

Chapter Four: Leaving a Legacy

Maria McLeod: Today is March the 12th, 2009. I'm interviewing Nancy Rust in the final of a series of four oral history interviews.

Nancy, today we're going to mostly talk about the late 1980s to 1996, the end of your time in the Washington state House. But I want to begin with a question about Patty Murray, who is now a U.S. senator and has been since 1992. She began her career as a legislator from your district, joining the state Senate in 1988. I noticed that, in some of your campaign materials, you have photos of a young Patty Murray and you and Grace Cole. This campaign piece I have here in front of me includes a photo of the three of you at a desk, which I presume is located in an office at the Capitol. Patty is seated between you and Grace. You and Grace are standing. Below the photo, it reads: "A Hardworking Team." How did you get to know Patty, and what kind of work did you do to help bring her into the Legislature?

Nancy Rust: I met Patty Murray for the first time when she was working on Donn Charnley's campaign. Donn was running for the state Senate, or maybe that was the year he was running for the House. I don't remember which. But anyhow, she was working on Donn Charnley's campaign. Donn and I did a lot of things together, and so, as a result, Patty was doing things for me, too. She also was lobbying for Parent Ed. in the Legislature. That was the time someone – it was probably one of the senators – said to her, "Well, you're just a mom in tennis shoes." She's always carried on that theme, and she has an annual Tennis Shoe Award. I got to know Patty pretty well before she ran for the Legislature. Actually, it was protocol for

her to ask me, and she probably asked Grace, if we were considering running for the Senate, particularly because I was a committee chair. I wasn't interested in running for the Senate because I didn't want to give up my chairmanship. So when she was in the Senate, we did some things together. I remember particularly when the oil spill bill went to the Senate. She was the one who spoke against the amendments that were being offered in the Senate. That was one particular thing we did together.

MM: What was the nature of those amendments? What would the amendments have done to the bill?

NR: I don't remember them exactly, but some of them would have really weakened the bill. I think I might have said this before. The ARCO lobbyist really wanted the bill to pass. At one point, when the bill was in the Senate, and all those amendments were coming on, I got really discouraged. I told the lobbyist that I thought we should wait till next year and start over again. But she said, Oh no. You can't. I said, "It isn't going to be your fault." She said, Nevertheless, they will blame us. And the amendments miraculously all came off before it came back to the House.

MM: And that was some of Patty's work?

NR: She was in the minority. One of the senators, a Democrat, had pro-union amendments, which would have weakened the bill because the bill didn't exempt a worker who was guilty. I figured if a worker was disgruntled and unhappy and he willingly did something that would cause an oil spill, he should bear the results. He should be reprimanded. It was the senator who had always been a strong union person who wanted the exemption in the bill, but I thought it would really weaken the bill. I remember being in the wings when those amendments were being debated, and Patty was speaking against them. There were other amendments, too. That was the one I particularly remembered. When I went to my interview

with the unions the next year, the man who was the leader of that particular branch of the unions – you know, they all have their different ones – was on the panel. I thought, Oh no. But he never said anything.

MM: Really?

NR: Well, you know, I had a good union vote otherwise. But I really felt very strongly that they shouldn't be exempt if they *willingly* did something that would have caused an oil spill.

MM: In 1992, the Senate had a Republican majority, didn't they?

NR: Yes, they were Republican, and we got *all* those bills through. A lot of credit goes to Joe King, who was our speaker, because we got the major legislation through when the other house was the opposite party.

MM: Yeah, that is quite a feat. Quite a few things happened at that time. I keep thinking about that era in terms of the bills that were being passed and that incredible amount of work. You had mentioned hazardous waste before, which was another issue you were tackling during this era. In 1990, the House passed Engrossed Substitute House Bill 2390, "Regulating Hazardous Substances and Waste." And that new law – you call it the "planning bill" for short – strengthened existing laws by directing hazardous-waste producers to implement a plan to reduce hazardous waste. The set goal would be to achieve a reduction of hazardous waste by 50 percent by 1995. The Department of Ecology was directed to adopt the new rules by April 1, 1991. That included provisions for dealing with substance-use reduction, waste reduction, recycling and treatment, in descending order. You were the prime sponsor of this bill.

NR: Yes.

MM: Do you recall the work you did in the House and your negotiations in order for this bill to pass? The House had a solid Democratic majority, but the Senate, in 1990, had a narrow Republican majority. Anyway, what do you recall about that?

NR: Well, it was something we worked really hard on. The bill originally was much bigger than what we ended up with. I may have talked about that before. We wanted them to send their plans to the Department of Ecology to be approved. But the lobbyists were very firm about any trade secrets that could be shared. I remember our staff worked really hard on that bill particularly, coming up with different versions that maybe would be acceptable. So we finally ended up with what I thought was a pretty weak bill. They just had to do the planning. They didn't have to send it to the Department of Ecology, and they didn't necessarily have to do it. But it turned out to be one of the best successes I had because they learned, while they were doing the planning, how they could reduce the waste. And it worked. We had a hearing on the bill in the summer after it had gone into effect. The lobbyists all came with lots of praise because it had been very successful, and the people they were working with had saved money. Not only saved money in not using hazardous substances, but they saved money in not having to dispose of it, which is expensive. So it was a good bill.

MM: The other issue, I don't think we've talked a lot about this, but you had a lot to do with reducing solid waste, too. I know that you received an award from Washington Recyclers for Legislator of the Year in 1992.

NR: Yes.

MM: As I was composing questions for this interview, I remembered that four years after you entered the Legislature, in '85, there was the big issue of the Midway Landfill where methane, caused by decomposing trash, had crossed the road. It had traveled through gravel beneath the surface and

had gone into a neighborhood in Kent, and there were some ensuing evacuations. Homes were in danger of exploding from the methane gas leaking into their basements. That event created a good deal of attention on solid-waste-related problems in our state.

NR: What happened at Midway was a big problem, and probably the county had to spend a lot of money on it. Since then, there's a whole new way of building solid-waste facilities. We went over to Eastern Washington in '91 or '92 to see the one that they were building. It's close to the Columbia River; actually, it's right near the train tracks, but it's in a dry area. They're not building any more solid-waste facilities like Midway in Western Washington because of the rain. But this landfill has several layers of lining, and it is actually piped for the methane gas, which then can be used.

MM: Oh, I wasn't aware of that.

NR: Yes, and instead of the methane gas being a waste or a danger, we can actually use it.

MM: Oh, because methane is a natural result of the decomposition.

NR: Yes. So they're building landfills in completely different ways, and I think that's because of what happened at Midway.

But, you know, one of the bills we did was the major overhaul of solid waste. That was the Waste Not Washington Act, Substitute House Bill 1671, Providing Major Solid Waste Reform. That legislation was passed in 1989, which brought about curbside recycling. That's how come we all have our recycle bins out front, and every utility that offers garbage pickup has to offer recycling at no extra cost. I don't know if you noticed that little black box when you came in our driveway. That's our garbage. The big bin is the recycling. Of course, there are only two of us, but still, it's a big difference when all that stuff that's in the big recycle bin used to go in the garbage.

When we first moved in here, you were still allowed to burn. So I burned a lot of paper. We had a little incinerator down in the backyard, but you're not allowed to do that anymore, which is a good thing.

MM: Because of an air bill you helped to pass?

NR: Yes, but solid waste was one issue, and hazardous waste, of course, is different. Our hazardous waste all goes to Oregon. Well, our solid waste from Seattle also goes to Oregon. We went on a fieldtrip once, before the bill was passed, along with the Oregon legislators, and we looked at the hazardous waste sites. Then we saw the place that was planned as the solid-waste site for Seattle and Portland. We went up on a ridge, and it was the whole valley, and that's where our solid waste goes now. The garbage from Seattle goes there.

MM: What was the impact when you saw that?

NR: It was awesome, *awesome*; it was such a big area.

MM: Did it make you feel like we're just waste producers, each of us?

NR: Yes. It really brought it home that they were going to fill that *whole* valley and that we had to do a lot of work to reduce waste. I think you can see, not many people have these little tiny garage bins, but a lot of them on our street have pretty small ones, too. They're upright, but they're slim.

MM: Yeah, actually driving in today, it looked really neat and tidy here because there was black bin, blue bin, black bin, blue bin. I could see the trash trucks going by, collecting, but it was so much tidier than usual. In my neighborhood up north, we have the red, white and blue milk crate kind of bins; everything falls out of those.

We're Working To Clean It Up. For Good.

There are over 600 hazardous waste sites in Washington. Some are considered the most toxic in the country. They threaten our health.

I won't stand for it.

I am using my experience to find regional solutions to the problem. I recently participated in the first meeting of the Pacific Northwest Hazardous Waste Advisory Council. I feel honored to be the Washington State Legislator appointed to the council.

There's no easy answer to toxic waste but we are making headway. You can be sure I won't stop until it's taken care of for good.



Excerpt from 1988 Campaign Flyer

NR: We had that at first, the different bins that we had to sort. Then they found that it was really cheaper to have everything together, and they do the sorting. Of course, I'm sure they hire people at minimum wage. But it's still jobs.

MM: Not to stay on trash for too long, but I wonder, when you're a legislator and you're trying to get these bills moved along and passed, there's always some compromise and some negotiation. If you could impose stricter and tougher laws in terms of solid waste, what would be some of the things that you would like to see happening to reduce our waste even more?

NR: Well, of course, now they have the green bins, too – which are for grass clippings and that kind of thing – you do have to pay extra for that. But in Seattle, particularly, people can put all kinds of food scraps in those, and that's a step beyond what we were able to do at the time. So that would be one thing. At the time, I really felt that we didn't have to compromise

much on the Waste Not Washington Act. It included everything that was feasible at the time. It was a pretty big step forward, because then Seattle and other Washington cities started having recycling pickup.

One of the things we did is we had an agency for waste reduction, and that was very successful. They found markets for the recycling. I had the opportunity to talk to the man who was originally in charge of this. That agency has gone private now. But it's been very successful in finding markets for recycling.

MM: That's a big problem; you can't recycle something and then lose money, can you? It has to pay for itself. How do these issues impact your waste practices?

NR: The stuff that we put in the garbage, hardly any of it is the icky goeey stuff because we compost that ourselves. We don't subscribe to the green service, and we have plenty of room back there to put grass clippings. We compost yard waste, and we kitchen compost. Mostly, what I put in the garbage are things that are not recyclable. Like, with chicken, there's a paper-and-plastic piece to absorb the juice, which really smells and can't be composted. It doesn't decompose. I don't put anything in the plastics recycling that is not recyclable; it goes in the garbage.

MM: I know that packaging is a huge problem.

NR: We had a bill on packaging once, but it didn't pass. But I think that industry itself has done a lot to reduce packaging because, of course, it saves money.

MM: I also want to talk to you about the 1991 Clean Air Act, which revised Washington's original Clean Air Bill. Again, I can't believe all the work you did in this short period of time.

NR: Well, Representative Wes Pruitt was the prime sponsor on that. We were having these meetings for the oil bill and the air bill at the same time, but Wes did the major work on that bill. The reason that bill was successful, I think, was because it taxed *everyone* in order to pay for it. There was a fee attached to the renewal of your license plates to take care of the air pollution we create. Anyhow, the grass burners had to do it. Everybody had to do it, and we funded the bill on the fees to take care of the problem. So they couldn't say, Why do we have to do it when somebody else pollutes the air worse than we do? Why do we have to do it? They didn't have that. Everyone had to do it.

We were forced to do it by the federal government, but they gave us a lot of leeway because different states have different air problems. We had to get our emissions below a certain level, and it

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“There are few givens that come with life anywhere. But clean air ought to be a given, at least here in Washington. How we can sit by and watch as our air thickens, smells and threatens our health, is beyond me. I don't intend to let smog settle over our cities or have our kids end up wondering where the blue skies have gone.”

Rep. Nancy Rust

Excerpt from 1992 Campaign Flyer

didn't matter how we did it because of the differences in the states. I think it was a good federal bill because it left it up to the states to have to meet the standard.

MM: And the state could exceed the standards set by the federal regulations if the state wanted to do so, right?

NR: Oh yes. In whatever way they could do it.

MM: At that time in the state, there were problems – like spontaneous combustion in trash pits – from the heat of decomposition. Pits would catch on fire.

NR: Oh yes. Well, I remember down by Lake Washington at the Center for Urban Horticulture, which was all parkland, all that was burning because of the landfill. I remember the smoke coming from it.

MM: There were smelters on Commencement Bay, and pollution came from that area – a lot of industrial emissions, people burning wood stoves. There were even times when Mount Rainier would become obscured because the air pollution was so bad, especially when there was an inversion.

NR: Yes, we did the wood stove bill earlier, in 1987. As a matter of fact, that was one of the first good bills we got out of my committee where I learned to work with the industry. We did some compromising, and we got the bill passed.

Now you can't burn in your fireplace or use your wood stove when there's an air inversion. There are penalties for that unless it's your sole source of heat. For example, we have a wood stove in our cabin on Lopez Island, and we don't have any other heat. But it's just a cabin, so we can always burn there. Sometimes, I feel guilty about it though.

MM: And then there were the grass field burnings, which you mentioned. That was a big issue in the Spokane area, right?

NR: That was part of it, yes.

MM: Grass growers burned those fields annually, and the area would fill up with smoke, depending on which way the wind blew. It was a health issue for people, especially people with asthma.

NR: Another issue was in Lake Forest Park, which is part of my district. It's a low place, and it's right at the end of the lake where the air quality was worse. There was one woman who moved over here because it was so bad over there. She was one of the real advocates for the wood stove bill. Her husband had done a lot of study, and they were real advocates for the wood stove bill. Living here, we get the wind from the water, and the air is clearer. Lake Forest Park is in a little sinkhole. It settles there because it's right at the end of a lake, and it's low. But here, we get the wind off the Sound all the time. But the air-quality problem was alleviated as the result of the wood stove bill, primarily.

MM: Is there anything else you want to say about the Clean Air Bill or things that we've changed because of the air bill?

NR: Yes. Our air is cleaner than it was. Although, there are still problems, but cars are better.

MM: There was a lot of work done to reduce emissions, wasn't there?

NR: We had to do emission control inspections. I remember doorbell-ing one particular person in our district who always commented upon that issue. She'd say, I think of you every time I have to take my car in to be inspected. Well, now we only have to do it every five years, but then they had

to do it at least every other year unless it was a new car. With new cars, you didn't have to do it. Cars built after a certain year were better. I think it was '81. They didn't have to be done as often, but cars that were older than that had to be done more often. But I think now it's five years for everybody. But it's still something you have to do, and you have to pay for it.

MM: I guess if we had more mass transit, obviously, our emissions would go down. So it's also a transportation issue. Did you have conversations with Representative Ruth Fisher, who headed the House Committee on Transportation while you were working on the Clean Air Bill and some of these other environmental issues?

NR: Oh yes, especially because the issue was part of the whole Growth Management Act, too. It was done separately, but it was part of that whole. All those issues were related to each other. I remember that when Governor Booth Gardner had a press conference, he praised all those bills. He said it was the best year for the environment since the early '70s. The '70s were when we, under Governor Evans, did SEPA – the State Environmental Policy Act – the Shoreline Management Act—

MM: And it was during that time that the Department of Ecology was established, in 1970, under Evans. I read a quote by Booth Gardner saying as much. I think he named 1991 as the greatest year for environmental legislation.

NR: Since that earlier time.

MM: You had done so much environmental legislation in the early '90s that I believe it was in 1993 that the Department of Ecology approached Governor Lowry and said, You know, we are really grappling with trying to fulfill the mandates of these laws and trying to implement them in the Department of Ecology. And we need time to do this.

It was sort of like asking the Legislature to slow down the legislation, the creation of new environmental laws, to let the Department of Ecology catch up.

NR: Another issue related to the success of the legislation was that almost all the bills that came through my committee were funded. They came with money.

MM: You were on the Appropriations Committee at that same time. How does the money portion work?

NR: We put fees in the bills, so it was no problem. They went to the Appropriations Committee, but there was no problem because there was no general fund money required. The bills came with their own money.

MM: So the problem is if these bills come into the Appropriations Committee and there are no fees or anything attached, then you have to look at your general fund, which is a pie that's already been sliced up and committed to. Then you're stuck trying to shift priorities. I see.

NR: Yes.

MM: Was that part of your doing? In essence, it sounds like you were saying, Look this isn't going to pass, and this isn't going to work unless we have fees attached. I know; I'm in Appropriations.

NR: Well, that was the way you did it; you put a fee on it. For the kinds of things that came through my committee, you could do that. Whereas, if it was in education or related to social service, it didn't operate in the same way, with fees. But with the oil spill bill, I told the lobbyists, you figure out how you're going to pay for it. I said, "I don't care; just figure it out." [laughing]

MM: [laughing] The power you wield.

NR: One of the things I did in the Appropriations Committee is to have paragraphs included in the budget that put restrictions on funds if the department didn't follow through.

MM: You were really against tax exemptions. I don't know if that's what you're referring to.

NR: I was really against tax exemptions.

MM: So if someone came around, a business, and they were seeking tax-exempt status for a portion of what they did, or what they made, you didn't allow for that?

NR: Yes. Sometimes I was one of the very few people who would vote against a tax exemption on the floor. There were several for the Boeing Company. They were given exemptions for doing the new Dreamliner plant. The Boeing Company got all kinds of exemptions, and it just made me mad.

MM: And does that happen because they are such a force in our state's economy and they wield a lot of power?

NR: Yes, they had a lot of power. But, you know, you have to wonder afterward if they would have built that plant here anyhow. Then, of course, after we did all this, they moved their headquarters to Chicago, which was a bitter pill. But we had to laugh because they fought an income tax so hard, and then they moved to Chicago where they had to pay an income tax. So ha, ha!

MM: I don't think we've spent enough time talking about your work on

the Appropriations Committee. It seems there were certain things that you protected and wanted to see funded so that they could begin, or continue, without interruption. I was reading about your support of early childhood education; job training for welfare recipients, helping to get them off public assistance; expansions to basic health care plans. These are only examples; there are many things you did. You defended WIC appropriators in 1992, which provided food supplements to low-income mothers and children up to age 6. And then, what else? Let's talk about comparable worth.

NR: I thought comparable worth was earlier.

MM: I think the law was in place, but you helped to create a \$15 million allocation to allow the state to meet its responsibilities under the 1984 law, which was designed to correct pay inequities between men and woman of state jobs of comparable difficulty. Do you want to talk a little bit about your work on the Appropriations Committee?

NR: I don't know that I specifically worked any harder than anybody else on some of those issues. I do remember trying to explain comparable worth to a lot of people because, of course, we had equal pay for the same job, but this was equal pay for comparable jobs. It was Chris Gregoire, then deputy attorney general, who came to our committee to explain it; that was in 1983. That was the first time I met her. She was so articulate; we were really impressed with her. I think the issue came up originally because of a lawsuit. I believe it was Public Employees. So, anyhow, it was just for the state, but it's a model for how it should be everywhere.

MM: When you work on the Appropriations Committee, and you have a budget shortfall in the state, what happens in Appropriations? I mean, you worked with some budget shortfalls. Did your committee work for Appropriations become tougher?

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NR: I think, most of the time, we compromised by doing some cutting and also adding some fees and providing more revenue. I remember discussions about putting fees on various things, and then we talked about putting fees on different kinds of lessons, like swimming lessons. I said, “Oh no! You can’t put fees on swimming lessons, because every child needs to learn how to swim.” So we didn’t put it on that.

MM: So you would just look around at the various things people subscribe to and do, and you would consider whether the state could get some dollars by placing fees on those items or activities?

NR: Right. They wanted to put a fee on cable television or something, and *boy* did those lobbyists get it out to all the subscribers, and we didn’t do that.

MM: When you had these budget shortfalls and these problems, what are the priorities, the things you feel we need to protect? What goes through your mind, and what’s the work of the committee?

NR: Well, we had a lot of caucuses of only the Democrats during the time we were in the majority, where we spent hours and hours debating these issues. One thing, particularly, I do remember working very hard on – this was the first year that we were in the majority, which would have been 1983. The Republicans had cut welfare for two-parent families. Some of the women – I think Representative Joanne Brekke was the instigator – had several meetings, just ourselves, and we decided we were not going to vote in the committee for the proposed budget unless welfare was returned to two-parent families. This was because, in some instances, a husband was leaving the wife so she could get welfare.

MM: Oh, I see.

NR: We succeeded because we had not shared with the other Demo-

crats in the committee what we were going to do until it came. Then we said, No, we're not going to vote for that unless you do this. We won. It was women. It was Joanne Brekke, Helen Sommers and me, and I don't remember who else, Barbara Granlund probably, and some other women. Anyhow, we did it, and it was really important to keep the families together.

MM: So was it unusual or was it typical that someone who is on Appropriations is also on the Revenue Committee, two different committees simultaneously?

NR: Well, they weren't always two different committees.

MM: It used to be Ways and Means together?

NR: Yes, right. Then I gave up being on the Education Committee because I knew they were going to put me on Revenue. I wanted to be on Appropriations because it's one of the big pluses to get on Appropriations.

MM: Oh, really?

NR: Yes.

MM: Because you had so much control over what gets financial support?

NR: Yes, and, of course, it's a lot of work. For one thing, the meetings were always from 3:30 to 5:30 in the afternoon, and so there was no ending. Earlier in the day, your committee might meet from 8 to 10 in the morning, and then there was another committee from 10 to noon, or else we went to the floor then. So you had to end at the scheduled time. People didn't understand that. They'd come from out of town, and they didn't have a chance to speak. But we only had those two hours to get it through. On the Appropriations Committee, if there were still people who wanted to

speaking, even though maybe 25 people have already said the *same thing*, then they got to speak. It went on and on and on. It got kind of boring with continuous speakers saying the same thing.

Then we would sometimes have to stay down for the weekend when the rest of the members went home.

MM: To do more work?

NR: We were working, and we were having hearings.

MM: Do you remember what any of your really big hearings might have been about?

NR: Well, when it came down to the end, we had hearings on all the bills that came to the Appropriations Committee. You see, we had to hear them all again. They'd already had a hearing, or two hearings in their committee, and they came to Appropriations to get heard again. So then toward the end of the deadline, you've got all these bills coming. There was no way you could deal with it without meeting on the weekend. But we didn't complain. I mean, we did complain, but we didn't want to get off the committee because of that. We had asked for it.

MM: Was it beneficial to you to have had a background in mathematics or that you had dealt with taxes before?

NR: Well, I wasn't any better at arithmetic than anybody else, but I think math gives you a certain discipline and ability to analyze things.

MM: Numbers never talk to me. I can see numbers on a page, but I really need someone to narrate to me what's going on. But I imagine that you can look at numbers, and they speak to you.

NR: Yes, but I'm not necessarily any better at arithmetic than anybody else. I do have different ways of sometimes doing it in my head than other people would.

MM: I'm remembering that you'd had some experience working with finances, taxes especially, before you had joined the Legislature. You had worked with Hank McGuire, who was running for county assessor. But what did you learn about the way bills are passed, the way politics works, from being on Revenue and Appropriations committees that you didn't understand or know very well before?

NR: Well, I had learned a lot about tax structure in the League of Women Voters. I had chaired that committee and had been on the committee when the league had a person named Eleanor Brand. She was really knowledgeable about taxes, and she actually went to work for the Senate. I took over after her. I remember telling the league president one time that I could never know as much as Eleanor. She said, Don't worry about it. We don't all need to know that much.

But I really did understand about how property taxes work, and why we need to have an income tax. I was part of a group called People for Fair Taxes. As a matter of fact, I was a founding member of that.

MM: People for Fair Taxes?

NR: People for Fair Taxes, and we were in favor of an income tax, having a three-legged stool. Heavy reliance on the sales tax is what is really wrong with our tax structure. We have property taxes, and people hate the property tax, but it's not higher compared to other states. It's just that we're so dependant on the sales tax. So now, when people are saving their money even if they're working, the milieu is that everyone is afraid that they're not going to be working, even though they are working. If they're still working, they'd be paying an income tax. But, now, because they're afraid that

they might lose their jobs, they're all paying off their bills and putting off buying new cars or new refrigerators, new big things. They're putting those purchases off.

MM: In terms of what's happening now, the current economic downfall, is this recession comparable to anything you went through or you remember from when you were in the Legislature?

NR: Well, in 1981, there was a big shortfall, but, of course, we were in the minority then. That's the burden of being in a majority: You have to balance the budget. When you're in the minority, you can sit back and complain. They put the sales tax back on food, which was *very* unpopular. I think Governor Chris Gregoire has made a mistake by declaring that she won't increase taxes, even fees. They're going to have to do something, because the cuts are too much.

MM: In this last campaign, 2008, she promised no new taxes.

NR: I know, I always think that's a big mistake to do that kind of thing.

MM: She must have felt she just couldn't get elected against Dino Rossi when she said it.

NR: I guess somebody said, in an editorial, that she's got to get rid of the Dino Rossi fear.

MM: Yeah. Well, speaking of campaigning and fears, I came across some materials about one of your challengers –

NR: George Bye!

MM: George Bye, yes. In 1990, you faced Republican George Bye. He

“For the past decade, Nancy Rust has sponsored or co-sponsored almost every major environmental bill introduced in the House . . . she is consistently out in front.”

Bruce Wishart, Director
Sierra Club State Conservation Office

Sierra Club State Conservation Office

“While in office, she has shown an outstanding concern for the environment as well as concern for other issues important to the State.”

Sally J. van Niel Co-chair
Vim Wright Co-chair
Political Action Committee

Washington Environmental Political Action Committee

1992 Campaign Flyer

was 33 years old during the primaries. Actually, he was an Air Force reservist. I think he also owned an academy for nannies.

NR: Yes, he had an academy for nannies. I can remember that now.

MM: Anyway, he was called into active duty, right before or during the primary, and he went to the Middle East, Saudi Arabia, before the general election in November. This generated a lot of media attention. I read the newspaper clippings that you shared with me. What was your reaction to the campaign and all this attention that was showered on him as a military man?

NR: Well, I continued to campaign, although he wasn't campaigning, because I felt the Republican Party might raise money to campaign for him, and there would be a lot of sympathy for him because he was in the service. So I continued to campaign, but maybe not as hard as I might have otherwise.

In your prepared questions to me, you had raised the question of his residency. That was earlier that we found that out. As a matter of fact, I found that out in the beginning. He was living in Shoreline, and he had a lot in Bothell. I don't remember exactly the details, but we took it to court because at that time there were very few – maybe fewer than five – precincts in Shoreline that were not in my district. I knew my district boundaries so well that I spotted it right away. My campaign manager went over there to this address and took pictures of his children playing outside. His wife was Asian, and his children were Asian, and he had pictures of them in his campaign materials, so they obviously were his children. She took down the license plate parked in front, which was his car. That's where they were living. I think he registered to vote at the Bothell address. Dave McDonald was the lawyer for the Democrats, and he took it to court. The court ruled that if George Bye were elected, he could not serve, and that he couldn't vote for himself. Actually, we didn't make a big point of that, but we knew

it. It must have been in the paper. Nevertheless, before he was called up to serve, I already had all the doorbelling material and everything, and I kept on doorbelling. I was a compulsive doorbeller. Our strategy was to keep on doorbelling because his name was still on the ballot. We didn't want to win by default. Actually, he perjured himself.

MM: Oh, really?

NR: Yes. It says you have to be a *resident* registered voter in your district, and he was not a resident of the district because he was living in a house that was outside of the district. So that was perjury. But, you know, you don't want to win by default – in this case because your opponent had to drop out because he didn't live in the district. We wanted to win.

MM: And you won with 62 percent of the vote in the primary, and 65 percent in the general election. Was there any problem with your district changing?

NR: It went from the 1st to the 32nd. It changed very little. We got those other precincts, but our district really didn't change. The number changed. They eliminated the 32nd District as it had been. We only got a half a precinct from the 32nd District, but we got the number.

MM: Oh, I see.

NR: When you're running for the House, you've got to run every other year anyhow, so it just meant we had a different number. I bought a bunch of stickers that said 32, and put them over the number 1 on my yard sign. That was all I really had to do –

MM: And your letterhead probably, too, yeah. All of this happened in 1991.



Nancy Rust

Nancy and her husband Richard Rust, a family physician in the community, have six grown children, all graduates of Shoreline Public Schools.

1990 Campaign Flyer

NR: Yes, we had to change all that. Probably, if I had letterhead left over, I probably just changed it. You know, Booth Gardner – you have to give it to him. He had a lot of stationery from the governor before, Governor Spellman. For years, that was blacked out, and his name was put under it. But that's a little way of showing that you're saving money.

MM: Let's see. There was something else I wanted to talk about.

NR: Oh, wetlands.

MM: Wetlands, OK, that's right.

NR: Yes, I was a prime sponsor for that bill. But Jennifer Belcher, it went to her committee, not to my committee, so Jennifer did a lot of work on it. But I spoke on it on the floor.

MM: I found, when I was going through your papers, a 1992 floor speech on wetlands. But something happened in 1991. The Senate proposed three bills that would have negatively impacted the Growth Management Act's ability to protect wetlands. All these bills died in the House, which I would imagine had something to do with you. You sponsored a wetland bill, which was deferred to the Committee on Natural Resources, as you just said, Jennifer Belcher was the committee chair. And I quote, "An Act related to wetlands protection and management. Adding a new chapter Title 90, RCW, adding a new section to Chapter 76.09, and prescribing penalties." I believe this may have been one of the attempts to create wetland legislation, and I noticed that you had a floor speech. What happened with this legislation?

NR: Oh, it didn't pass the Senate; it passed the House. But we did some of this before the Growth Management Act. Well, the Growth Management Act was a two-year process. We did have wetland protection in the

Growth Management Act, but this would have been stronger. It ended up that they're protected.

MM: It seems that wetland protection was something you were constantly working at, beyond the Growth Management Act. You wrote a letter to the *Richmond Beach Community News* dated March 14, 1992, which I really love. I love this quote: "Wetlands are as important to our planet as kidneys are to our bodies. They filter our sediments, break down toxic chemicals and delay runoff, reducing the effects of floods and eliminating the need for costly flood-control measures."

NR: Yes, most of the wetlands have, of course, been destroyed because people thought they were swamps, and they were filled. But because the bill went to Jennifer's committee, Jennifer did most of the work on the bill.

The Land: Understanding the Balance

In the past several years, Washington has passed legislation which has protected our lands without straining the budget. Rep. Nancy Rust has steadfastly protected our precious wetlands, ensuring critical ecosystems will survive. Nancy remains a fair leader in the battle to save our land without inhibiting all development.

"My mission continues to be to watch over our lands and make sure we are leaving a legacy of environmental improvement for my grandchildren and yours. Sure we're going to have conflicts, but we need to stand up for the land or it's decline will take its toll on our lifestyle, not only in future generations but in our generation."

Rep. Nancy Rust

Excerpt from 1992 Campaign Flyer

When it came to the floor, since I was the prime, I was the first speaker. See, the first speaker is always the prime sponsor, the name that's on the top.

MM: Yes, your name comes first. So it was your responsibility to persuade the rest of the House to pass it?

NR: Yes, and Jennifer's, too. We worked together on the bill.

MM: I found your handwritten notes from that time you spoke on the floor. Under "reasons for protecting wetlands," you write, "Habitat. Flood Prevention. Water Quality. Wetlands are sponges. Take them away, and water goes down hill, carving out gullies, silting streams, flooding homes and farms." Then you have an example of Maple Valley and the people whose properties and homes were flooded, which, you mention, resulted in damage and decreased property values. Do you remember speaking to these issues?

NR: Oh yes.

MM: Did you like giving floor speeches? Was it something you looked forward to doing?

NR: Well, I tried to be a good committee chair. I was not a prime sponsor of a lot of the bills, but I worked very hard on them. So, in that case, it was always the person who was the prime sponsor who made the first speech. That person was always prepared. I sat on the edge of my seat during that time, and I was prepared, too, but not in the same way he was. The speaker would call on somebody from the other side. He always did that, going back and forth. If that person spoke against it, I popped up next. So then I had to speak extemporaneously. I had to refute what he had said. But it turned out that I was good at that.

MM: You had done your homework. You even had to anticipate what the other person was going to say.

NR: Oh yes, *oh yes* I had to do my homework. I had that floor file right in front of me. I knew all those bills that came through my committee. I could speak like that on a bill. I knew what was in them, and I knew why we were doing them. So it was easy for me to pop up like that.

And when I went to the League of Women Voters National Convention before I joined the Legislature, our league was sponsoring what was called a new program, and, of course, the league's president made the major speech, which she had spent a lot of time preparing. But they made me sit in the aisle; I came next.

MM: So you could pop up.

NR: Yes. I just seemed to be able to do it. You know, when I was taking piano lessons, my mother would despair because I wasn't practicing. It would be coming time for our recital, and my mother was worried about how I was going to do. So she would talk to my piano teacher, and my piano teacher said, Don't worry about Nancy. She'll rise to the occasion.

I guess I did. I would sit down, and I would play the piano as I had never played it at home. So I think it was a talent that I developed when I was a child, being able to do this. It worked for me in the Legislature.

MM: You could harness the energy of the moment, and it focused you.

NR: When we were in the minority, I spoke more those last two years than I ever had before because the rule is: If you got the votes, you don't need to speak. Well, boy, I had to speak against all those bad bills coming out from the Republicans. On the Growth Management Act, I was talking all the time because they had all these really bad amendments. Well, they managed, they had the majority, and there were some Democrats who would vote for

them, too. I would get enough “no” votes on those bills because the Senate was still Democrat. I would go over and talk to the senator whose committee those bills were in. The fact that I had gotten enough “no” votes made it a lot easier for them to not pass the bill. If the bills had passed with a very strong majority, then they would have had a hard time defeating them. But I gave them enough negative votes, so it was pretty easy for them. And those bills didn’t pass.

MM: You know, I’m wondering about those bills that didn’t pass in terms of weakening the Growth Management Act. I don’t think builders were very happy because a lot of prime real estate, which may have been on wetlands close to the water, was no longer buildable.

NR: Well, of course, the Shoreline Management Act always had been in effect since the ’70s. That was a growth management act. At the time, we didn’t call it that, but that was really what it was for shorelines and the rivers over a certain size.

But now, yes, they can’t develop. I don’t think I’m going to go into our litany of complaints about living in Innis Arden, but we wouldn’t have all these trees if it weren’t for our wetland.

MM: Well, one thing I noticed, in doing research, is that you weren’t terribly reliant on PAC funding for your campaigns, right?

NR: Yes, I did. I got PAC money. I got money from the teachers, the state employees.

MM: But what I’m thinking about, with Republicans, is the kind of pressure they’re under because they’re receiving more money from the building industry.

NR: Oh yes, well, I was the enemy of the builders.

MM: So when they're trying to weaken the Growth Management Act, that's where their funding is coming from, a portion of their campaign financing is coming from the building industry.

NR: The BIAW, Building Industry Association of Washington, oh, they were my big enemy. For 12 years, they couldn't get a bill through my committee.

MM: How did you deal with them? What did you do?

NR: Their bills got stuck in my committee, if they went to my committee.

MM: Did you become the stone wall for them?

NR: I was the stone wall. That was one of my accomplishments. You know, maybe we didn't pass as many bills as other committees, but we

***"You have to be willing to step out
of the pack and take risks,
even jump completely out of your element
if that's what it takes."***

—Carol Bartz

Inscription on the back flap of campaign donation envelopes

passed some really big ones. Anyhow, that was one of my accomplishments. I'm actually proud that we were able to stop a lot of the bad stuff coming over from the Senate when they were Republicans. They didn't get anywhere in the House, so most of my opponents were very well funded as a result.

MM: In 1992, you were running against someone named Leo VanHollebeke, whom you defeated in the primaries. He claimed you were vacationing in Europe while you should have been in session, which he emphasized by including a picture of the Eiffel Tower on his hit piece against you. There was also something about your affiliation, which I didn't quite understand, with the Highland Clinic. I think it has to do with your husband, Dr. Rust. That was part of VanHollebeke's campaign against you. How did you defend yourself?

NR: Well, VanHollebeke sent out this terrible mailer with the Eiffel Tower. He claimed that I had not been in Olympia to vote for the biennial budget. The biennial budget that I didn't vote for had two weeks left in the biennium. It was a supplemental budget for just those two weeks.

It's true; I had been in Europe. I was on a bicycle trip in France. Governor Booth Gardner usually called us back immediately after session, to finish the budget, but this time he didn't. We had signed up for this trip a year ahead of time, and I had thought we would be safe to go, even though we might have gone into special session. So the word came the day before we were to leave, and we had airplane tickets. We had paid for the trip, the whole thing. We went anyhow, and I wrote a letter to Joe King. I didn't call him; I sent him a letter, which he got after we had gone, telling him that we were leaving for this trip. Well, I got back and there was a message on my telephone – we didn't have e-mail then, of course – saying that I should be in Olympia the next day. So jetlag and all, I was in Olympia the next day bright and early in the morning, all suntanned and relaxed. We voted for the biennium budget for the next two years. So I was there.

That was the year I had hired campaign specialist Kathy Allen, and she got this response in the mail in 24 hours. It said, “Shame on you, young man.” It had his picture all blurry, and, of course my photo was good. I knew I had perfect attendance for regular session. I knew I had never been sick. She had confirmed that with the Secretary of State that my attendance was perfect, and we included that information, and some other things. People got it in the mail on Monday, and the election was the next day. Kathy Allen was worth her money.

MM: I looked her up. She’s now president of something called the Connections Group.

NR: Right. She works on campaigns.

MM: And she’s the author of *Taking Back Politics: The Insider’s Guide to Winning*. She’s apparently very sought after, and she does a lot of work with women politicians.

NR: Oh yes, that’s what she does. At that time, she was only working for Democrats and mostly for women, but I think she works for other people now.

MM: So what happened with the Highland Clinic?

NR: Well, the issue made it in the paper, and it sounded really bad. My husband, Dick, and his partners were moving, and the clinic was going to be empty. It was all fixed for a doctor’s office. I think, originally, it was Lois North’s idea to have a clinic in the north end. Lois was president of the King County Council. Audrey Gruger was the council person then. They tried to get the county to take over the clinic because it was all set up with all the separate rooms and sinks that you have to have. And they needed a north-end clinic. There was one on 45th Street that is still there, and so it

would have been perfect to have one in the north end. But, I think because of the publicity, it didn't happen. It was sold to somebody for a law office instead.

MM: Well, why was it a problem for you to be affiliated with that?

NR: Because it made it sound as if we were going to make money off of it, which wasn't true, and because Audrey and I were friends. It was really bad publicity. The issue hit the papers while we were gone, I think. I didn't really respond to it the way I should have. I didn't write a letter to the editor or do anything about it. It was kind of a bad thing.

MM: But you defeated Leo VanHollebeke.

NR: Leo's father had been a senator, and he was a Democrat, but he was not pro-choice. So Leo ran against me as a Democrat in the primary. That was when our district number changed, and I remember he came to the Democratic meeting and made people believe that it was an open seat.

MM: He took advantage of that.

NR: He made it sound as if it were an empty seat, and he was running for it. Of course, he was running against me. But the district hadn't changed; we just had a different number. So everybody had assumed that Grace and I were going to be running in it. Also, Leo had worked on Patty Murray's campaign when she ran for the Senate.

MM: I noticed he listed that as part of his previous experience.

NR: He had used her list of yard signs. I would go up to a house that had Leo's sign and I'd say, "Well, I was kind of puzzled because last year you had a sign for me." The homeowner would respond, "Oh, he said that we'd

had a sign for him before.” Of course, he hadn’t run before. Then there was that awful hit piece; it was pretty ugly. But I won by a lot, so.

MM: Yes. You won 51.75 percent over his 27.04 percent; that’s big. You got 14,642 to his 7,651.

NR: Then you mentioned, in your prepared questions, Terry Roberts in that campaign. Terry didn’t file until quite late.

MM: Yeah, you faced Terry Roberts in the primary, but also in the general.

NR: Yes. He ran in ’92, but it was really late. It was the next time, in ’94, that he really ran. It was in ’94 when he sent out the hit pieces. He used the health care bill. He called it the “Rust/Lowry plan.”

MM: What was that?

NR: It was our health care bill, which he called the “Rust/Lowry plan.” Mike Lowry was our governor. I only voted for it at the last minute because I got an amendment passed.

MM: And why was it bad that you had voted for the health care plan? Why could he use that against you?

NR: Well, there was nothing bad about it. The insurance companies hated it, and they fought it. They said we would take away people’s choice of doctors, when in fact the insurance companies were taking away the choice of doctors, and they still are.

MM: Right. So it was a kind of scare tactic?

NR: Yes. This was a major health care bill that we actually passed. But I

think we lost the majority over it because of the insurance companies that were upset about it. So the next year, when the Republicans took control over, they did away with it.

MM: But you weren't the prime sponsor of that bill.

NR: No, and I was on the fence on the bill the whole time. I really suffered over it. At the last minute, I got an amendment passed, which was something the doctors wanted, and so I voted for it. Of course, when you get your amendment on it, you vote for the bill. It would be not very good if you got this amendment on, and then didn't vote for it. So anyhow, yes, it was at the last minute that Brian Ebersole, who was the speaker at that time, said to me, Bring me your amendment.

I got it. And it passed. They wanted to have the support from the doctors, so I got this amendment passed. So Terry Roberts acted as if it were my bill when all I did was get an amendment on it. I defended that bill when I was doorbelling, but it was hard.

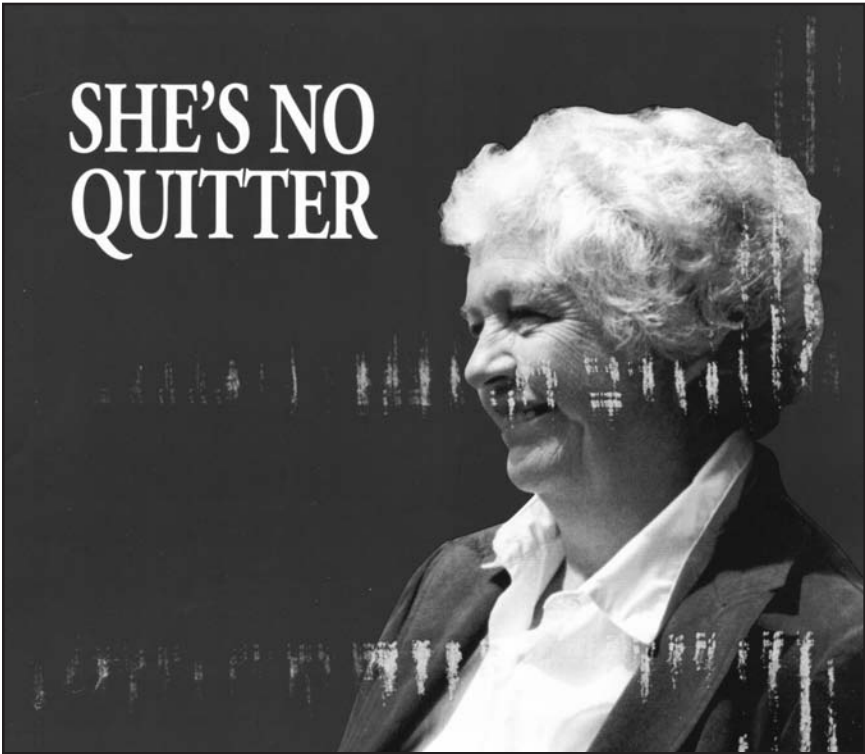
MM: So you defeated Roberts in '92, earning 65.65 percent to Roberts' 34.35 percent of the vote.

NR: Yes, and in '94, he was armed with all this stuff from the insurance companies, and he really hit me hard.

MM: So this was the year you developed these purple campaign pieces?

NR: Yes. I don't know why Kathy wanted to change the color because we were always using my color.

MM: Which was a rusty color red and the beige. And these new pieces are white and purple. They are really big, glossy campaign materials for you. This one says, "She's no quitter," and it has a profile shot. It's an 8½-by-11,



1994 Campaign Flyer (with marks of having gone through the mail)

and it folds open. There's quite a lot in here.

NR: Yes. This is a different piece.

MM: "Nancy Rust won't quit while there's so much at stake. Like our land, like our water, like our people." There's a picture with you and Alexa, your granddaughter, on the back. Then this is another one, this is an anti-Terry Roberts piece, "Terry Roberts will say anything."

NR: That's Kathy who did that; she did all that stuff.

MM: Then, on the back, it states, "He will say anything to get elected. He

will say whatever the Republicans tell him to say.”

NR: Terry’s mother was Asian, and he got a lot of money from the Korean groups. We spent a lot of money on our pieces.

MM: So you said you spent \$30,000 that year for the ’94 election. That’s interesting because he chooses a kind of blue, and then you went purple. This is quite a departure from any of your other materials before, both in terms of color and size.

NR: It was. I don’t know why she wanted to change the color, but I didn’t argue with her.

MM: Maybe she wanted it to be more noticeable, not the same old thing.

MM: So what were the major issues with Terry Roberts? Were you surprised by his campaign against you?

NR: Yes. Well, he got a lot of money from the BIAW and some of those other folks. He campaigned pretty hard. He got a lot of money from the Asian community.

MM: In ’94, as the result of the primary, you received 58.58 percent of the vote to Roberts’ 41.42. In the general election, you got 56.35 to his 43.65 percent. He went up a little bit.

NR: But you see, I got over 60 percent of the vote some other years.

MM: Yes, so that race was closer than what you were used to.

NR: Of course, other people would think that percentage was very good. But, you know, I worked really hard for that. I decided to not run again

after the election in '94, but I didn't tell anybody. Only the leadership knew I wasn't going to run. I didn't make it public, because I didn't want to be a lame duck. But that campaign for '94 was that much harder.

A lot of times, I worked harder than I needed to. When it got to be August, I used to say, "I'm never going to do this again." But then I'd go down and see all the work we had yet to do, and I'd run again. But in '94, I really meant it. I felt like I was getting an ulcer, I'd wake up in the night, and I would be hurting. I hated asking for money, and sometimes I would waste a whole day getting around to trying to call somebody, and then it would be too late, and I wouldn't do it.

MM: You would procrastinate because you hated it?

NR: Yes. So, anyhow, I decided I really meant it, that I wasn't going to run. Then, of course, we lost the majority. I could have run for the Senate when Darlene Fairley did in 1994, but I didn't want to lose my committee chairmanship. Once you're in the House and you have a leadership position, or if you're a committee chair, you don't want to go to the other house and sit in the back row. So I had no interest in running for the Senate. Although, the only difference is that in the House you have to run every two years, while you only have to run every four in the Senate. We still represent the same district, same size. You know, in other states, they're divided in two. The two representatives split the district in half, one representing each half, while one senator represents both sides. Just like in the U.S. House, you know, we have many congress people for each states' two senators. In Washington state, for example, we have nine representatives in the House. Anyhow, I didn't want to go to the Senate because I didn't want to lose my committee, and then we lost the committee anyway.

MM: That's similar to other people, like Helen Sommers, who stayed in the House. She had been chair of Appropriations, Capital Budget and Revenue. And also Ruth Fisher, who was head of the Transportation Commit-

tee, remained in the House for similar reasons.

NR: You don't want to lose what you have, go over there, sit in the back and not be able to do the same things you were able to do before.

MM: And so Representative Mary Margaret Haugen was a little different because she made the switch to the Senate.

NR: Yes. There are other people who did; they didn't feel the same way about it. As a matter of fact, a lot of people that were in the House with me are now in the Senate.

But anyhow, I'd already decided I wasn't going to run. Maybe I would have changed my mind if we hadn't lost the majority. The other thing was that Dick, my husband, retired in '94. He still did take care of nursing home patients, but he wasn't going to the office. So it was nice, because he had that little transitional time. So anyhow, it was time.

MM: And you had served for 16 years.

NR: Yes. That's a long time. By that time, I was old enough to retire, too.

MM: I wanted to ask you something that happened in 1993 when the state was facing a budget deficit of \$1.7 billion over the following two years. Having passed major environmental legislation, activities in the Environmental Affairs Committee changed focus to oversight and strengthening existing laws. The reason I want to ask you this question is because I found a news article that quoted you at that time. You said, "We don't have a big environmental agenda like we've had in the past." This was quoted in the *Seattle P-I*. It says you tried to pass state laws guaranteeing that parties responsible for toxic-waste cleanup can sue for restitution from others that helped create the problems. You planned to move bills, requiring that the states shipping garbage to Washington landfills meet recycling goals com-

parable to Washington. And you'd seek to tighten controls on real estate development in floodplains.

NR: We had a big floodplain bill that year, '93. We worked hard on that. I had been on a joint select committee dealing with floods. And so it was a really good bill. It got through the House, and it died on the Senate calendar. That means if it had had more time, it would have passed the Senate.

It was when Senator Linda Smith was taking a lot of time filibustering, and other bills failed at the same time. Then, of course, we lost the majority, and nothing came of it. But a lot of the flooding that has happened within the last few years would probably not have been as disastrous if that bill had passed.

MM: And had there been some floods that precipitated the floodplains bill?

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"Water is the resource of the 1990s. How we find it and pay for it; how we improve its quality; how we allocate it to whom and for what; these all loom as water questions for the future. We have prepared for the future by taking care of our sensitive aquifers and reservoirs. We must think regionally when it comes to our future water needs, and I see this mission as the challenge of the decade."

Rep. Nancy Rust

Excerpt from 1990 Campaign Flyer

NR: Yes, there were. There were some floods that precipitated it, and some of the people that lived along the floodplains wanted dredging and that kind of thing to make a deeper channel, but that was not what we wanted to do. We wanted to move the levees farther away from the river so there's more room in there. Then the mission would be to build the levees in a certain way that the floodwaters, instead of breaking through in a big rush and destroying property, would flood easily. For example, a lot of the Skagit Valley is so fertile because of historic floods. But you don't want it to break through and rush in. In the original bill, we had required that buildings that are in floodplains be built in a certain way that would withstand flooding. I don't think that lasted. But there are some examples. A high school in Carnation and one of the civic buildings in Mount Vernon are built that way, so maybe it's parking underneath and then the major offices and classrooms are above. Usually if the floods are coming, you can get the cars out of the way, but you don't store the documents and things like that in the garage.

MM: And we've just had such terrible floods in our state recently.

NR: Regarding the one in the south on I-5, I'm not going to say it wouldn't have flooded, but it wouldn't have been as disastrous if we had gotten some of those things through. In some ways, the highways, if they're built up, serve as a barrier, keeping the waters from being able to spread.

MM: I didn't think about that.

NR: A lot of the flooding is related to cutting down trees in the mountains. Also, rain on snow, when all of a sudden we get what you call a "Chinook," and you get warm weather and rain on the snow where there aren't any trees to absorb it. It's one of the main reasons for some of the flooding that happens. They accused a particular clear-cut that had happened up

above. I know it's one of the things Peter Goldmark, the land commissioner, used as an example that the former DNR person had allowed to happen.

MM: There are many little threads of things I'd like to ask you about in this final interview that I haven't yet asked you about. One of the things – and this is totally off the subject you just spoke about – was the special commission to study nuclear energy.

NR: Oh yes. Actually, it wasn't about nuclear energy, it was about nuclear waste. It was called the Nuclear Waste Board. And we had all these meetings on Friday afternoons.

MM: Was this around the time that people had started to investigate the Hanford Nuclear Reservation in southcentral Washington state?

NR: Yes.

MM: Hanford became an issue, an environmental issue the state began to tackle, in 1985. The Tri-Party agreement between the Department of Ecology, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Energy, regarding cleanup of the site, was signed in 1989. Were you on the Nuclear Waste Board around that time?

NR: Yes. It was when they were having troubles with Hanford. The problem had been these single-lined tanks with mixed waste, and they were burping. But the big problem is that all over the country, all these nuclear plants had been built with the thinking that they would figure out a way to dispose of the nuclear waste by the time they had to dispose of the spent rods, and they *haven't yet*. The spent fuel rods – it's not just that they're potentially explosive, it's that they're very hot. They are kept in what they call "swimming pools." I went to see some of those. We made several trips to Nevada to see Yucca Mountain. At that time, there were six states that were

possibilities for being the disposal site, and Washington was one of them. Then it was lowered to three, and we were one of the three.

MM: So who was making the decision, the Department of Energy?

NR: Yes. And the decision to send the fuel rods to one of the Western states was purely political because most of the nuclear power is in the East. And so Congress had decided that the nuclear waste could not be deposited in granite; granite is in the East.

So there were different sites. They were tuff, basalt particularly, and salt sites that were being considered at the time. Well, anyhow, we went to Europe and the federal government paid for this trip. We started in France. We didn't look at any sites in France, but France recycles nuclear spent rods, and we don't do that. We went to Germany, and we went to Sweden. Anyhow, the federal government was so afraid that we were going to be accused of being on a boondoggle that we had no free time. We went from one proposed nuclear waste site to another, and we talked to people. It was a hard trip. The only free time was just after we arrived on a Saturday; Sunday we were free. Of course, that was our jetlag day. I had been to Paris before, but only for a couple of days. So I buddied with the other Democrat woman from Spokane, and we walked the length of the Champs-Elysees. Just in one day, we did see quite a bit of Paris. But, you know, Paris doesn't change. Anyhow, that was the only free time we had. The rest of the time, we were either on an airplane, going in and out of airports, or we were going in and looking at proposed nuclear waste sites.

MM: The least attractive part of any country.

NR: Yes. The only other advantage was that although we all went together, we didn't have to come home together. So I stayed in Paris for a week at my expense. They paid for my way over and back and all the expenses while on duty, but we didn't stay in fancy places. Also, some of the food

was provided by our hosts. As trips go for congressmen, it was pretty reasonable. And there were people from the other states, too. I think it was just Texas and Utah at that time.

We'd also been down to New Mexico to look at the salt site there. Germany had a salt site. We went to Switzerland, and they were proposing putting it in granite. In Sweden, they were proposing putting it under the ocean.

MM: Wow.

NR: Then Congress finally decided to put it in Yucca Mountain in Nevada. Of course, Harry Reid is from Nevada, and he's the Senate leader. But I just read in the paper, in a little tiny article, that Congress has decided not to send it to Yucca Mountain.

MM: Where are they going to put it?

NR: That's it. That's the real reason we can't build any nuclear power plants; because they haven't decided what to do with the waste. I mean, some people say that, "Well, we need to go back to nuclear. You know it doesn't have a carbon problem." And we haven't had any really bad experiences with it. But they've got to solve the problem of waste. It's scary.

But what is happening in Washington state is that these single-lined tanks at Hanford were burping and buckling, and they didn't even know what was in there.

MM: They were close to the Columbia River, too.

NR: It's six miles from the Columbia River. The Oregon legislators were more concerned about that than ours were sometimes. You know Portland is on the Columbia, and our state seems more worried about Puget Sound. Well, I worked with them on some of those things because I felt just as

strongly about the Columbia myself.

MM: So when you were on the Nuclear Waste Board, around what year do you think it was? Was it after Chernobyl blew up in 1986?

NR: The Nuclear Waste Board began in 1985. Our mission, at the time, was to evaluate whether or not Hanford might serve as a repository for the permanent disposal of nuclear waste. We were in Europe the following year when Chernobyl happened. We were in Italy. I remember they weren't serving lettuce in the restaurants.

MM: Because they were afraid of the fallout making its way into the vegetables.

NR: Yes. Well, I was on that issue for quite a while, over a lot of years, trying to solve the problem with Hanford. But what is at Hanford, what they're putting in Hanford now, was called low-level waste. It's the commercial waste that we really worried about. A lot of people felt that salt would be really the best place because the salt molds over it.

MM: I wondered about that. You mentioned salt, and I thought the waste would leach through, or something. But no?

NR: No. It means that there's no water there because it's still in the salt form and hasn't dissolved. The salt site was in New Mexico near the Carlsbad Caverns. We went down and looked at that. In Germany, we went into an old copper mine. All we did is we went into these things, we sat in the meeting and sometimes the meetings were a little tedious because they were translating.

MM: How long were you gone, a couple weeks?

NR: Well, at least a week.

MM: And how many people were with you?

NR: There were eight of us from Washington. The states must have paid something, too, because the other states didn't send as many. There were eight of us: four women, two Republicans and two Democrats, and the same with the men. Dick Nelson was on it, Irv Newhouse.

MM: And Dick Nelson became a good friend of yours, too, right?

NR: Yes, because we did that together.

MM: So what happened in '95? I'm getting toward the end of my questions here, but in '95, you said the Republicans had taken over, and suddenly there's no Environmental Affairs Committee.

NR: No, they did away with my committee!

MM: The committee becomes Agriculture and Ecology. So what happened? How did things change?

NR: Well, everything changed. I ended up speaking more than I ever had before because I had to fight all these bills. He had a terrible bill on water. You know the governor had a bill. We had done a lot of study on water, and the governor had big plans for doing something on water. But since we lost the majority, his bill was fairly short. It did four things.

MM: Was this still Governor Lowry at the time?

NR: It was Lowry. I couldn't tell you exactly what it was, but it was a pretty simple bill. It's always been a courtesy for the chair of a committee

to sponsor a governor request bill, and Gary Chandler refused to. He had his own plan for how to deal with water. Instead of going to the Department of Ecology, which he thought was biased in favor of the environment – that was their *mission* – he wanted the issue to be solved by engineers and have a board.

Well, of course, we fought his bill. None of their bills passed because the Democrats were still in control in the Senate. But I had to speak against them. It was really very humiliating, you know. Debbie Regala – she’s now in the Senate – also did a lot of speaking. The two of us did it together, taking turns. So I was on that committee, and then I was on the Government Operations Committee.

MM: The committee, Government Operations?

NR: Government Operations Committee. And Marlin Appelwick, who was our leader, put me on that committee so that I could speak against anything that came up against the Growth Management Act. I was talking against bills on one or the other committee.

MM: So when you think back over your whole 16 years, how did it shape your life and impact you to have served as a representative and chair of the Environmental Affairs Committee? How has serving in the Legislature shaped who you’ve become or who you are?


NR: You know, up until that time, I was a mother, and our social life focused on Dick’s career. Our friends were other doctors and families, and it was just the right thing for me to do at the right time. I became more of a person in my own self. So it was a wonderful experience, and I wouldn’t have traded it for the world.

Although I was ready to retire, it was the best thing I could have done when I did it because our children were all out of the house. I mean, the twins were in college and Mike was still in college, but they were not

home. So, you know, I had really been a stay-at-home mother and a volunteer, and I worked on a lot of things. Everything all kind of fit in, all the things I'd done, even without having thought of being in the Legislature. So then I became more of a person in my own right by doing that. I think Dick was very proud of me, and the children were, too.

MM: And now you've become part of Washington state history.

NR: Yes. You know, I was wondering if, when I talked about my first campaign, I had mentioned enough that all of the family had helped me,



“ I was always taught to leave things better than I found them.”

Nancy Rust

Chair, Environmental Affairs Committee

1992 Campaign Flyer Cover

because I want to give them credit for doing that.

MM: It became a family affair.

NR: It was. I don't know if I ever mentioned that when my twins Amy and Lib did their internships for being teachers, they did them in Olympia. So that was kind of fun to have them down there while I was there. We went to some movies together, did things like that. Then, also, our oldest granddaughter was a page, and she was a page for two years in a row.



Arcadia as a page

MM: What's her name?

NR: Arcadia is our oldest granddaughter. She's now in her early 30s. She came down for two years in a row to be a page. I have a beautiful picture of her somewhere. I don't know, maybe I gave it to Martha, her mother. It's of Arcadia carrying the American flag.

MM: That's great.

NR: So she really liked doing that work, and it was a great experience for her.

MM: Well thanks, Nancy. I think this has been a good interview. I think we'll end it there. Do you think that's good?

NR: Yes.

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