I came out with. One was open space. The current law that we have now for the use of land for a lower tax base was something I introduced during that session. There were a couple of others; I cannot remember whether they passed or not at this time.

**Bennett:** After that session was over, there were some who claimed that it was simply a rubber-stamp of the Governor's agenda except for abortion, which turned out to be a hotter issue that session, I think, than some had anticipated with *Roe v. Wade* decided right after the session opened. What was your sense of the Governor's involvement in that session?

**Barengo:** You know, I don't recall. Was it that session when *Roe v. Wade* was the issue?

**Bennett:** *Roe v. Wade* was decided about three weeks after the session opened.

*The U.S. Supreme Court's decision in **Roe v. Wade** was announced on January 22, 1973.*

**Barengo:** Yes. Bob List was the Attorney General, and the *Roe v. Wade* legislation was sponsored by Bob Barengo and Bob Broadbent, a lawyer and a physician. We crafted the legislation with the help of Attorney General List to exactly mirror the Supreme Court decision—no further, no less. We thought it would be bi-partisan—a Republican and a Democrat; a lawyer and a doctor—to put this forward and to get it through because we had to do something. And that was how that came about.

*Robert List (R) was Nevada Attorney General from 1971 to 1979.*

*Dr. Robert V. Broadbent (R-Washoe) served in the Assembly from 1972 to 1974.*

Governor O'Callaghan, who was a very forceful person as you remember, had had a bad previous session with the Legislature and had been very unhappy with them. He then established the Governor's PAC, if you will. They didn't call it that in those days, but he had a PAC. He supported candidates, took polls, did lots of things, and played an integral role, I think, in getting a lot of people elected. I had met O'Callaghan before that, but O'Callaghan had nothing to do with my race except that he came to an event I had at the Washoe County Fairgrounds.

So whether it was a rubber stamp or not, I don't know. The Governor took a very active role in the Legislature. I think that Governors

previously had not, and that may have caused the criticism of him. But he was very active in the Legislature. He came over a lot. He would call you; I can remember getting calls at four in the morning: “Why did you do this yesterday?” [chuckles] and we would have these discussions. I don’t think it was necessarily his session, but he had an agenda he wanted passed.

**Bennett:** In that session, both houses were Democrat, and the Governor was a Democrat. Did that have a measurable effect on how the session ran that year?

**Barengo:** Keith Ashworth was in his first term as Speaker that year. We had 22 freshmen in the Assembly, and so the freshmen were the majority. The freshman legislators formed a bond among ourselves. We got to be pretty close with each other. Now there were varying people who would vote different ways, but the freshmen kind of looked to the freshmen to vote. It wasn’t like it is now, where you vote party lines—we voted however we wanted to vote. There was no requirement that we had to vote the party line. I remember that Jack Vergiels, who was the whip that time, would give us what the Governor’s proposal was, and we would say, “Gee, that’s nice. We’re not voting that way.” So it was not mandated. You didn’t get ostracized if you didn’t vote with the party.

*Keith Ashworth (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1966 to 1976. He was Speaker in 1973 and 1975. He served in the Senate from 1976 to 1984.*

*John M. (Jack) Vergiels (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1972 to 1984. He was Speaker in 1983.*

I think today their campaign contributions come from the party. It wasn't that way. We raised our own campaign contributions.

**Bennett:** How did you raise those campaign contributions?

**Barengo:** As I said, most of running was working door-to-door, but you had to pay for your material, your campaign brochures and things. That was something I personally did or had a group of people who would help me. I think we raised a grand total of \$9,000.

**Bennett:** Were there party caucus meetings during session?

**Barengo:** We had party caucus meetings. I specifically remember one caucus meeting where we were told we had to do something, and we said, "No, we're not going to do it." The leadership said, "We won't start until you guys agree to do it," and we said, "Well, don't start because we're the majority. You can't start the place without us, so we're going to do what we think we want to do. We don't want to be told how to vote."

There were not caucus meetings like they have them today. Maybe the issue would be to inform you, but there was no mandate that you had to vote that way. They would *check* votes sometimes, but it was not like, "You must vote this way."

**Bennett:** Were those freshmen primarily Democrats, or was it a fairly even mix of Democrats and Republicans?

**Barengo:** I can't recall the exact makeup of the numbers, but it was not all Democrats.

**Bennett:** Across the state?

**Barengo:** Across the state. We had election contests, too, to start off with. It was with Hal Smith, who was the Republican, and Hal was seated in a Democratic district.

**Bennett:** As I understood the news reports when I was looking at the paper for that year, it was one of the first sessions where all of the leadership in both the Senate and the Assembly came from Clark County.

**Barengo:** An unusual year, yes.

**Bennett:** The Reno papers were concerned about that. Did that have an effect?

**Barengo:** You know, I don't like this north-south stuff. I've never liked it. I think we're all Nevadans, and I think that we all have to take into consideration that the state *is* different.

In those days, we used to talk about having three states, and we had to make sure to deal with each of the three states. We had the north, the south, and the rurals—all had different problems and different ways of addressing them. We had to take that into consideration. I

*Robert Hallock (Hal) Smith (R-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1966 to 1974.*

don't think that is done so much today. It's not thought about that way.

**Bennett:** Was there a particular reason you ran as a Democrat?

**Barengo:** I had been a Democrat, and I had supported Senators Bible and Cannon. Santini was a Congressman then, and I've known him all my life. I was a Democrat, and that's why I ran.

**Bennett:** Did your father run as a Democrat?

**Barengo:** My father did run as a Democrat. That's correct.

**Bennett:** Sort of a family legacy?

**Barengo:** Somewhat, yes.

**Bennett:** Even though you were somewhat familiar with the legislative process, was there anything that surprised you that first session about legislative work?

**Barengo:** I'd gone to law school. Of course, when you go to law school, you think you know everything about everything, and you knew how the laws work. In my time in the Legislature, I learned a lot about law. I had a foundation from law school, but I really learned a lot more as a legislator.

During that session, I was Vice-Chairman of the Judiciary Committee, and Keith Hayes was Chairman. Keith got sick in

*U.S. Senators from Nevada Alan Bible (D) and Howard Cannon (D) served from 1954 to 1974 and 1959 to 1983, respectively. Congressman James Santini (D) served from 1975 to 1983.*

that session. He had cancer and had to leave, and I became Chairman of Judiciary. So I was Chairman of Judiciary from my first session, and you get more into the nuts and bolts of how things work and how to run things when you are a chairman. Of course, Keith was a freshman, too, so Keith and I had made this agreement at the beginning that we would actually be Co-Chairs, but when he left, I became Chair. His wife, Karen Hayes, subsequently served in the Legislature. Keith died after serving very admirably on the bench in Clark County for a number of years.

*Keith C. Hayes (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1972 to 1974 when Governor O'Callaghan appointed him Clark County District Court Judge. He was named Chief Judge in 1976. He passed away in 1981.*

**Bennett:** From our perspective now, it seems unusual that two freshmen would be chairing and vice-chairing Assembly Judiciary, a major committee.

**Barengo:** It was, but there were 22 freshmen, and in those days, the Assembly was not 42, either; it was 40. So they had to put people someplace; they really wanted the experience, but the other experienced lawyers in the Assembly were either Republicans or on other committees. On that Judiciary Committee, there were some very senior, experienced, and *very* good lawyers, so I learned a lot from them. At that time, Mel Close was the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, and we had back-to-back offices and hearing rooms. We had a door between our rooms, and we used to go back and forth

*Melvin D. Close, Jr., (D-Clark) served in the Senate from 1970 to 1982. He chaired Senate Judiciary all but one of those sessions.*

between the Senate and Assembly Judiciary Committees to see what was going on. There were a lot of relationships then with the Senate and the Assembly. That doesn't exist any more, either, because they've changed the configuration of the building.

**Bennett:** That was the second session in the new building? [**Barengo:** Correct.] Were the committee rooms all on one floor, or how was that set up?

**Barengo:** The committee rooms were on the second and third floors. There was nothing above that. Actually, I think they were mostly all on the second floor. Not everybody had offices in those days, either. Only the committee chairmen had offices. The Judiciary Committee had a fairly good-sized office, and we sandwiched in two desks so Keith and I each had a desk.

The other thing that I remember about that legislative session, which is kind of an odd thing to remember, is that we had rotary phones. If you wanted to make a phone call, you had to dial nine, and it would take forever to make a phone call. Halfway through the session, somebody asked why we had rotary phones. There were push-button phones around. We found out there had been an executive order that only the Governor's Office could have push-button phones. We said, "Wait a

*In 1971, the Nevada Legislature moved from the State Capitol Building to its own facility about a block away. Nevada is one of only three states in the country where the Legislature and the Governor are not housed in the same buildings.*

minute. We're the Legislature. We can have whatever we want." So we got push-button phones. [chuckles]

**Bennett:** That's great! Did everyone have access to a phone? Obviously, the chairs had phones in their offices, but what about the rank and file?

**Barengo:** The rank and file had large meeting rooms on the ground floor where there were phones, and there were pay phones, but if you were not a committee chair or had some other way, you didn't have a phone. But we had quite a lax policy. Everyone would use the phones in our offices, and the secretaries would take messages for everybody else. In those days, you did your work at your desk. That's why the desks are designed the way they are. That was your working desk, not just your floor desk.

**Bennett:** So it wouldn't have been unusual to find people sitting on the floor throughout the whole day?

**Barengo:** Absolutely not. In the center of the Legislative Building, there was the Nevada Bell phone system. The phone operators were all in there. They would take messages, and then they would go find you to give you a message. Sometimes, they would hold the call, and you would run back and get on one of the phones that were in the phone booths and take your phone call there as a legislator. I returned calls that way, also. There was a mailbox on the wall

*A bank of several booths, each with its own coin-operated telephone, lined the wall approximately where the Lobbyist Table is currently located.*

where you could get your messages as you went by every day or several times a day. It was not as good as it is now. The minutes were horrible!

**Bennett:** Who was taking the minutes?

**Barengo:** The secretaries would take them by hand. Sometimes, we had tape machines, but they were not sophisticated like they are now. There was a paucity of information in the minutes.

**Bennett:** Was it during your tenure when the Legislature mandated that all minutes would be taken and kept?

**Barengo:** Right about then, yes.

**Bennett:** Was there a change in technology that made minute-taking a little bit easier?

**Barengo:** There was more of a call for minutes. Some people didn't take any minutes at all or destroyed them, and we never knew what happened. There was also a movement across the country at that time to make legislatures more efficient. We were striving to become one of the efficient legislatures, which we achieved and got some national recognition for doing that in the 1970s.

**Bennett:** What were some of the other things done to achieve efficiency?

**Barengo:** One of the things we've always had is a good bill-printing process. Other states were still

writing out amendments and intermediating them. We printed them, and we stuck by that pretty well over the years. That raised us up nationally on how efficient we were.

During my first couple of terms, if you look at the *Journal*, you'll see people absent from votes. The reason they were absent is that there were committee meetings going on. We restructured the committee meetings so that they happened at a specific time, and then the floor action happened at a specific time. Before that, everything was going all the time, so if you wanted to be in a committee meeting, you had to miss floor actions.

**Bennett:** Interesting. So there were committee meetings happening throughout the day? [**Barengo:** Yes.] Were they at set times?

**Barengo:** They generally were, but they were at odd times, or they could be called at any time. I've heard stories that, before I got there, they used to rent motel rooms to have meetings because they had no space for them in the old building. We had some hearing rooms, but not that many.

Also we did not have electronic voting. We had roll-call voting. It may take longer, but I believe it's better. I believe it is better because what happens now is everybody votes right now, and they vote because, to a large part,

because they listen to the prepared floor speeches—it's not debate anymore—and they were told how to vote prior to the vote by the leadership. There's no longer debate on the floor. It's a floor speech prepared by staff. That didn't happen most of the years I was there. Prepared floor statements were only made when there was a significant piece of legislation, and you wanted to make sure that significant pieces of information were included in the floor statements. Other than that, you either wrote your own speech or you spoke extemporaneously about the bills, then you got up on the floor, and you argued them.

We used to debate bills by section and clauses on the floor, and then we had a roll-call vote. Legislators would look to certain people who they believed had an expertise in that area. They would withhold their vote until they saw how "John Smith," who was an expert in financial matters, was going to vote because they weren't sure that they understood this bill correctly and relied upon what "John Smith" knew because of his expertise. So there would be abstain, abstain, abstain, abstain, abstain, and then there would be yes votes. Then people would come back and say, "Having abstained, I now wish to be recorded as yes or no."

It was a longer process, but I believe it was a more deliberative process. You had to

think about things. You had to understand each bill and read each bill and argue about the components of the bill.

**Bennett:** Do any particular debates stand out in your mind?

**Barengo:** We had lots of them on lots of issues. Obviously, we talked about abortion; there was a big debate on that in that time of the year. ERA [Equal Rights Amendment] was looming its head about that same time for a couple of sessions; there were big debates on that. We had a lot of things making the statutes neutral. There was landlord-tenant legislation in that session. Issues would come up that would be debated upon between old-time legislators versus new, or what have you—different philosophies about legislation. There were a lot of floor debates. Now I watch the Legislature, and the bills just go boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. That wasn't how it was. There were lots of questions and discussions on the floor.

**Bennett:** Since most legislators had their offices on the floor, was the floor restricted?

**Barengo:** Absolutely not.

**Bennett:** So there was a lot of movement on the floor?

**Barengo:** A lot of movement, and the floor was not restricted. There were restrictions about coming on the floor during a session, but it was a more

*In 1975, Barengo was the prime sponsor of A.J.R. 1, which would have ratified the proposed constitutional amendment relative to equal rights for men and women. It died in the Senate.*

liberal policy than we have now. There weren't those glass walls in the back. I sat down in the front row in my first session, but in my next session, I moved up to the back row. Roger Bremner and I sat together in the last row closest to the exit door, and the press was right behind us. We'd sit and talk to the press all day. We wanted to be there because we wanted to talk to them and wanted to be accessible to people coming in the back and talking to us. People would come in the back, and you'd bring them down to the floor and back and forth. There was a lot of accessibility and a lot of visitation with people on issues. Now it's kind of closed.

*Douglas Roger  
Bremner (D-Clark)  
served in the  
Assembly from 1972  
to 1984.*

**Bennett:** Were there a lot of constituents or members of the public who would watch the process?

**Barengo:** There were. We didn't have nearly the amount of lobbyists that they have now. But there were lobbyists, and there were constituents, and people would come in.

**Bennett:** Who are some of the lobbyists you remember?

**Barengo:** Oh, Wallie Warren. Probably everybody remembers Wallie Warren. The head of the AFL-CIO was about quite a bit. I've lost his name now all of a sudden. Very prominent man. There were varieties of citizens passing through all the time. One of the things I enjoyed at the Legislature over the years were

*The clock above the  
main elevator in the  
Legislative Building  
honors public  
relations executive  
and longtime lobbyist  
Wallace D. (Wallie)  
Warren.*

the citizens that I got to meet. I met people from all over the state and still know people from all over the state. From growing up here, I had connections around the state before I got there, but I increased it much more by people coming to Carson. I always enjoyed that part of it.

**Bennett:** It sounds like a normal day was rather hectic.

**Barengo:** They were just as hectic as they are now. They were busy days, yeah.

**Bennett:** Before the end of session when things got crazy, what was a day's schedule like?

**Barengo:** We started very early. We were like Senator Townsend is now. The money committees and the Judiciary Committees all started very early in the morning—seven o'clock most of the time; six o'clock on some days when we had many issues to debate. We also went to Las Vegas and held hearings on weekends maybe three or four times a session. They don't have to do that now because they have the video-conferencing. That's a good thing, I think. But we would go to Las Vegas. It was busy, and it was a shorter time. The sessions were much shorter.

**Bennett:** 1973 set a record for being the longest session, then 1975 broke the record, and then 1977 broke the record. Why were the sessions getting longer so quickly?

*Randolph J. Townsend (R-Washoe) began serving in the Senate in 1982. As the Chairman of Senate Commerce and Labor for 10 sessions, Townsend was famous for convening early morning committee meetings.*

**Barengo:** It's hard to say. Maybe the issues got more complicated. I don't really know why they got so stretched out. They got longer, but they were still not as long as now. As Speaker in 1981, I tried to get it closed up early. In the last two weeks, I remember, we knew we couldn't get it closed early. So we said that we're not going to kill these people. We're not meeting all night. We're not going to meet several days in a row all night. We're going to come in during normal office hours and make the thing go. We want the work product to be a good work product, not a rushed work product. So we went over for that reason, partially.

**Bennett:** How did you track your bills during session without computers like legislators use now?

**Barengo:** I was Chairman of the Judiciary Committee three times, and one session—1973—we had more bills than practically everybody in the rest of the Legislature put together. You did it the old-fashioned way. You either had it up here [taps head], or you had a paper schedule that you kept up with on a daily basis. You and the staff worked on that constantly. You had to know where things were, and you really had to know what was going on with things. That is why I alluded to certain legislators' expertise in certain areas because you would go to that legislator since he was the one that was

working on that area, and you trusted what he knew.

**Bennett:** Who are some of the legislators you remember as being particularly expert in certain topics?

**Barengo:** Oh god, there's a ton of them. I haven't thought about that for ages. Hal Smith was good in his areas of finance. Paul May in taxes. Keith Ashworth in taxes. Ross Prince was another old-time legislator. They just had a vast wealth of knowledge in lots of things that affected Nevada. Roy Torvinen and Mack Fry in the law. There was Jimmy Ullom, who only served one session; he had a good knowledge about sheriffs and police. Just a variety of people always had good expertise when they came to the Assembly. Jimmy Banner knew NIC [Nevada Industrial Commission] inside and out, better than anybody did, and he served many years. Just a lot of folks like that. Over on the Senate side, there was Carl Dodge. What a wonderful man Carl was. A true Nevadan. He had a broad breadth of experience and knowledge and was really a scholar. There were some great people, I thought.

**Bennett:** What was the interaction between the Assembly and the Senate? You mentioned that some committees were back to back.

**Barengo:** Now they're on different floors, and they go this way and that. We were not that way before.

*Paul W. May, Jr. (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1966 to 1984 and 1986 to 1988. He chaired the Assembly Committee on Taxation during six sessions.*

*Roy Lee Torvinen (R-Washoe) served in the Assembly from 1966 to 1974.*

*Leslie Mack Fry (R-Washoe) served in the Assembly from 1968 to 1974.*

*James N. Ullom (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1972 to 1974.*

*James J. Banner (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1972 to 1989.*

You saw every Senator each day as you saw every Assemblyperson each day. You talked to them practically every day, also. You were not segregated from them like they are now. I truly believe, the way it is now, some of the people never go up that floor or down the next floor. They don't intermix at all. Then, of course, you'd go out with them at night. Senator Lamb, Senator Gibson, Snowy Monroe—we talked to these people all the time.

Carl Dodge and I had a particular relationship because of the abortion bill. We didn't necessarily agree on the abortion bill. We agreed the Supreme Court had acted and something had to be done, so I went out to Carl's ranch one weekend. We were armed with the Supreme Court's briefs and decision, and we sat out there for a whole Saturday. He and I went through the whole thing to try to understand how the Court ruled the way they did, so we could craft our legislation to be the right way. That kind of interaction went on all the time.

**Bennett:** What sorts of things happened after hours?

**Barengo:** After hours, I think there was a lot more camaraderie than there is today. Carson was smaller, somewhat. There would be, just like there is today, the events put on by the tax association, the teachers, or whoever.

*Floyd R. Lamb (D-Clark) served in the Senate from 1956 to 1983.*

*James I. Gibson (D-Clark) served in the Senate from 1966 until his demise in 1988.*

*Warren L. (Snowy) Monroe (D-Elko) served in the Senate from 1958 to 1976.*

*Carl F. Dodge (R-Churchill) served in the Senate from 1958 to 1980.*

*A.B. 319 (1973), sponsored by Barengo and Broadbent, permits licensed physicians to perform abortions except where limited by certain conditions.*

And we had another thing. Keith Ashworth and Bob Robinson were cooks, and they would cook at their house every couple of weeks or whatever. They would invite everybody to their house, and we'd have a big, cooked dinner just for the legislators. Both houses would be there.

Of course, Bill Raggio and I were elected that same session. I had worked for Bill Raggio when he was District Attorney—I was the last D.A. he appointed—so I've known Bill forever. Both houses were much closer then, I think.

**Bennett:** Where else did you gather? Jack's Bar is notorious.

**Barengo:** Jack's Bar wasn't there in the beginning.

**Bennett:** It's interesting to hear that because Jack's has this reputation of being *the* place that the Legislature went to, but it sounds like that might be more recent.

**Barengo:** Yeah, it developed in the late 1970s. Jack's Bar wasn't there when I started. There were a variety of places around town where people would have dinners or what have you, but Jack's Bar was not there. That became different many years down the road. I was gone then.

**Bennett:** What were some of the issues that you enjoyed working on the most?

*Dr. Robert E. (Bob) Robinson (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1972 to 1982 and in the Senate from 1982 to 1986.*

*A Senator since 1972, William J. Raggio (R-Reno) was Washoe County District Attorney from 1958 to 1970.*

**Barengo:** Over the years, we did a variety of things. We had lots of interim committees. They don't seem to have as many now as we did then that are really substantive committees dealing with specific issues. We had a lot of those. Those were always interesting.

We did the ERA work, which was kind of an interesting political thing. We had landlord-tenant issues. We had death penalty issues. We spent a long time working on death penalty issues. That was the bill that held the session up one session. We couldn't get a consensus over whether we should have a death penalty or not, and finally, in the late hours, we did.

Revision of the gaming act was in an interim committee. We went through the gaming statutes. Mel Close chaired from the Senate and I chaired from the Assembly, and we had a joint committee rewriting all the gaming law. That was very interesting.

From my own personal perspective, I learned a lot about a four-letter word that I never really knew much about before called *bonds*. I just did not know how the State is financed. I understood that there was this paper that you raised money with, but I didn't really understand it. We had a flurry of bond bills, maybe in about 1975 or 1977, so I asked if they

*The Legislative Commission's Subcommittee for the Study of Gaming produced LCB Bulletin 81-1, "Regulation of Gaming."*

could come to my committee. Normally, they would probably go to Commerce. So all of these bond letters descended on my doorstep. I learned a heck of a lot about that and financings and those kinds of things. That was also kind of a short summary of how the State financed itself, and I learned state financing that way.

**Bennett:** Which committee did you enjoy the most?

**Barengo:** Judiciary was extremely interesting, and I learned a lot about the law from Judiciary. It's broader than just dealing with courts. Whatever you find in the NRS [*Nevada Revised Statutes*] was mostly in that committee. That was very interesting. Commerce was a particularly interesting committee. My least favorite committee was Labor and Management.

**Bennett:** Why was that?

**Barengo:** There wasn't a lot there, and it was kind of fighting all the time between management and labor. I thought that both sides were good, but I did not like that committee. I served on it my freshman session.

**Bennett:** How were committees assigned?

**Barengo:** That's still part of the process. Basically, you support the Speaker, and the Speaker gives you a plum for supporting him. Your expertise is considered, too. As you move up in seniority,

you get more choice, too, of where you want to go.

**Bennett:** Did the Speakers repeat their leadership positions?

**Barengo:** They did not. In fact, it was kind of the history of Nevada that Speakers did *not* repeat. Keith Ashworth was the first to repeat. He was Speaker twice in a row, and that was a rarity. He was the first one who ever did that. Swackhamer had been Speaker a couple times, but they had been separated by a number of years.

*William D. Swackhamer (D-Lander) was in the Assembly from 1946 to 1972. He was Speaker in 1957 and 1965.*

**Bennett:** Was the Speaker's election contested every session?

**Barengo:** It was heavily contested every session. Mine was equally contested.

**Bennett:** How did that work?

**Barengo:** That was kind of an interesting race. Paul May had been the Speaker when I was Speaker Pro Tem [in 1979].

Let me back up. Before Paul, Joe Dini had been Speaker. Joe Dini wanted to be Speaker again. The factions arose during the course of the election, and right after the election, it became apparent that Joe was going to be dumped. A lot of us talked, and we decided that I should contest the job of being the Speaker. It really was a contest, and there

were a small group of us, but Paul May really had the votes, and Paul May became Speaker. That same group hung together even though Paul had decided he wasn't going to run again, and we added a few people to it. As the election turned out in 1981, there were 26 Democrats, and it was 13-13. Jack Vergiels had 13 votes for Speaker, and I had 13, and they were from all around. It wasn't a north-south issue, it was maybe conservative versus liberal; maybe management versus labor. I'm not even sure that was what it was, but just mostly folk who had gotten closer to each other. Jack and I had always been friends. So we had it contested. And the Republicans said, "Well, we're not voting for anybody but Mr. Barengo, or we will not vote. We have a vote in this, too," so it basically became three parties—13, 13, and the Republican group. The Republicans said "We'll vote for who we want because you guys can't get together." Then Jack and I had a discussion, and Jack became Majority Leader, and I became the Speaker. And I appointed the first woman Speaker Pro Tem, Karen Hayes. I talked about her husband earlier, Keith Hayes.

**Bennett:** Why did you choose Karen for that position?

**Barengo:** Karen was a very popular, well-liked, able person. She also chaired Judiciary that same year, following in her husband's footsteps. Karen went on to become a county

*Karen W. Hayes (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1974 to 1982. She was the first woman to serve as Speaker Pro Tempore for an entire session. She chaired Assembly Judiciary in 1979.*

commissioner in Clark County and was quite capable. It was the job that she wanted and felt she was capable of doing, and I certainly supported her in it. I was happy that I could appoint the first woman to any leadership position in the State of Nevada.

**Bennett:** Did you get any push-back on that?

**Barengo:** No. Not at all. I don't recall any at all.

**Bennett:** It doesn't seem as if the position of Speaker is contested so much anymore. Can you pinpoint when that might have morphed?

**Barengo:** Well, it changed with Joe Dini. Joe was an able legislator and an able Speaker, and he was able to keep the groups moving together and working together. He wanted the position. I chose to retire after my session as Speaker. Jack Vergiels went on to the Senate after his session as Speaker. Then Bill Bilyeu became Speaker. Joe became Speaker again, then they had the co-Speakerships, and then Joe again. From that point on, Joe kept it several times.

I think that was when it was changing how the legislators were elected, how they raised their funds, and how the money worked. Sometime about when Joe was there, they started having the Democratic legislative fund or caucus fund, whatever they call those things. They were raising money, and then giving money to the people they wanted to have run.

*Joseph E. Dini, Jr., (D-Yerington) served in the Assembly from 1966 to 2002. He was Speaker a record eight regular sessions and named Speaker Emeritus in 2001.*

*Byron (Bill) Bilyeu (R-Elko) served in the Assembly from 1982 to 1986. He was Speaker in 1985.*

That seemed to change how the houses were elected because the person who could control the caucus was the person who controlled the purse strings. The person who controlled the purse strings then could get the votes to become Speaker. Before, it wasn't that way. There was no organization in either house that would perpetuate itself.

**Bennett:** So the caucus wouldn't meet during the interim?

**Barengo:** We rarely had caucuses, and if we did, we were not required to vote that way. In fact, we wouldn't have. We may have had caucuses for informational purposes, but there was no hard, heavy hammer that you had to do this.

**Bennett:** What was the interaction like with the Governors? O'Callaghan and List were two very different individuals.

**Barengo:** Very different. As I said, Governor O'Callaghan was very forceful. He had a lot of advocates over in the Legislature, and O'Callaghan had us over to his office quite a bit. There was a lot of interaction. We were over to his office quite a bit talking about issues and how he viewed them. He had us to the mansion quite a bit. He had a lot of events at the mansion—single events, group events—with all parties.

*Donal N. (Mike)  
O'Callaghan (D) was  
Governor from 1971 to  
1979.*

*Robert F. List (R) was  
Governor from 1979 to  
1983.*

List was a little different in a lot of ways. List was a little more reticent, if you will, and quieter about how he did things. But I recall many phone calls from List and discussions back and forth with him. There was always open access to both of them.

**Bennett:** One of the issues that took a lot of time in 1979 and 1981 was the tax shift from property to sales tax. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

**Barengo:** That was an extremely interesting issue. At that time, Ray Knisley and Myron Leavitt were the gentlemen in the back room who would be cranking out these numbers and drafting this legislation. In the Nevada tax system, every penny is allocated to different districts—special-improvement districts or school districts or what have you—and they all get some money out of this. However we allocated things or changed things, we had to make sure that all these districts were held harmless and would get the same amount of money. So we were constantly reworking those formulas. Paul May, on the Assembly side, also knew a lot about taxation. He was back at that session. There were lots of proposals, and we had Committees of the Whole.

I'm on the Tax Commission now, and there has been a lot of discussion about that tax

*Raymond L. Knisley (D-Pershing) served in the Assembly from 1958 to 1966.*

*Myron Leavitt (D) was Lt. Governor from 1979 to 1982.*

shift, particularly in view of the Incline Village folks' argument about how their taxes are raising so fast. So I've reviewed all that legislation just recently for the Tax Commission, and it brought back some memories of those things we had. I can remember that we had handouts *all* the time—almost daily. We had many meetings of the Committee of the Whole in the Assembly Chambers with both houses there, asking questions and going through the handouts. Then there were smaller meetings to brief us as things were moving along.

It was a complicated process. We were in the same situation as the State was four years ago when they passed the tax caps. Property taxes were escalating, and the citizens were—rightfully so—nervous about it, and we tried to move things around. In retrospect, I'm not sure it was the right way to go, but that's what we did.

**Bennett:** Who were some of the major advocates of the shift?

**Barengo:** I think most of the major advocates came from inside of the Legislature. The Governor's Office was helpful, but the advocates who were trying to get it off were Paul May and Jim Gibson. They were the leaders from each house.

**Bennett:** Were issues like that worked on during the interim and then brought to the session?

**Barengo:** That particular issue had been discussed in the interim, but it really was worked on during the session. A lot of work was going on in the session. There were a lot of late nights.

**Bennett:** Did you stay in Carson City during that time, or were you commuting back and forth to Reno?

**Barengo:** My first couple of sessions, I commuted back and forth and would occasionally stay. In my last three sessions, I lived in Carson with Richard Bryan and Roger Bremner because we had early-morning committees, and we had to be there. There were also late-night committees, so it was better to be there than to commute back and forth.

**Bennett:** Did the legislators who stayed tend to congregate in a particular part of Carson City?

**Barengo:** Again, we talked about Ashworth cooking for the legislators. We also had a house, so we would have some weekly or bi-weekly event at our place and invite all the legislators. But I don't remember any particular congregating place as such. Adele's wasn't there then, either.

**Bennett:** The Legislature without Adele's?

**Barengo:** Adele's became the place everybody would go, but it was not there when I was in the Assembly. Mike O'Callaghan liked to go to a place

*Richard H. Bryan (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1968 to 1972 and in the Senate from 1972 to 1978.*

*In 1977, Paul and Adele Abowd opened Adele's Restaurant and Lounge in Carson City. It has been a popular legislative gathering place for over 30 years.*

out on Highway 50. I can't remember the name of it now; it was a steak house out there. I think it's still there. There was a variety of different places around. The old hot springs had a place, but there was nothing specific like Adele's became at night. I'm not sure what it's even like now. I haven't been around for a couple sessions, so I don't know.

**Bennett:** You mentioned there were committees that were meeting during the interim. Were there any particular topics that you worked on during the interim?

**Barengo:** I mentioned gaming. We did some mobile home issues on an interim committee. As an answer to the ERA, we did an interim committee to examine the statutes and make sure they were all gender-neutral. That was kind of a lot of work. We also had some committees that repealed old statutes that didn't need to be around any longer.

**Bennett:** I ran across a newspaper article that said that the 1973 session eliminated something like 70 boards and commissions. It seems extraordinary to think that Nevada would have had so many boards and commissions then.

**Barengo:** There were all kinds of little boards and commissions out there. A lot of them could be grouped together and changed, so we did that.

You have to remember what Nevada was back then. Nevada was a very small state—a government that didn't meet very often. There weren't a lot of ongoing committees like they have now. So a lot of things were delegated to these little boards and commissions. As the state government became bigger and more workmanlike, there was no need for those.

**Bennett:** One of the interim things that you worked on was the Uniform Commission on State Laws. Were you on that throughout your entire tenure?

**Barengo:** I think I was appointed to the Uniform Commission on State Laws in my first or second session. I'm still a member of that. I'm a life member now, but I have not been for a couple of years to a meeting. I've enjoyed going to that group over the years. It's a very interesting group of lawyers who are eminent in their field—law professors and what have you—from across the country who work on uniform state laws. Of course, each state puts their own twist on them, so they're not really uniform. But the Commission does a good job.

**Bennett:** So you had an opportunity to compare Nevada's production with other states?

**Barengo:** I did there and also in the Council of State Governments. I got involved quite a bit through

the Council of State Governments, and we would go to various meetings and look at what other states were doing. Roger Bremner and I and others would look at California's output, for example. They would be there year in, year out, and we'd be there for our 100 days or less. They would talk about some massive overhaul, and we'd say, "Gee, we did the same thing in three months." The laws are the same. So I think we were pretty efficient.

**Bennett:** How did you learn about parliamentary procedure—how to move things through the process?

**Barengo:** The parliamentary guides are *Robert's Rules of Order*, which we used in committee, and *Mason's Manual*, which we used on the floor.

As an aside, each committee also has its own set of rules, which started when I became Chairman of the Judiciary Committee. I wrote my own rules—how I wanted things to work in the committee—and then that got copied by everybody else.

Back to the parliamentary stuff on the floor of the Assembly under *Mason's Manual*. We were freshmen—we weren't leadership—so we had to learn how to use *Mason's Manual* to stop or to start things we wanted to do. One of the things about voting that you will recall because I know you know a lot of this stuff is

the statement that begins with “Mr. Speaker, having voted with the prevailing side.” When we had roll-call voting, which I explained earlier, we all sat at our desks and kept the tally of the roll and how it was going. If it didn’t come out the way we wanted, we would change our vote. If we could see that ahead of time, the guy at the bottom of the alphabetical list would vote the wrong way so that he could get up and give notice for reconsideration. We had to be working with each other on the floor at the same time to know what to do, so we could get the bill hung up for another day. You learn the *Mason’s Manual* to do all those things and make the motions to stop debate, start debate, get your votes lined up, call for the question—all those things that don’t matter so much anymore because it’s all scripted now.

**Bennett:** So you were spending a lot of time with *Mason’s Manual* at your desk, literally looking through the book?

**Barengo:** Literally looking through the books and talking to people who knew them. I’m trying to think of the one gentleman from Clark County. He’s not with us any longer. He knew *Mason’s Manual* very well, and we’d all confer with him quite a bit. Or we’d confer with the Chief Clerk. One of the reasons Mouryne Landing became Chief Clerk is that she was, among

other things, just a whiz at *Mason's Manual*. We'd talk to her beforehand.

So you have to, I think, understand the political game, which is getting to, as we used to say, 22, 11, and one. You also have to understand how the mechanical game works because the processes can be utilized in your favor or against you, also. How is a bill introduced? Where does it go? How do you change where it goes? How do you do different things with the bill? What happens after it leaves the house? Whose possession is the bill in, and can you act on it? Can you get it back from the Governor, or can you stop it from going to the Governor? All kinds of things in the mechanical process are also to be used in the political game, but I don't see that happening anymore.

I remember—and this was neither a good or a bad thing—in the late, late, late of the final night in 1975 or 1977, there was a glitch in a bill. Well, what did we do? What did we have to do to fix this glitch? We had a bill that had been conceived, gone through the committee structure, and passed the houses in something like 15 minutes. But you knew how to move it, and you knew how to get the other bill back so you could stop it and made it work right. Then there are all these trailer pieces of legislation, too. There's lots of fun and games in those things that can be played—how you

*Mouryne B. Landing  
was the Assembly  
Chief Clerk from 1973  
to 1995.*

repeal things and everything else. You have to understand—and I don't think they understand it as well today as they used to—how legislation drafting and then repealing and changing all interacts.

I did not introduce many bills in my years in the Legislature, and I had a specific reason for that. I viewed it as my job to make your piece of legislation workable and to draft it right. So I spent a lot of time with the bill drafters, or I spent a lot of time with the legislators to understand what they wanted and how to put it into the bill draft. As you well know from having been there, staff gets a piece of paper from a legislator that says, "I want to have fair housing." Well, what the heck does that mean? You craft this giant piece of legislation, and then they look at it and say, "I didn't say that!" Well, of course they didn't because they didn't know what had to go in it. So that's what I thought I should be doing when I was in the Legislature. What do we need to do? How do we get your idea on paper and get a bill out of it and get it passed?

**Bennett:** Tell me about staff during that time period. Was there a large group in LCB [Legislative Counsel Bureau]?

**Barengo:** Not like it is now. There was a small group. God help Frank Daykin. Frank Daykin prob-

ably didn't sleep for months. I remember going and getting Frank Daykin from the train when he came back. He had been in Nevada, then he'd left, and we called him to come back. I drove up to Reno to pick him up at the train because Frank didn't take planes at that time. His wife did not like planes; they took the train always. Frank's still around and still a friend of mine.

*Frank Daykin became Legal Counsel in 1977, serving until his retirement in 1985. He continued to draft bills on a contract basis into the twenty-first century*

We had one LCB guy who locked himself in his office; we never saw him the whole session. He was overwhelmed. It was a hard process. There always has been a backlog and a backup. I remember Speaker Ashworth going in the back room—this is supposed to be inviolate—and just *took* bills that legislators had requested and came back out and said, "This is your bill. Here, take it. You can't introduce it." because there were so many back there, we never would have gotten done. He made the decision, and he was allowed to do that. Maybe rightfully or wrongfully. But it was a different process, and there was not the staff that there is today. It was a very small staff.

You know, there's so much carryover staff now, which was not the case before. The poor guys in Fiscal would kill themselves. Bill Bible was there then. We hired Bill from the Governor's Office. Bill came over to work with us, and Bill was a great addition. Then he went

back to be Budget Director for the State of Nevada. We also got Judy Mattucci Sheldrew from the Governor's Office. There was a lot of poaching, but those staff people worked very hard. Again like I said, there was not the amount of staff that there is now.

**Bennett:** Did you have staff assigned to your committee?

**Barengo:** No. No, we did not have staff assigned to our committees. If we had a question, we'd have to ask for a staff person—a bill drafter or Legal Counsel—to come up to the committee to talk to us about a specific issue for that time only.

**Bennett:** So when the committee would come up with amendments—

**Barengo:** We'd have to draft them, or go down and work with the bill drafter to get them drafted. Luckily, we had, as I mentioned earlier, a bunch of good lawyers in the building who could draft their own amendments and then make sure they were drafted correctly. I see legislators now ask for an amendment, then they get the amendment and look at it and they say, "I guess it does what I want it to do." They don't know, I don't think. Often times, I see it handed off to the lobbyist, which is okay. I think lobbyists provide a very good resource to the Legislature, particularly for their issues, but some of them will work on any issue if you ask them to because they know what they're doing.

They'll review it and say, "Yes, it's right—or it's wrong." It's not because the bill drafter did it wrong. The legislators just didn't communicate to them as to how it should be done.

**Bennett:** A term that kept popping up in newspaper articles that I'm not familiar with is the "Dean of the Legislature." In 1973, it had been Swackhamer until he was appointed Secretary of State, and then Mahlon Brown became Dean. What was the Dean of the Legislature?

**Barengo:** The oldest guy. The longest-serving person, probably of the majority party.

**Bennett:** Was there a particular role?

**Barengo:** No. It was like calling Dini "Speaker Emeritus." It was a term of endearment. You'd been around for a while, and you were the guy—or the gal—who'd worked on most things and had been there the longest. If you wanted to know about what happened back when, you'd go ask so-and-so. They'd know.

There weren't the great minutes back then like there are now. You couldn't go to the minutes to find out about things. Minutes about certain things may have been kept because they were important issues, but generally there were not. The secretary's notes were more like "so-and-so and so-and-so appeared today and talked about this bill, and this is the amendment to it." End of story.

**Bennett:** So the Dean was like the institutional memory?

**Barengo:** Yes. Mahlon Brown was a great guy, by the way. I knew Mahlon for many years, and his son is a friend of mine. A fine man. I knew him before I got there. He came over to me the first day of the session and said, “Glad to see you. Your grandfather was a friend of mine, and if you’re as good a poker player as he was, you’ll be a great legislator.” [chuckles]

*B. Mahlon Brown (D-Clark) served in the Senate from 1950 to 1976. He was Minority Leader for three regular sessions, President Pro Tempore for two, and Majority Leader for six. He passed away in 1995.*

**Bennett:** Who were some of the other legislators who gave you advice or suggestions from their experience?

**Barengo:** I mentioned Ross Prince. He was from Ely. He’d been in the Legislature for a number of years—a Democrat from Ely. Just a good, fine, solid guy. He sat next to me, and he gave me a lot of advice, “Now, Bob, you want to read this bill a little closer here.” Helpful things—not “Oh, the bathroom’s over there” or something like that. They were just very open and nice people. To me, having grown up in Nevada, it was just the melding of all I’d ever known about Nevada. I enjoyed it from that point of view.

*Rawson M. (Ross) Prince (D-Lincoln, White Pine) served in the Assembly from 1966 to 1974.*

**Bennett:** As somebody who grew up here, whose family had long roots here, how do you think Nevadans perceive their Legislature?

**Barengo:** Well, I think it’s changed over the years. I think the rural communities have always perceived

their legislator as their ambassador to the state, if you will. But as the population has grown and the districts have become bigger with more people in them and more attached to the urban counties, that is fading away. The rural counties are all different now than they used to be. I don't know if the people in the urban counties even know who their legislators are anymore. I think that position has virtually no visibility among the citizenry as a whole.

**Bennett:** And it did?

**Barengo:** It had more. I still get people who say to me, "You used to be in the Assembly." Washoe County is still pretty old—there are new people here—but there's a core of those people here.

**Bennett:** How did your legislative service affect your family?

**Barengo:** I wasn't married at that time. I was only married during my last session, so I didn't have a family to worry about. I had law partners who got mad at me because I wasn't around. But I was not married, so it didn't really have an effect on them.

**Bennett:** How did your campaigning change once you became an incumbent? Or did it change? Was it the same type of campaign?

**Barengo:** Actually, I ran the same kind of campaign every year—get out, knock on doors, mailers. I

used to start my campaign up at the county fairgrounds. I had a big party for my district—a barbeque—and I had the Governor, the city councils, and the Senators come over to the fairgrounds, and I'd put on these nice barbeques. I did that at least five times. Well-attended, it was a good event and good getting out. It was an old-fashioned political party with the hats and the posters and the whole thing. It was a lot of fun.

**Bennett:** Buttons and everything?

**Barengo:** Everything.

**Bennett:** Why did you decide not to run for the Legislature again?

**Barengo:** I had served five times—been elected five times. I had been Speaker. There had been a tradition in Nevada that Speakers did not follow themselves. I also had been looking around. My last couple of sessions, people would come to me and would say things like, “We really need to do this,” and I would say, “Oh, no, we looked at that last session, and we can't do it that way.” So I started thinking, “Wait a minute, I'm becoming an entrenched incumbent, and I'm looking at things through *my* eyes. Maybe we *can* revisit that and look at it a different way.” I started thinking that I was becoming part of the problem. I never intended to be a full-time legislator or make that my

career. I truly believed that we have citizen legislators, and I had served my time. It was time for somebody else to come and serve theirs. It was just time to go.

**Bennett:** It seemed like there was a lot of turnover among Nevada legislators.

**Barengo:** There was, and there wasn't. There were people who would stay two or three terms. There would be a lot of turnover from one term, but if you stayed more than one, you would stay maybe three or four. I think if you'd look back, you'd find it that way.

**Bennett:** Then you ran for State Treasurer?

**Barengo:** I ran for State Treasurer after I decided to leave the Legislature. That was a decision I made right before I filed. That was an interesting experience, but I wasn't successful, and that was good. I decided that I needed to do some other things in my life, and that worked out fine.

**Bennett:** Why didn't you run for the State Senate?

**Barengo:** I really did not want to go back to the Legislature as a Senator, and probably there was not necessarily an open state Senate seat at that point. I could have come back after a couple years and run for that office, but I really wanted to move on from the Legislature and try to do some different things.

One of the things I did do was get back in my practice of law. I talked to you earlier about bonds. I learned a lot about bonds, and I went on to do a lot of bond work with the State of Nevada—bond counsel and things of that nature. So I moved myself to some different areas. At that time, I was married, and I needed to make some money. The legislators don't make a lot of money. The first year, I left the District Attorney's Office. I was a deputy district attorney when I got elected, and at that time, we believed that you could not serve in the executive branch or as a deputy DA or as a teacher and serve in the Legislature. I still believe that.

So I resigned my job. I was unemployed from the start of the session until the session ended, and then I practiced law. I believe I did the first year of my law practice five times because I would just get it going again, and then it would be time to run for office. I'd go and serve in the Legislature for three or four months, then I would come back and start all over again. So I needed to get my law practice going to make some money for myself and take care of my family.

**Bennett:** Not thinking about what you know came after your tenure, but in the period from your first day as a legislator to the end of the 1981

Session, how had the institution changed over your tenure?

**Barengo:** Committee structures had changed some. We had electronic voting. That had changed it. Staffing levels were starting to rise. More offices were being made available to people. It had become more formalized—and I don't mean that we weren't formal before—but it had just become more structured. Not nearly like it is now, I think, but there were some changes. I don't think there were great changes during my time.

**Bennett:** When did you come back as a lobbyist?

**Barengo:** I guess it was the 1983 session. I got these calls from people saying, "You know, when you were there, I could go down and talk to you, and you'd help me with this. Well, you're not there any more, and I don't know what to do. No one seems to want to do this, so could I hire you to go do this now?" So I thought, "Okay. I guess I can do that." I had no intention of becoming a full-time lobbyist; it just came about. I will say that I'm happy that, in my last session lobbying, my fellow lobbyists put me in the Jim Joyce Hall of Fame. So I do appreciate that honor from those folks.

**Bennett:** What are the differences between being a legislator and being a lobbyist?

**Barengo:** Well, obviously, you can't vote. You're more of a staffer, I think is what it is. You're an advocate for a position, and you've got to find a legislator who either agrees with your position or showing that they might agree with your position. Most of us who lobbied wanted to be open, to tell everything there is to tell about a bill, talk about the pros and cons—give our side and the other side—and hope to get this person to listen to why our side is the better side. It's just a matter of having good knowledge about what you're going to talk about.

I always told my clients, "If I don't know as much or more than you know about this issue, I can't represent you." So I would spend quite a bit of time with my clients to learn about their issue and their business and how it worked because most of the time—not always—but most of the time, you have a client who has an issue, and there would be other people who have similar or competing issues that may impede you. It wouldn't necessarily be a good or a bad issue, or you wouldn't necessarily have a lobbyist or legislator who's opposed to you. They might be opposed because they were advocating somebody else's issue—somebody who's supporting a slightly different issue. But if you understand the political process and the business that you're dealing with, you can usually carve away, and then this

person can get what they want, and you can get what you need.

**Bennett:** So adding in your lobbying experience, you have a broader view of the Legislature and how things changed over 30 years.

**Barengo:** I was there in 1969 for the D.A.'s office, so from that period of time until my last lobbying session, I saw how it changed.

**Bennett:** So you also have a unique experience. You lobbied in the old building, and you lobbied in the new building.

**Barengo:** I was down in the old building, yes, and I've seen how that worked. That's when they'd close the doors and make them vote. We had that one issue where one of the guys jumped out of a second-story building and down the fire escape because he didn't want to vote.

**Bennett:** Yes. Were you there for that issue?

**Barengo:** No, I was not. I know him, but I wasn't there for that issue. [chuckles]

**Bennett:** Who was that?

**Barengo:** He was from Mesquite.

**Bennett:** Hafen?

**Barengo:** Not Tim Hafen. The other one.

**Bennett:** Yeah, the other one. There were two who served in the Legislature.

**Barengo:** Yes, right. Tim was there when I was there.

*Bryan K. Hafen (R-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1960 to 1964 and 1966 to 1970. He jumped out the window to avoid a tax vote in 1969.*

*M. Kent (Tim) Hafen (R-Esmeralda, Nye, Mineral) served in the Assembly from 1966 to 1974.*

**Bennett:** So how was it different, being a lobbyist in the old Capitol Building?

**Barengo:** The old Capitol Building had one or two committee rooms. The rest of the time, they would just meet in the hall and talk, or they'd rent a motel room, as I said earlier. They used to use what they called the Greeno Hotel, which is now an office building across there, and they used to have meetings over there, among other places. It was much more informal. You'd hang around and talk to people in the halls. That's how it started out in the new building, also.

*The Greeno Hotel was one block north of the Capitol Building at 108 E. Proctor.*

The new building was designed with a lot of security systems that were never used. I'm glad they never used them. That inner hall was meant not to be open to the public, but they've never closed it. I object to the way they've closed up the Building now. I think they've closed it more to the public and made it harder for the public to participate. In fact, as a lobbyist, I screamed hard many times when they would have meetings at their desk, and you couldn't go on the floor. Now that's ridiculous. They've since changed that, but they would do that quite a bit. They would open the floor, but you never could get near enough to hear what was going on anyway. So now they're kind of structuring that a little better than they did. There's been an association to kind of close it up, I thought. I didn't like that.

**Bennett:** How have legislators changed over time? I don't necessarily mean the individuals, but the type of person.

**Barengo:** I think that when I was first there, people became a legislator because they had been somebody or done something in their community. They were in the Chamber of Commerce, maybe the Elks, maybe the Grange; maybe they were in a tax association; maybe they were good lawyers—whatever. They had risen up, and then people said to them, “You know, you really ought to go to Carson and represent us.” You know, old-time Nevada was kind of that way, and that's how someone got there. You got the support of the community first to get you there.

Nowadays, you make an individual decision that you want to run. You come out, and you run. Then you go to the party, and the party supports you, and the leadership supports you and helps you raise money. So you're beholden to them. The other way, you are beholden to a group of people; maybe the teachers would put you up. My simple answer is this. I think you were somebody before you got there, and then when you left, you went back to your community, and you were still somebody. Today we see a lot of people who are nobody when they get there, and when they leave, they're nobody. You never hear of them

again. That's not everybody, but that's generally how I see it, and I don't think it's been good that way.

**Bennett:** What are some of the things that you've seen happen that you think were good for the process or good for the State?

**Barengo:** Well, the Legislature passed open meeting laws. I think the Legislature itself has an image, and it's been pretty good for the state. We now have this statewide TV system, so that people in Clark County can be at hearings. That's *very* good. That's utilized quite a bit. That's a very good thing. There's been more of an outreach, with the electronic age, to the citizens and bringing them access all the way to Carson. It used to be thought that legislators should be put in these far-off places so no one could ever get to them. It's now opened up quite a bit.

Campaign disclosures are good because when we ran, we hardly had any money, and now these campaigns raise huge amounts of money. So it is good to see where the money comes from.

**Bennett:** Once you were active as a lobbyist, did you look back on what you had done as a legislator and wish you had done some things differently?

**Barengo:** I don't know. I don't know if there are any votes as a legislator that I ever thought we really messed up on. Maybe the tax issue we

talked about, but that was good for the time being. As we've progressed down the road, it's become problematic, particularly now that we have the cap on top of it. That's caused some problems, so maybe we could have done that differently. We are the only state that does the property taxes the way we do them.

**Bennett:** Why is that?

**Barengo:** In most states, the taxable value of the property is the assessed valuation, and then you go from there. Whatever it's worth is whatever it's worth. We have a bifurcated process. You value the land as vacant land, then you value the improvements, and then you put them together to arrive at a rate. That causes problems because—in Incline, for example—the land is more valuable than the house, so it kind of inverts things.

But at the time, it was the way it was. It was good because we were trying to shift the burden from the property taxpayer onto the sales taxpayer. Of course, we're seeing problems with that now as our economy is slowing down in Nevada because we're not getting the sales tax we used to. We were, in fact, trying to get it off the tourists. That's now slowed down, and it's hurting our state.

**Bennett:** You've mentioned Tahoe a couple of times. That was a major topic during the time you were in the Legislature.

**Barengo:** We had a special session to pass the TRPA [Tahoe Regional Planning Agency].

**Bennett:** Were you involved in that?

**Barengo:** I was not a member of the select committee, but we all were involved in it to a degree. Spike Wilson was one of the members, as I recall. Swackhamer was involved. I forget who was—oh, I can see him and I can't think of his name—involved on the Senate side. We were kept pretty well informed, and we knew a lot about what was going on. I did go down to one of the California joint meetings we had and kept involved in it.

**Bennett:** Was there interest in that topic among your constituents or people outside of the Legislature?

**Barengo:** Oh, I think generally everybody in this part of the state was concerned about what was happening at Tahoe. The *big* issue was the gaming issue because gaming was limited on the Nevada side. There was a square-foot requirement originally, so that was a *huge* issue—that we do not hurt gaming but that we don't have proliferation of gaming.

*In 1980, Governor List called the Legislature into special session to consider an amendment that substantially revised the bi-state Tahoe Regional Planning Compact. The session lasted four hours.*

**Bennett:** At that time, was Tahoe looked at as an environmental issue, or was it more of a business issue?

**Barengo:** Oh, I think it was looked at as a natural resource that needed to have some controls. The Californians were always yelling at the Nevadans because of our gaming. Then you drove along the California side, though, and you looked upon row upon row upon row upon row of motels that were falling down. The environment was not good over there, either, and it needed to have some impetus to clean it all up.

**Bennett:** When you look back at your time in the Legislature, what are some of your fondest memories?

**Barengo:** I think my fondest memories are the people I met all across this state. I still love to go all around the state and see people. Also my own personal growth that I achieved in there.

One of my oddest memories is that I was presiding on the podium when Art Palmer delivered a note to me that said, "The President has been shot." I said to Art, "Shot?" and he said, "We don't know anything else." So I immediately looked down to the majority leader or Roger Bremner, one of the two, and said, "We need a motion to go into recess." He made a motion to recess, and then I made the

*In 1981, Arthur J. Palmer was Director of LCB. He was informing the Speaker about the attempted assassination of President Ronald Reagan. The Majority Leader was Jack Vergiels.*

announcement after that. We adjourned for the day until we found out what happened. That was something that just sticks in my mind.

**Bennett:** Yes, it would.

You've mentioned several people—I hate to say old-time legislators, but that's the only phrase that's coming to mind right now—who seem to have really stuck in your memory.

**Barengo:** Well, yes. For example, I was sitting in a Tax Commission meeting about two months ago, and I saw this guy looking in the window. It was Mel Close! So I got up and went to talk to Mel. Mel was Speaker of the Assembly, a Senator, and President Pro Tem of the Senate. He's a successful lawyer and in a prominent Las Vegas family. Mel and I became very close. I'm very fond of Mel.

We were truly family down there. I think we were family. A lot of us are still friends, and we still see each other and talk. Mel's is a name I picked out as an example, but that's kind of how it was.

**Bennett:** It's interesting that you use the term "family." I've heard that used before to describe the Legislature. Essentially, you're sequestered for a certain amount of time.

**Barengo:** You're there. You learn everything about them. You learn their children. You learn their

spouses. You are very close to them. As I said, Dick Bryan and I lived together for a couple sessions. I knew Dick before then, but we became closer. I still see or talk to a lot of these folks.

**Bennett:** Are there any last-minute thoughts about your tenure as a legislator that perhaps I haven't touched on yet?

**Barengo:** No, not really. I think everybody should be able to go through this experience. It was a very valuable experience on how to deal with people.

Recently, during this Presidential election, I listened to them talking. The Vice Presidential debate happened last week, and we had two different debating styles. We had Joe Biden, the consummate insider who talked about inside-the-Beltway stuff the whole time. I learned during my first session to quit talking like a lawyer because I would get up and speak like I was a law professor: "This is why we can't pass this bill. This is the principle here." And I would get *no* votes. Well, I found out what was wrong. I had to talk to *them*—to each legislator from where they came from. I learned not to talk legislative-ese or legalese or what have you, but plain, simple talk, and then things got better for me. So that's a lesson. I think that

people need to get out of the trees and talk with people.

**Bennett:** You served with a broad diversity of people, particularly in the 1973 session. [**Barengo:** Yes.] There was the largest black delegation up to that point.

**Barengo:** It was. A couple of good guys, too, just really good guys. The Reverend Bennett—I love him dearly. [chuckles] He and I did a few things during that session that we got in trouble for.

**Bennett:** Such as?

**Barengo:** Well, he had a particular piece of legislation that he wanted for children, and it required a budget. It had to go through the money committee. Well, we knew it would never get through the money committee, so he and I redrafted the thing and passed it. No one knew until it went over to the other house, and it got passed there. They realized that we had bypassed the money committees. We got this piece of legislation [chuckles] that set up an agency for children, I think it was, and it had money in it.

**Bennett:** How did you get it past the money committees?

**Barengo:** We disguised it by how I drafted the bill, so it didn't have to go to them. As I talked about earlier, I learned the process. Reverend Bennett and I used to laugh about that all the time.

*Rev. Marion D. Bennett (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1972 to 1982.*

*In 1973, Bennett sponsored, and Barengo co-sponsored, two successful measures concerning children: A.B. 260 authorizes the operation of a facility for the treatment of emotionally disturbed children and A.B. 816 creates the Child Care Services Division in the Department of Health, Welfare, and Rehabilitation.*

**Bennett:** Any other thoughts that come to mind since I've been poking at some of your old memories?

**Barengo:** No. There are a lot of them out there that I can't think of. Everything you say brings something else up. But nothing kind of right there that I want to say.

**Bennett:** Thank you very much for your time. I appreciate it.

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I, ROBERT R. BALENGO hereby authorize Get Consensus, L.L.C. to  
(Interviewee) (Interviewer)

record my oral history for purposes of the Oral History Project of the Nevada Legislature conducted by Get Consensus pursuant to an Agreement between the Legislative Counsel Bureau (LCB) and Get Consensus, L.L.C., signed on January 10, 2008. I understand that the purpose of the Oral History Project is to collect digital audio tapes or video tapes, or both, and written transcripts of my interview. In addition, I understand that I may provide to the interviewer selected related documentary materials, including, without limitation, photographs, manuscripts and other memorabilia. I understand that the audio tapes, video tapes and written transcripts will be deposited and archived in the permanent collections of the Research Library of the LCB or transferred by the LCB to an appropriate entity within the State of Nevada for permanent storage as determined necessary by the LCB. I further understand that any documentary materials provided by me may, as determined necessary by the LCB, be deposited and archived in the permanent collections of the Research Library of the LCB, transferred by the LCB to an appropriate entity within the State of Nevada for permanent storage, or returned to me.

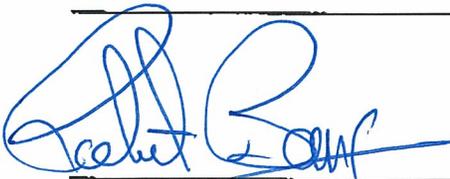
The audio tapes, video tapes, written transcripts and documentary materials produced as a result of my interview, may be used for research, scholarly and educational purposes and may be used by the Nevada Legislature and the LCB in public educational presentations, including, without limitation, books, audio or video documentaries, slide-tape presentations, exhibits, articles or presentations on the Internet or successor technologies. I agree that the LCB may use the audio tapes, video tapes, written transcripts and documentary materials produced as a result

of my interview to compile the oral histories of former Nevada Legislators and that such compilation may be made available for sale by the LCB. I further agree that the LCB may use my name, video or photographic image or likeness, statements, performance and voice reproduction, or other sound effects, for purposes relating to the Oral History Project without further approval on my part. I understand that when the material is used, proper acknowledgment regarding my contribution to the Oral History Project will be made.

By giving permission, I understand that I do not give up any copyright or performance rights that I may hold and that this permission does not preclude any use that I may want to make of the content of the information contained in these recordings. I do not give permission for my oral history and related materials to be used for purposes other than as specified in this Release Form without further written permission.

I herein warrant that I have not granted exclusive use of my oral history or related documentary materials to any other person. The only conditions which I place on the use of my oral history and related materials are as follows:

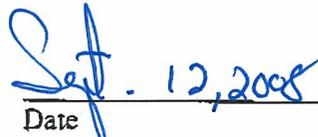
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Signature of Interviewee

Address:

4747 Caughlin Parkway



Date

775-~~627~~ 329-6275

Phone Number



**Robert R. Barengo**

Robert R. Barengo joined the Commission on December 3, 2003. He represents General Business. Mr. Barengo attended the following schools, St Thomas Aquinas Grammar School, Reno; Bishop Manogue High School, Reno; University of Santa Clara; J.D. – 1969; and California State University at Hayward; B.S. – 1966 He has held many elected offices and has extensive legislative experience. 1981-1983 Speaker of the Assembly and Chairman of Legislative Commission. 1978-1981 Speaker Pro Tempore. 1973-1979 Chairman Judiciary Committee. 1972-1982 Assemblyman, District 29, five regular sessions and one special session. Served on various committees including Interim Finance, Ways and Means, Commerce and Judiciary.

In 1972 to present Mr. Barengo has been in private practice of law: general business; municipal finance and bonding and investment banking; government and administration law; Gaming Law. He was Judge Pro-Tem, Sparks Municipal Court and Reno Municipal Court in 1976-1995. He was also the Deputy District Attorney for Washoe County, Nevada in 1969-1972. Mr. Barengo founded, and was the President and Director of Western Thrift and Loan, a Nevada Thrift Company. He was President from April 1998 to August 2000 and Director from 1997 to 2003. 1992 to present he is the Director of Riviera Holdings Corporation, publicly traded Corporation (AMEX) and subsidiaries, Riviera Hotel and Casino, Las Vegas, Nevada, member, Board of Directors. 1992-2000 he was director of American Wagering, Inc., publicly traded Corporation (NASDAQ) and subsidiaries, Leroy's Horse and Sports Place and Leroy's Hotel Corporation, Board of Directors 1996 (board member of private corporation before public offering). He is currently a Commissioner for National Conference of Commission on Uniform State Laws and was elected a life member in 1988.

Listed in the Bond Buyer's, Directory of Municipal Bond Dealers, Section Municipal Bond Attorneys of the United States and National Association of Bond Lawyers. 1992 to August 2004 State of Nevada Dairy Commission, Governor appointed Chairman in July 1993; State of Nevada Dairy Commission, Governor appointed member for banking and finance in October 1992. 1988-1991 Member City of Reno Financial Advisory Board. 1996-2003 Member of the Nevada Insurance Commission Advisory Committee on Health Care and Insurance. His Community Service includes: Truckee Meadows Community College Foundation Board of Trustees 1998; Truckee Meadows Community College Advisory Board 1981-Present; Nevada Opera Association Board of Directors 1987-1989; Nevada Chapter National Multiple Sclerosis Society Board of Trustees 1987-1989; member Board of Trustees, Nathan Aldelson Hospice, Las Vegas, Nevada 1993-Present.



**Get  
Consensus**

GROUP FACILITATION  
COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING  
ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

## ***ABOUT THE PROJECT TEAM***

Get Consensus, LLC, is owned by Dale Erquiaga who serves as the project's manager and conducted some of the interviews. Dale is a native Nevadan with an extensive background in Nevada politics, having served as Director of the Nevada Department of Cultural Affairs and Chief Deputy Secretary of State. With both Nevada and Arizona clients, Get Consensus is based in Phoenix.

Dana Bennett is the project's leader and has conducted most of the interviews. Currently a PhD candidate in public history at Arizona State University with a particular interest in the women who served in the Nevada Legislature between 1919 and 1960, she has also conducted oral histories with former Arizona legislators. Prior to returning to school, she was part of the Nevada legislative process for many years.

Gwen Clancy is the project's award-winning videographer. Based in Reno, she hosts and produces the documentary series, "Exploring Nevada," which is seen on local TV throughout the state.

Jean Stoess transcribed and indexed the interviews. A long-time Reno resident, Jean is familiar with Nevada politics in both elected and appointed capacities and has indexed several Nevada history works.