An Interview with

NANCY

BOLAND

An Oral History produced by

Robert D. McCracken

Esmeralda County History Project

Esmeralda County, Nevada

Goldfield

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PREFACE

The Esmeralda County History Project (ECHP) engages in interviewing people who can provide firsthand descriptions of the individuals, events, and places that give history its substance. The products of this research are the recordings of the interviews and their transcriptions.

The Esmeralda County Board of Commissioners initiated the ECHP in 1993 in order to collect information on the origin, history, traditions, and quality of life of Esmeralda County communities that may be impacted by the construction of a high-level nuclear waste repository located at Yucca Mountain, adjoining the Nevada Test Site in Nye County. Though the repository has yet to be built, the ten oral histories in this group of interviews were paid for by county monies received in connection with the Yucca Mountain effort, which is now in hiatus.

In themselves, oral history interviews are *not* history. However, they often contain valuable primary source material, as useful in the process of historiography as the written sources to which historians have customarily turned. Verifying the accuracy of all of the statements made in the course of an interview would require more time and money than the ECHPôs operating budget permits. The program can vouch that the statements were made, but it cannot attest that they are free of error. Accordingly, oral histories should be read with the same prudence that the reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries, and other sources of historical information.

It is the policy of the ECHP to produce transcripts that are as close to verbatim as possible, but some alteration of the text is generally both unavoidable and desirable. When human speech is captured in print the result can be a morass of tangled syntax, false starts,

and incomplete sentences, sometimes verging on incoherence. The type font contains no symbols for the physical gestures and the diverse vocal modulations that are integral parts of communication through speech. Experience shows that totally verbatim transcripts are often largely unreadable and therefore a waste of the resources expended in their production. While keeping alterations to a minimum the ECHP will, in preparing a text:

a. generally delete false starts, redundancies and the *uhs*, *ahs* and other noises with which speech is often sprinkled;

b. occasionally compress language that would be confusing to the reader in unaltered form;

c. rarely shift a portion of a transcript to place it in its proper context;

d. enclose in [brackets] explanatory information or words that were not uttered but have been added to render the text intelligible; and

e. make every effort to correctly spell the names of all individuals and places, recognizing that an occasional word may be misspelled because no authoritative source on its correct spelling was found.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As project director, I would like to express my deep appreciation to those who participated in the Esmeralda County History Project (ECHP). It was an honor and a privilege to have the opportunity to obtain oral histories from participating individuals. I was welcomed into many homes and was allowed to share in the recollection of local history. I thank the residents throughout Esmeralda County and Nevadað too numerous to mention by nameð who provided assistance and information. They helped make the successful completion of this project possible.

Appreciation goes to the Esmeralda County Commissioners who initiated the project in 1993: Chairman Wade Barton, Virginia Ridgway, and Joyce Hartman. Appreciation also goes to current Chairman Nancy J. Boland, William C. Kirby, and Dominick Pappalardo, who initiated the current project in 2012, and to Ralph M. Keyes, who became a commissioner in 2013. Ed Mueller, Director, Esmeralda County Repository Oversight Program, gave enthusiastic support and advocacy for this effort. The United States Department of Energy, through Mr. Muellerôs office, provided funds for this round of interviews. Thanks are extended to Commissioners Boland, Kirby, Pappalardo, Keyes, and Mr. Mueller for their input regarding the conduct of this research and for serving as a sounding board as we worked out methodological problems. These interviews would never have become a reality without the enthusiastic support of the Esmeralda County commissioners and Mr. Mueller.

Jean Charney served as editor and administrative assistant throughout the project; her services have been indispensable. Jean Charney and Robert B. Clark transcribed a number of interviews, as did the staff of Pioneer Transcription Services in Penn Valley,

California. Julie Lancaster and Suzy McCoy provided project coordination. Editing was done by Jean Charney and Darlene Morse. Proofreading and indexing were provided at various times by Darlene Morse and Marilyn Anderson. Joni Eastley proofed all the manuscripts and often double-checked, as accurately as possible, the spelling of peopleôs names and the names of their children and other relatives. Jeanne Sharp Howerton provided digital services and consultation. Eva La Rue and Angela Haag of the Central Nevada Museum and Suzy McCoy served as consultants throughout the project; their participation was essential. Much-deserved thanks are extended to all these persons.

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ð Robert D. McCracken
2013

INTRODUCTION

Historians generally consider the year 1890 as the close of the American frontier. By then, most of the western United States had been settled, ranches and farms developed, communities established, and roads and railroads constructed. The mining boomtowns, based on the lure of overnight riches from newly developed lodes, were but a memory.

Yet, even in the 2010s, the spirit of the American frontier can still be found in Esmeralda County, Nevada, in the attitudes, values, lifestyles, and memories of area residents.

Esmeralda County was established by an act of the Territorial Legislature of Nevada on November 23, 1861. The first boom camp in the county, Aurora, named after the goddess of dawn of Roman mythology, mushroomed into existence in the early 1860s with a population of at least 5000. The name Esmeralda, Spanish for "emerald," was provided by a member of the party that made the initial discovery of gold at Aurora; the individual probably had some beauty in mindð the term was then a common name for girls with green eyes. Another version is that the name referred to the Gypsy dancer Esmeralda in Victor Hugoôs novel, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame.* Discoveries at Aurora were followed by others at Columbus (1864), Red Mountain/Silver Peak (1864), Gold Mountain (1866), Palmetto (1866), Montezuma (1867), Oneota (1870), Sylvania (1870), and Lida Valley (1871). Goldfield, which sprang to life in 1902, was the last great mining camp of the American West, and one of the greatest gold camps in the history of the world. Along with Tonopah (1900) and Rhyolite (1904), its two sister boomtowns, and several score of

smaller, shorter-lived daughter camps located on the central Nevada desert, Goldfield was the last magnificent flowering of the American frontier.

Between 1903 and 1942, Goldfield produced approximately 7.7 million tons of ore containing more than 4.1 million ounces of gold and over 1.4 million ounces of silver, worth $90 million, mostly when gold was priced at $20 per ounce. Goldfieldôs glory days were from about 1904 until World War I. After approximately 1918, mine production declined to a fraction of what it had been, yet the town lived on. It survived a terrible flash flood in 1913 and a catastrophic fire in 1923 that wiped out a substantial proportion of the townð at least 33 square blocks, by some old-timersô estimates. Another fire in 1924 nearly applied the coup de grâce to the grand lady, but still she persevered.

Much has been written concerning Goldfieldôs prosperous years, but relatively less material is available on the town and its people from the decades following the end of World War I. Much of the history of Esmeralda County is stored in the memories of individuals who are still living.

Aware of Esmeralda Countyôs close ties to the land and our nationôs frontier past, and the scarcity of written sources on local history after 1920, the Esmeralda County commissioners initiated the Esmeralda County History Project (ECHP) in 1993. The ECHP is an effort to systematically collect and preserve the history of Esmeralda County. The centerpiece of the ECHP is a set of interviews conducted with individuals who had knowledge of local history. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and then edited lightly to preserve the language and speech patterns of those interviewed. All oral history interviews have been printed on acid-free paper and bound and archived in Esmeralda County libraries, Special Collections in the James R. Dickinson Library at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas, and at other archival sites located throughout Nevada.

The interviews conducted between 1993 and 1994 vary in length and detail, but together they form an unprecedented composite of life in Esmeralda County after 1920. These interviews can be compared to a bouquet: Each flower in the bouquet is uniqueð some are large, others are smallð yet each adds to the total image. In sum, the interviews provide a view of county history that reveals the flow of life and events for a part of Nevadaôs past that has heretofore been largely neglected by historians.

A second set of interviews was initiated in 2011. The goal here was the same as for the interviews collected 20 years earlierð provide a view of Esmeralda County history unavailable elsewhere through interviews with county residents. However, in this series interviews were also conducted with a second goal in mind. Over 97 percent of the land in Esmeralda County is controlled and managed by the federal governmentð more than any other county in Nevada; indeed, in any state outside Alaskað and of the private land approximately 50 percent consists of patented mining claims, leaving little opportunity for community expansion on private land. A large percentage of Esmeralda County residents consequently believe the county is in large measure governed by the federal government as opposed to elected state of Nevada, county, and local officials. Many feel the strong presence of the federal government has the effect of constricting economic opportunity and personal freedom for local residents in many areas of life and would like to see changes made in that arrangement with the transfer of more control to local and state government. Those issues formed part of the focus of these oral histories.

ð RDM
2013

This is Robert McCracken talking to Nancy Boland at the Nuclear Repository Office in Goldfield, Nevada, August 10 and 18, 2011.

CHAPTER ONE

RM: Nancy, why don't we start by you telling me your name as it reads on your birth certificate?

NB: Nancy Joanne Boland.

RM: And when and where were you born?

NB: I was born March 12, 1953, in Rochester, New York.

RM: And what is your mother's full name?

NB: Viola Frenz Boland.

RM: When and where was she born?

NB: She was born in Rochester, New York, in June 1927.

RM: Do you know what her background was– where she grew up and what her father did and so on?

NB: Actually, I do. My grandparents lived right down the street and they gave my parents a piece of their farm to put their residence on as a marriage gift. My grandfather started off being a dairy and vegetable-type farmer and plowed his fields with horses, and had to give up the dairy a little later on because of arthritis in his hands. My grandmother was the financial genius and backup for running the household. She churned butter and made all the meals, a very hard-working woman.

They shared the burden as farmers, and that's how my mother grew up– helping out on the farm and messing around with the critters. She liked those a lot. Then she went to work in the city of Rochester for Hickok. Hickok was one of the core industries. Remember the Hickok Belt? They used to give away that prize. She worked there for some time. I don't know how she met my father, but he was working at Eastman Kodak

when they met.

RM: And what is your fatherôs full name, and when and where was he born?

NB: His full name was Francis Bernard Boland, and he was born the same year my mother was.

RM: Was he born in Rochester, too?

NB: No. Iôm not sure where he was born. His father was a construction worker and he wandered from job to job to job. He helped with some of the canal-building in upstate New York. They moved a lot, and the last place they did settle in was in Rochester, so probably from about 12 years old on, my father lived in the same neighborhood.

RM: How did your father earn a living?

NB: He was a pipefitter for Eastman Kodak.

RM: Did he work for them a long time?

NB: Yes. He started with them when he was 17. Then he was in the last part of World War II just long enough for the Armistice and came right back to work.

RM: Eastman Kodak was a huge operation there, wasnôt it?

NB: Yes, it was. That job ended up costing him his life, actually, because he had mesothelioma, that asbestos-caused lung cancer, because he was a pipefitter. We lost him rather early, which was sad.

RM: Thatôs too bad. He got that on the job, working? Did they put the pipes in with insulation or something?

NB: The insulation around the pipes had asbestos in it, so when they went to changing years ago, they knocked it off. It was kind of a hardened crust, so they just went ñbang, bang, bang,ò and all that stuff was up in the air. I think Kodak might have known that it was dangerous, but they werenôt properly equipped safety-wise.

RM: Did you grow up in Rochester?

NB: Actually, outside Rochester in Penfield, New York. I was an oddity there. [Laughs]

RM: What do you mean?

NB: My parents were still married. I went to school in the Webster, New York, school system. It's an odd arrangement, but where I lived in Penfield, I had a Fairport mailing address and I went to school in the Webster School District. That's when Xerox was in its glory days, when it actually started to become Xerox, so almost everybody that I went to school with who was not in agriculture, their parents worked at Xerox.

There seemed to be more people I went to school with who had divorced parents than had married parents. Our little neighborhood was very agricultural. You'd have, like, a 70-acre farm– our house was on one of those– and then the next thing up might be 40 acres, and then a couple little homes in between. The people that were in my neighborhood directly, generally our parents were still married, but when we went to school, it seemed like everybody else's parents were divorced.

RM: Did Xerox begin in Webster or was it also in Rochester?

NB: It was Haloid Corporation first and then it turned into Xerox later; a lot of people got rich because of that transition.

RM: So there were these two huge industries there, Eastman Kodak and Xerox.

NB: There were more than that. Bausch & Lomb is there. It's probably not that way now, but at one time Rochester, New York, had more millionaires per capita than anywhere else. A lot of entrepreneurs came out of there.

RM: There must have been a real spirit of innovation there, too.

NB: Yes, and then upstate New York is the core of IBM, too; it started in Syracuse.

RM: Thatôs really interesting. Now, what did you do after you got out of public school?

NB: I went to work. I always worked. [Laughs] Iôve been working since I was five years old, picking beans and strawberries. I never got paid an allowance; I had to buy everything. After school, I went to work doing some office workð accounting-type stuff. It was for a company that marketed sporting goods items. Actually, that was pretty fascinating because one of the people they signed up to represent their products was Mark Spitz. I remember meeting him in person when he came to their offices. They ran bowling alleys, too, which was great.

RM: So you started working after high school?

NB: As I said, I started working at five years old. I mean, I was doing farm work. It was like a rest when I got grown up. [RM laughs]

I worked there, and then one day I met this Canadian guy, and he decided he wanted to marry me and there was no saying no to him. He sort of told my mother, ñHey, I want to marry your daughter,ò and sheôs figuring, ñI donôt want her to be an old maid.ò She was concerned that I hadnôt married early enough.

I was supposed to get married real young and be a Xerox wife and homemaker and all that. Sheôd always had concerns about that I was somewhat maladjusted. My father didnôt, though. [Laughs] I wasnôt much of a female, letôs put it that way. I always enjoyed working with tools and I liked sports, so I wasnôt what she pictured as being a nice feminine little girl. I was really a tomboy.

Anyway, this guy came along and he was a nice enough fellow, and one thing led to another. When my mother found out about it she was, like, jumping up and down and ordering wedding invitations and everything. So I got married to him.

RM: How old were you?

NB: I was maybe 23; Iôm not sureð young 20s. We got married and I moved up to Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Up there, I again worked in office-type jobs, mostly with numbers. I decided one day that if I was going to be working, I wanted to get paid good money so I enrolled in the Certified General Accountants Program, which is like being a CPA down here. They have different classifications. You can be an internal accountant and in some provinces, a CGA can audit just like a CPA can down here; but in Ontario, generally you end up being something like a controller. Thatôs where that path leads.

Their programs are different than down here; you actually have to work and you take your schooling, and itôs critical, to keep going in the course, that you have a certain professional achievement along with your educational achievement. Say if youôre at Level 4, you have to be a mid-manager in order to complete and get your ultimate certificate. So you have to progressively get promoted along with the education, which I think is a much better way of going about schooling because you have practical experience, too.

I started on that course and continued on with it. I worked for Northern Telecom and the Humane Society up there, and the big one was United Tire and Rubber.

RM: And you were working as an accountant?

NB: No, you start as clerk or the equivalent and then you work up, but youôve got to work in the field and keep going up. I worked for United Tire and Rubber and it seemed like they werenôt going to advance me. Because of the requirement of the course and also because I felt like I was deserving and they passed me over, I left them and went to work for Northern Telecom. I wasnôt gone very long before I got asked to come back with an elevated position. Thatôs how I got to Nevada.

When I returned, part of my duties was being in charge of doing all branch

budgetsð supervising company budgets and cost accounting and inventory control. I worked very closely with all of the people who ran subsidiary companies, or even the engineers who made the tires. One of the little things in the string happened to be out here in Nevadað Mountain States Tire in Tonopah.

The first time I came out here was 1978. The marriage hadnôt been working out too good because my husband decided he was going to be a born-again Christian and wanted to be a minister, and because he wanted to do that, I was supposed to all of a sudden turn into a very retiring and submissive wife. So that just wasnôt working out too well for me. [Laughs]

RM: That wasnôt who you were, was it?

NB: No, and I said to him, ñYou saw what I was when you got me. Thatôs not going to work. If you want it to work, youôre going to have to respect me as the person that you married.ò That was a lot of the problem. Heôd gotten really wrapped up in this thing. He was thinking he wanted to be a preacher and was going to prayer meetings, and they were all speaking in tongues and so on, and he was looking for interpretations in everything. It was really hard on me because I was raised a Lutheran and I have a very strong faith in God, but I understand that faith in God is a long and steady thing, and faith is not something that comes over you all at once. His picture and my picture werenôt maybe the same thing, so it was particularly bothersome to me because it was as though I was the unbeliever. I wasnôt good enough.

RM: Yes, you were the heathen.

NB: Yes, because I wasnôt ñborn again,ò but I might never have been unborn again. Because as soon as I was baptizedð itôs kind of a different way of coming to the same place. So at that point I wasnôt too happy about the marriage and was wanting to come

back to the United States for a number of reasons. Although I like Canada a lot, theyôre not quite the same personality. I donôt know how to really put it. Theyôre more standoffish as a citizenry, and the people up there are all sort of lukewarm.

RM: Maybe theyôre a little more English.

NB: Itôs not even that. Itôs because of the way itôs structured there. In their educational system, you end up with people who arenôt real stupid or real smart. The people are sort of the same. Theyôve all completed this high-school-type thing, but you donôt run into really flashingly brilliant types and thereôs not the drive the people have here. A person like me might be considered to be aggressive because Iôm looking to achieve, and I missed that. I like the variety of us, and weôre far more strong-willed in the United States as individuals than they tend to be. Some of it may be the British influence, but I just think itôs the system, actually.

RM: In a way, thereôs less variability in people up thereð is that fair to say? And thereôs more variability down here. Youôve got a big range.

NB: And the bumps in life arenôt so bad there, either. Weôre far more without a safety net than they are, and thatôs probably another thing that contributes. But we have a lot more variety. Down here youôre going to have the challenge of taking care of yourself; otherwise, youôre going to starve. In Canada, that would not be allowed to happen. Youôd be in some kind of housing somewhere or somebody would take care of you.

As good as some of that is, I missed the challenge of being here and being able to freely say what I wanted to and not have people look at me and go, ñOh, youôre an American.ò At that time they didnôt particularly care for us because we were abrasive and aggressive.

RM: So you came back?

NB: That was my desire, to come back, but this company didn't want to let me go. At the time they were having a little problem with this Mountain States Tire in Nevada because it wasn't making money, and there was also sort of an abrasive relationship between the gentleman that ran it and the company's owners. So besides the difference between your ordinary Canadian and your ordinary American, putting a very city-oriented business-suit-wearing person in communication with a fellow who's really western and wears a cowboy hat just wasn't working.

So there was a big clash and they didn't communicate, and the people who owned United Tire and Rubber said, "Look. You can communicate with him and you can communicate with us, and we'd like you go down there and see if you can get this thing to run better. Would you be willing to do it? It gets you back in the States for a while and it would help us out with the problem. You can be a consultant to us."

I said, "You know, that might be a good thing," because it would give me a chance to think things out, so that's what I did. I'd been down here before on audits and such.

RM: So you knew what the central Nevada was.

NB: Yes. That would have been '79 because I first came in '78 on an audit.

RM: What did you first think when you came into this country?

NB: I liked it. It was wide open. I really have never liked cities. [Laughs]

RM: And a totally different world from what you grew up in or what you had in Canada.

NB: Not really, because I'd seen all of Canada. There's places like Timmins, Ontario, and Sudbury that are completely devoid of any kind of vegetation, so this looks green compared to that. And I've been to Baffin Island, which is near the North Pole, which is

nothing but an ice sheet; so I had seen quite a bit.

RM: Sudbury was where the meteor hit.

NB: There is nickel there; thereôs a nickel smelter. Thatôs what took care of all the vegetation. And thereôs portions of the landscape near the Great Lakes where itôs just a massive granite formation. This area of Nevada is different, but I liked it. I liked it the first time I came because it was the first time in my life my sinuses didnôt bother me, and I liked the openness of it.

RM: What did you think of the people compared to the people that youôd grown up with in the Rochester area and then the people in Canada?

NB: The people here were more like the ones I grew up with. Youôve got to remember, a lot of my neighbors and people I went to school with were rural, so thereôs a lot of shared interests. People out here like to go horseback riding or tooling around in their truck or shooting guns, and I fell right into it because I liked all that stuff.

RM: So they asked you to come down here and so you said okay.

NB: Yes. It was supposed to be for a limited period of time, but I ended up kind of getting hooked in. It was nice. When I came down here, they put me to the test. The ones who worked for the Tonopah store were trying me out to see if I was going to weakenð like going out and shooting black powder guns. ñIs the little woman afraid?ò

RM: And you were really not much more than a kid, were you? What, 25, 26?

NB: About 25.

RM: So you must have been pretty tough.

NB: Well, hell, yes. Thatôs what I said; I was picking strawberries at five years old.

RM: So having them testing you wasnôt so bad.

NB: No, it was a game. It didnôt bother me. Iôve shot guns before; maybe not the ones

they had, but Iôve shot them. So after a while I was accepted. Then I said I really didnôt want to go back to Canada and I stayed down here and helped run that store.

RM: How long were you with the store?

NB: A couple years.

RM: What did you do then?

NB: I wandered again. I went to work for an oil jobber for a little while in upstate New York. Then I decided I wanted to come back out here and start my own business.

RM: And what business was that?

NB: I did management consulting work, helping people with startups, and I did income-tax preparation.

RM: So you had developed a lot of skills in accounting and numbers, and how to make a business work.

NB: And even engineering, because I spent a lot of time doing cost accounting.

RM: Describe cost accounting.

NB: An engineer says, for instance, ñIôm making this tire,ò so you take the specs and figure out how much all the stuff costs, then youôve got to figure out how much time itôs going to take for them to do itð your labor costs. Then you come up with something called the standard cost, which is the estimated cost that you carry because youôre not going to know how much it costs for you to make all these tires till the year is through. Thatôs your best guess and itôs got to be good because every time one of those tires is done you say, ñOkay, thatôs my standard cost,ò and then you put it in your inventory. At the end of the year, you find out how good those standard costs were because you do a physical inventory of your raw materials and whatnot to see what you actually usedð you already know how many hours your people put in. So the difference there has to be

reconciled.

RM: Where did you get those skills?

NB: From the courses I took.

RM: How long did that program last?

NB: Itôs a five-year thing. I finished it down here, actually.

RM: What is the name of that institution?

NB: Itôs called the Certified General Accounting Association; they sponsor the program. So you might be going to, say, McGill University in Montreal to take a course, or you could go to University of Toronto. Even community colleges, sometimes. They figured the course curriculum out and okayed it. It wasnôt just accounting; there were business management components and human resource components. When you got done, you were like an MBA, not just an accountant. This geared you up to be like the financial manager of a company when you were done because human resources and inventory and purchasing and so on fall under the finance function in a company.

RM: And you took to that like a duck to water?

NB: Yes, I still enjoy that. When I got down here, I kind of naturally got involved with mining companies. Even while I had my own business going, I worked for mining companies.

RM: Were they Nevada companies?

NB: No, they were Canadian companies with operations in Nevada. Most of them end up being from Vancouver. Thereôs a whole street full of them out there. All their offices are, like, right next door to each other.

And that worked well for me because they understood what my credentials meant. A lot of companies here donôt understand what a CGA is but the Canadian companies

know what it is and theyôre like, ñYes, we want you.ò There was a little time in there, too, when my husband and I watched the Sunshine Mill up in Silver Peak; it was in mothballs.

RM: So you remarried when you came down here?

NB: Yes, but donôt ask me what year that was. Weôve been married a long time.

RM: And what is his name?

NB: His name is Dennis Hammers.

RM: Is he a miner?

NB: No, he used to be a stagehand in the Las Vegas Stagehands Union. Heôs traveled a lot, like I did when I was young. He did road shows. One time he could have gone with Michael Jackson, but he didnôt think that the Jackson Five was going to go anywhere. [Laughs] Heôs toured with rock and roll bands and shows down in Las Vegas. I think one time he worked on the East Coast in Virginia, at Wolf Trapð I think he worked at that theater one summer. In later years now, heôs worked in mining as a welder, fabricator. Heôs good at about anything. When youôre a stagehand, youôve got to have a wide variety of skills.

CHAPTER TWO

RM: So you were working for mining companies while here, but also going to Vancouver and places.

NB: That was part of it because the head office would be up there.

RM: How long did that go on?

NB: Iôm trying to think. We stopped working for Sunshine in 2000.

RM: That was when you were guarding the mill.

NB: Well, we sort of were their representatives. If the environmental people showed up, we took care of that, too.

RM: It was an operating mill?

NB: No, it was mothballed. But we didnôt just watch it; we showed it and made sure that nobody got hurt up there.

RM: Tell me about the Sunshine Mill and Mine. What were they doing?

NB: It was silver. Originally it was built for the Sixteen-to-One mine thatôs uphill from the town of Nivloc, over by Silver Peak. It was built in 1980, I think.

RM: Was it a big deposit of silver?

NB: Yes, it was. The mill was wonderful. It was the nicest little mill, and itôs too bad itôs not around anymore now.

RM: It doesnôt exist now?

NB: The government got after them and said it was time to reclaim it. They wouldnôt let it just stay there anymore. I think it was NDEP or BLM, one or both of themð the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection and the Bureau of Land Management. We had watched it for a number of years and they had a lot of people with options on it and

theyôd be in and out. Actually, we were one of the money-making cost centers of Sunshine Mining because of those options. They were getting, like, $100,000 a month in these options. They always had somebody optioning off the mills, so it would work for them; but finally the government types came by and I could tell by the way they were talking when they showed up for a site visitð it was like they were saying, ñOkay, weôre going to make it go away now. Youôre going to have to do reclamation.ò

I got hold of the people in the head office up in Boise, Idaho, and I said, ñI think youôd better get down here.ò But they forced them to reclaim it.

RM: Was the mine exhausted?

NB: It wasnôt exhausted but they would have had to start a new portal to get down to more ore bodies. It was underground, so they had a haulage portal and mining portal and they would have had to have done more mining to get down to the ore bodies.

RM: Thereôs still a big ore body under there?

NB: Conceivably, yes. But all of this was going on when the Hunt brothers did the silver thing, and they were the primary owners of Sunshine Mining.

RM: The Hunt brothers owned the Sunshine; did they buy it when they were trying to corner the market on silver?

NB: No, they had owned it before.

RM: When did it quit operating, do you know?

NB: Itôs operated a couple of times, actually. It stopped, I think, in ð81 or ð82 but then it opened up as a custom mill, running ores other than the Sixteen-to-One. When you do custom milling, it means that you have a couple hundred tons of ore you need run so you come to my mill and I mill it for you and then get part of the proceeds. That went on for some years, which might have brought it up to ð85 or even later. Then this company

called Zephyr bought it. They bought the Mary Mine property and they also optioned off this mill to use it to process the ore from the Mary Mine.

RM: Where is the Mary Mine?

NB: The Mary Mine is just slightly north of Silver Peak.

RM: Was it a big mine, too?

NB: Yes, itôs huge and very historic.

RM: Is it a silver mine, too?

NB: Itôs a gold mine. Thereôs the Mary Mine, the Drinkwater Mine. You know where the volcano is?

RM: Yes.

NB: Theyôre across from the volcano. The Sunshine Mine is the other way, and that tends to be silver. Silver Peak had just a phenomenal amount of silver production years back. The Mary Mine goes way back to the 1800s. Itôs been open, closed, open, closed, open, closed.

RM: Before Tonopah?

NB: Oh, yes, all of this was before Tonopah. Silver Peak was around when we became a state in 1863, and Tonopah and Goldfield didnôt come along until the early 1900s.

RM: Just out of curiosityð I come from a mining backgroundð what kind of mill was it?

NB: It was a ball mill, a crusher. You had a grizzly screen, a jaw crusher, and a cone crusher, and then they had a fine ore bin. They had screens up there to classify it; if didnôt meet the size it kept rotating back to the cone crusher. It went from the fine ore bin into the ball mill, and then it went up to CCD, the counter current decantation circuit. The lights swirl this way; they have you swirl that way. It picks up the gold in solution, and

then it comes back in the building and you put zinc in under pressure and then you send it up to the belt press. The zinc will drop the gold out of the solution.

RM: And what was their capacity? Was it big or was it pretty small?

NB: It was not real big. We could do about 35 tons an hour in the ball mill 24 hours a day, I think.

RM: Thatôs big where Iôm from.

NB: It was small compared to what something like Round Mountain Gold puts out. Iôd have to look up the specs; itôs been quite a few years now.

RM: Sure. I was just curious. Meanwhile, they had tailings, right? Were they running into environmental questions from the authorities because of the tailings?

NB: No, because it wasnôt closed down. Theyôd let them stay there because we kept everything up nice and they knew that there was somebody there so people wouldnôt get hurt. But finally they said, ñNo, weôve had enough of you. We wonôt let you keep this here any longer. You must do something about it.ò That nice little mill would be really wonderful today when all the prices are up and everybody needs a mill, if it was still standing. But at that point Sunshine Mining was forced to find someone to do reclamation and sell off the buildings. A lot of the mill equipment right now is on the Texas-Mexico border. And then the BLM, somehow or another, managed to sell off the acreage to a private person, and some of the buildings are still there.

RM: You mean the acreage that the mill sat on?

NB: Yes, and some of the buildings are still there. Itôs like a junkyard up there now. It used to be a well-kept clean-cut thing and now thereôre pieces of sheet metal flying around. This man has brought his collection in.

RM: Did they make them clean up the tailings?

NB: Yes, that got cleaned up.

RM: How did they reclaim that?

NB: They had been sitting there a long time. There wasn't any cyanide problem or anything. They just profiled the area, so it really hadn't been a problem.

RM: So in terms of our mission on this project, you had firsthand experience where the federal government, as well as the state government, came in and said, "All right, you've got to do something about this."

NB: Right, and instead of something that used to look halfway decent, every time I drive by it, I'm looking at this ugly thing.

RM: And an old mill can be a good tourist attraction.

NB: And it was quite functional.

RM: Yes, and as you say, maybe it would be used now.

NB: It's always been rather a puzzlement to me how that got sold because in the resource management plan with the Bureau of Land Management, that wasn't designated as a disposal area to be sold to a private party.

RM: How many acres are we talking about?

NB: I think it's about 25.

RM: Are there any mills now in Silver Peak?

NB: No.

RM: So anybody that finds a little streak of gold out there is out of luck for getting it milled there?

NB: For a mill, yes. I don't know what Mineral Ridge is doing right now, but before, they were trying to heap-leach the gold from the Mary Mine.

RM: Out there on site?

NB: Yes.

RM: That involves a lot of hoops to jump through, doesn't it, to set up a heap-leaching operation?

NB: Yes. The first time that got permitted, I helped write the plans. [Laughs] When Mineral Ridge was open the first time, a Canadian company had it and I helped do some of the work when it was getting permitted. Then I ended up being their administrative superintendent when it actually got going.

RM: Was that an arduous process?

NB: I wouldn't say arduous. It's very lengthy and extremely expensive because it's sort of a specialized field. They also want some sort of vetting, so it's like an individual like me can't sit down and just write this. Even though I know it, it's not my field of expertise so you have to have somebody come in like an environmental scientist, for instance, to address that part and have their name on that. Even though I've been exposed to it before in a practical way, I don't have the proper credentials.

So that's what happens. A company is forced to have specialized professionals contribute to this process because it does need to vetted. Not just anybody can sit down and do it. And you run into things like their Excel program rounds off acreage differently than yours does. So the Bureau of Land Management comes back with a comment saying, "We feel our calculations of acres disturbed is 1,020.02," and you had 1,020.015.

RM: They get that picky?

NB: They get that picky and they still are that picky. [Laughs]

RM: So you've had firsthand experience with this kind of issue. We used to mine in Nye County back in the '50s and if you wanted to start a mine, hey, go out and start a mine. Want to build a road up the mountain? Go ahead and build it. You could do

anything you were big enough to do, basically. Now itôs a whole new ball game, particularly for the little guy. Talk about that in terms of environmental regulations and what itôs done to the mining industry, particularly the little fellow or little woman.

NB: Between what the federal government requires and the state government requires and the new fees that theyôre charging for all miners, I think itôs practically put the little operator out of business. If youôre a smaller company, you will be forced to hire an engineer to help you get through the permit even if you are on private land.

RM: Even if youôre on private land?

NB: On private lands you need the blessing of Nevada Department of Environmental Protection. Even if youôre working on patents, you have to have their blessing. If youôre on public land, youôve got to file a plan of operation and a reclamation plan if youôre going to do anything but hand mine with the BLM, and that goes through both them and Nevada Department of Environmental Protection. It makes it very expensive to start up.

RM: What are the fees? Say I found a streak of gold out here somewhere.

NB: I have no idea what it is anymore; weôd have to look that up. Thatôs one bad thing about með Iôm not good with remembering numbers. Iôve worked with numbers so long that when Iôm done with a number, itôs gone, because if I ever acquired a real good memory for numbers, Iôd have gone insane a long time ago. Itôs a good thing when youôre doing peopleôs taxes because theyôd call you up to say, ñHow much money am I getting back or do I have to pay?ò and the only thing I could ever tell them was if they were getting a refund or had to pay some money.

But letôs back up a little bitð I realized we didnôt explain properly how Nancy Boland went from tire and rubber to mining. United Tire and Rubber made tires for mining and forestry uses so I spent a considerable amount of my time while I was in

Canada at mines and in very remote places. In the process of all of this, I learned to run almost every piece of mining equipment known to man, at least enough to move it around if you needed to. Now, mining is a very incestuous community. Itôs a small community and people tend to travel from one firm to another; once you have a core group that you know, people cross over an awful lot. Geologists and mining engineers kind of travel from one firm to the other. Even though I was an accountant with a tire company, I also spent an awful lot of time with mining on this side of the border and that side of the border because we had holdings on both sides.

I had known my current husband as a friend, and he was working down there as the bartender. The owner had been featuring my husbandôs name in radio advertisementsð that he was the bartenderð because he has a rather colorful life story himself. [Laughs] Heôs sort of an iconð he does things like go on pack trips across the United States. Anyhow, he was at the Gables and heôs worked as a cowboy several different times at Lida Ranch and done water jobs, too, at the RO Ranch and at Lida. He happened to be bartending down there and there was a guy I was involved with who I wanted to get away from. I told my friend Dennis, ñIôve got to get out of here.ò

He said, ñWeôll get you out, and if you want to get on the plane and go to your folks, fine.ò So we took off one night and as we were leaving town, we were saying, ñWeôve always been really good friends,ò and we got to talking. We figured weôd give it a try so we disappeared for a while. The sheriffôs office thought I had been killed or something because we never said anything to anybody, and Dennis had a tendency just to disappear anyway. Nobody thought much about him not being around but when I didnôt show up, they were a little worried.

So we kind of went on little adventures where he worked cowboying and I might

have been cooking. We did quite a bit of wandering around and enjoying life. [Laughs]

RM: How long did you do that?

NB: It was about six months or so, and then we went to work over in Silver Peak when Homestead was there, then we took off again. We went up to Eureka for a little while, and he was doing some cowboy work and helping out on a hay ranch up there, then came back again. So we'd been in and out of Goldfield a couple of times, but not for too long.

CHAPTER THREE

RM: That does a good job of establishing your background. What do we want to discuss next?

NB: Do you want to keep talking about how expensive it is to mine?

RM: Yes, and particularly the role of the environmental law.

NB: It is oppressive to both small and large operators. You need reclamation bonds and reclamation permits, and reclamation bonds can be millions and millions of dollars because you have to go through a bonding company to make sure that the entire cost of your reclamation is covered if the bond has to be pulled. It costs as much to make the earth go back as it took to get the gold out of the ground sometimes, so thatôs a bad thing. Years ago, you didnôt have to get the bond; you just had to have the reclamation plan. When Sunshine Mining first started up in the 1980s, they didnôt have to have a bond. And you have to have air-quality permits, water-quality permits, and water-discharge permits. Depending on what process youôre using, you could need all of the above. You may even have to have permits for hazardous materials.

RM: Which would include things like dynamite?

NB: Even diesel fuel can be a hazardous material. If it gets on the ground, thatôs an environmental disaster these days. Any kind of petroleum product anywhere on the ground is badð oil, gas, diesel.

RM: So the little guys, the little miners, who were really what central Nevada was founded on, are gone.

NB: Theyôre out of it. Most of the people who would have been a small miner have figured out now that the best thing they can do is sell to a big company, which is

something most of us know anyway, because we know how expensive it is to actually get a mine started. Anymore, theyôre pretty well precluded unless theyôre taking their little itty-bitty machine out there and doing it as a weekender.

Our state hasnôt helped them lately, either, because theyôve come up with a new fancy extra fee that all the miners have to pay; they increased those fees tremendously. The state did that when they had a special session in 2009. They added additional fees that the miners have to pay when they come in and record claims or when they do any proof of labor or intent to hold. Itôs a lot of money and itôs forced a whole lot of people out of the game or to give up a lot of claims.

RM: Thatôs amazing. Now, what other things about mining in this part of the country have you had firsthand experience with?

NB: Iôve had actually quite a lot of experience because when I was in Tonopah the first go-round working for Mountain States Tire, as it was called at that point, that was at the height of the Sagebrush Rebellion. The tire store is located right next to the Golden Hills, which was quite the gathering point for some illustrious leaders of that movement.

RM: Who were some of the leaders of the Sagebrush Rebellion?

NB: Senator Rick Blakemore, Dick Carver, and Wayne Hage.

RM: When would this have been?

NB: That was in ô79, ô80. They would frequently gather at the Golden Hills for lunch or dinner, or at Jerryôs. I remember many a time listening to their conversations close by.

RM: For the record, what was the Sagebrush Rebellion all about?

NB: It was all about the government making it hell to make a living. It was about government coming in and shutting down a road, coming in and telling you where you can graze your cattle and where you canôt graze your cattle. The government comes in

and says, ñYou can only get to this water if I let you get to this water.ò It was felt that the Bureau of Land Management, in particular, was being oppressive to the people who lived here.

RM: And as a result, there was this rebellion.

NB: It was a pushback. None of these people started the problem. They reacted to what they felt were things that were wrongfully done to them, like road closures. Or, as you said, a man or woman had a mine up in a Forest Service area and was told that they couldnôt get to their property and no one would turn around and pay them for what they lost on their property. Or the government said, ñYou canôt get to your water unless we tell you you can get to your water,ò and that water was owned by the rancher. It was a piece of property owned for a beneficial use by a rancher or a miner. Thatôs what it was all about.

RM: And these regulations essentially rendered these holdings worthless.

NB: Right, with no offer of restitution and no recognition that these things were owned. I think that thatôs what really bothered everybodyð it was as though they didnôt count, and the government was saying, ñYou will only do what we say you will do and there will be no questions.ò There were a lot of, I think, onerous law enforcement activities in this area taken on by the federal government at that time.

RM: Could you give some examples?

NB: I wasnôt there personally. Iôve heard a lot of that secondhand and I know thatôs what caused it to come to a head. The people were standing up for their rights, especially with the roads at that time.

RM: Did you sit in on any of these informal meetings with Dick Carver and the others?

NB: No, but Iôd hear them and I knew all of the people; weôd all say howdy. I wasnôt

one of the plotters and planners, but I knew what was going on. I admired and understood what they were doing.

RM: Were there any miners or mining companies that you were involved with that were involved in this movement?

NB: In an odd way, Sunshine Mining put up a very good fight. There was an area that ended up being designated a wilderness study area outside of Silver Peak in about õ79. Sunshine Mining submitted comment after comment after comment about there being mineral values in that area. They actually got a couple of claims in there that somebody still has right in the middle of this wilderness study area.

They worked diligently to try to stop that from being declared wilderness, or even a study area, and they were on the winning side of it until the environmental groups took action. The Bureau of Land Management actually decided that it wasnôt suitable for a wilderness area because of a lot of the input theyôd received from different mining companies and the local people, too. But there was a lawsuit brought against BLM by environmental groups and it ended up being a wilderness study area, which it still is today.

RM: What does that designation do to these places?

NB: Itôs just like being wilderness.

RM: You canôt do anything.

NB: No, and itôs all non-motorized. But there are still inholdings, claims, and whatnot in there.

RM: That you canôt work or even drive a vehicle to.

NB: It would be very difficult, yes, unless you were going up there with some mules and a pick and shovel kind of thing.

RM: Could you do it then with a mule and a pick and a shovel?

NB: As long as itôs not motorized, yes. Knowing how well they all stick together, Iôm sure all the mining companies were on the same page. They tried very, very hard to keep that area out of a wilderness study. Having been through their files, I know thereôs comment after comment after comment, and Iôm sure it was the same with the issues of the Sagebrush Rebellion because thatôs what was pushing everybody to create the rebellion.

RM: Whatôs your assessment of the problem now in terms of wilderness and so on?

NB: The problem now is a lot like the problem then. The more wilderness thatôs declared, the less land thatôs available for mining or other uses. Right now, Esmeralda County has a really bright future in energy production. They have an awful lot of geothermal resources in the Clayton Valley where Silver Peak is, and in Fish Lake Valley, which is where Dyer is. Both are amply blessed with geothermal. For us to prosper, we need to be able to: 1) make sure that somebody can get in there and build a facility to do it; and 2) have a way that this power could get sold somewhereð we need to transport it. Nevada wonôt be able to use all the power thatôs produced through these alternative sources ultimately with whatôs planned here right now.

RM: Thereôs over-capacity?

NB: Theyôve filled their renewable portfolio required by the NRS. The ideal thing would be to be able to sell it to California. The problem might be that if more wilderness is declared in this county, transmission could be completely blocked.

RM: So this area of Nevada will be able to produce a lot of electric power with no way to transmit it?

NB: Right. And if thatôs the case, we wonôt be producing a lot of power because if

thereôs no market for it, nobodyôs going to buy it; I see that as a big problem. If that land gets locked up, it stays locked up because itôs done with an act of Congress. If it becomes wilderness, youôre going to need a right-of-way before it becomes wilderness because if that right-of-wayôs not already in there or a road isnôt included in the wilderness plan then itôs locked up.

RM: What route would that power take?

NB: The state of Nevada, Nye County, Esmeralda County, and Inyo County have all been cooperating on this project. The way we would like to see it done is to either use the route that comes out of Silver Peakð thereôs a power line that is kind of famous on its own from Enron, - anywayð that goes over to Oasis and continues on in California.

RM: It goes over Oasis and down into the Owens Valley? Does it go over the White Mountains out of Oasis?

NB: Yes. So thatôs one route, but it probably wonôt work because itôs a really old line.

RM: What about making it bigger?

NB: That might happen and thatôs one possibility because youôve already got a power line. It eases the regulations in getting that permitted because itôs already on the books. Another route that probably would work, but I think is going to have a problem, is one the state proposedð they talked about running one from about Lida Junction and cutting into California that way, going south of Lida. The map I saw was not very detailed. The only way thatôs going to happen is if they use what we call Oriental Wash, but that comes very, very close to the Death Valley National Park and it comes very, very close to one of these wilderness study areas we already have. If those werenôt there, itôd be an awful lot easier to find a good route.

RM: What do you do when you get it over to California, say to the Owens Valley?

Does it go to L.A.?

NB: Yes, and a lot of it goes in and out of Vegas, actually, because their power lines go in and out of Vegas.

RM: Have you given any thought over the years to a nuclear reactor in Esmeralda County?

NB: I haven't given that that much thought because most of the nuclear reactors I knew about need water for cooling, I don't know if they've got some kind of new one that doesn't need the water.

RM: Yes, they've got low-water ones and they've even got them that run without water.

NB: If they have them that run without water, it would probably be worth it.

RM: Is there much water here?

NB: No, there's very little water. They're in horrible straits in Fish Lake Valley.

RM: I didn't know that.

NB: That's been a closed basin for probably 15 or 20 years, and that's just with the permitted uses. The permitted uses, I think, surpass their yield by two or three times.

RM: So the water table's dropping.

NB: Yes, it's dropping, but that's just permitted uses. There's nothing in that figure accounting for domestic wells. If you add on the number of domestic wells times two and a half acre-feet, if they're all using that amount, the situation really is ugly. We're working, actually, on water plans.

RM: What are your thoughts on the water plan, in a nutshell?

NB: It's important for us to have a plan because it gives us some ammunition. If we don't have a plan for our water, then somebody could come in and take what little water

we have; itôs important that we have a plan so everyone knows exactly what the status is. Iôve heard people say, ñOh, you got water,ò but they havenôt looked on the water inventories at the state engineerôs site, and a lot of them donôt understand that when they look at that, it doesnôt include everybodyôs little domestic well.

The BLM has a solar PEIS (programmatic environmental impact statement), which is a big wide study like an EIS, environmental impact study, but for a much wider area. They did one for the western states for possible solar project locations, and one of the places that the field office here at Tonopah picked was down by Gold Point because it was flat and there werenôt any mining claims on it. My first comments back to that were, ñThereôs no water there.ò Thereôre only 300 acre-feet of water in the basin.

RM: That wonôt go far.

NB: No, 300 acre-feet is what you need for maybe 150 people, and thatôs if theyôre on a municipal supply, not irrigating. That was one comment and the other one was, ñThereôs no big power line there.ò Itôs in the Valley Electric system and everything was engineered just to supply, for instance, a light bulb down in Gold Point or Lida and they didnôt build more than they needed for that use. Theyôre very small lines, and to go build lines down there, I said, just doesnôt make sense.

RM: Just to inject one of my interests here, thereôs a big power-producing center down in Phoenix called Palo Verde. Itôs three 1000-gigawatt reactors and they pay $45 million a year property taxes to the county there, plus theyôve got 2,400 good jobs. Iôm thinking, why canôt we have these kinds of things, one or more, in Central Nevada?

NB: We canôt because the government has all the land and they wonôt site something like that here. Thatôs another thing weôve been working on with Nye County. Itôs like this geothermal issueð theyôre leasing ground for that and the federal government has

decided they love stuff like this nowð geothermal or solar projects, or wind. So you can go out there and lease it for that, but you canôt lease it to put up a manufacturing plant.

RM: Thatôs another thing thatôs inhibiting it, isnôt it?

NB: Yes. We are at the whim of whatever policy happens in Washington. And not just this county, but that has historically been the problem. Itôs very difficult, as an elected official, to develop any kind of plan for the future because you donôt know what theyôre going to do to you next. Iôve been through this. When Yucca Mountain is on the table, you need to try to revolve your plans around Yucca Mountain because you say, ñAll right, theyôve passed this law.ò So you need to put that in your plan and that precludes you doing other things, perhaps, that you would like to do. You canôt, say, lobby to put a manufacturing plant or something along the rail line they were proposing for Yucca Mountain because they might come back and say, ñWe need three miles right-of-way for the line,ò even though ultimately theyôre only going to need maybe 500 feet. But when they withdraw the land and the people in the Bureau of Land Management, in their wisdom, come up with the mapping theyôre making decisions on, they withdraw three miles, even though theyôre only going to need 500 feet or maybe a quarter mile. So thatôs what happens.

When they make a decision on their land maps, weôre stuck with it. That means what used to be multiple use land isnôt there anymore except for grazing and whatnot. But when they say, ñIôm going to need this possibly for a rail corridor,ò itôs gone from other considerations. Itôs gone from geothermal uses. Itôs gone from them saying maybe we could put one of those solar projects here where itôs equally flat. At the time the selection for solar projects was being made, the rail corridors were still on their withdrawal maps, so that meant they couldnôt do anything in the Clayton Valley or in the

Alkali Springs Valley. The only places they could find were by Millers and by Gold Point, both of which are kind of unsuitable, in my estimation.

RM: Why?

NB: For Millers, youôve got a solar project going on right outside Tonopah in the same water basin. Even if you try to make them efficient they still use quite a bit of water, no matter how you set them up. Anything but PV (photovoltaic) uses quite a bit, and even PV uses up water because they have to wash the panels to keep them at optimum performance. So youôve got that sitting there. Now weôre going to put another one on the other side, a little further down the road, right by the rest stop out there at Millers by Highway 95.

That was part of the problem I had with it. Iôm going, ñWhat good is it going to do Esmeralda County? All weôre going to have is burden. Weôre the government that, unless we make some arrangements, has to do law enforcement, fire-fighting, ambulance service, trash, etc. All these people are going to live in Tonopah. Theyôre not going to spend money in our countyð where are they going to spend money? What good does it do us? Whereas if you had it between Tonopah and Goldfield, somebody might actually live in Goldfield.ò That is what I wrote.

The other problem I have with it is that one of the bigger pieces of private ground in the county is at Millers. Thereôre acres and acres and acres out there, so it would be kind of nice if we could have something where people live, something that might actually do us some good, or something that created some jobs. These solar things, once theyôre built, donôt carry a lot of jobs with them. So you get this big tidal wave, just like we always do when mining booms happen, and then theyôre all gone.

Thatôs what drives us crazy about the federal government. First of all, weôre doing

Yucca Mountain. Then we all go gaga for alternative stuff. Then they start opening these things up for leasing and whatnot. You never know which way theyôre going to go next.

If they decide theyôre going to make wilderness out of 80 percent of Esmeralda County, how are we supposed to live? They have never designated any decent space that could be sold to some private entity to, say, do a little small manufacturing facility. Right now weôre trying real hard to get this land thing straightened out so that when they come up with another resource management plan maybe we could get a little community expansion.

RM: Your argument would be, what are you holding onto all this land for if itôs not doing anybody any good?

NB: Right, and then that goes in a circleô itôs doing the federal government good with these leases and whatnot but itôs not doing us much good until something gets built.

RM: But when they build something, people will have jobs and theyôll be paying taxes and so on.

NB: No, because they wonôt be living here. Where are they going to live? Theyôll be living in Tonopah, paying taxes to Nye County, and shopping at the Scolari store and the hardware store up there. So we need to have a little bit of expansion, tooô some more housing. Goldfield and Silver Peak are landlocked. Goldfield not so much because there are some patented claims here, but Silver Peak is a quarter section. Weôre all jammed into a quarter section. If we wanted somebody to come in and build a few houses, thereôs no place to do it.

RM: So your argument is the government needs to let go of some of this land to develop it for the benefit of the people.

NB: Right, so we get enough people living in this county that weôve got some kind of

tax base. You need that. If you don't have a job here, you leave the county.

RM: Or you're retired on a pension or something.

NB: Yes, and that's why you'll see the unemployment rate and our population go in parallel lines throughout history.

RM: What's your take on the idea that geothermal doesn't create that many jobs?

NB: It doesn't, but it'll give us taxes. And there's going to be a lot less need for a facility like that to consume vast amounts of acreage. You can put a little fence around a geothermal installation and you can still have some grazing nearby. It's not going to cut thousands and thousands of acres off from public access like these solar things could do. So I'm a lot happier with those.

RM: And solar doesn't create that many jobs, really, once it's built.

NB: No. Most of the time they've got some control room somewhere in the Midwest that takes care of it, and there's probably going to be some floating technicians to fix anything that's wrong with it.

RM: That's one of the reasons why I'm for nuclear power. It creates a lot of jobs and a lot of taxes.

NB: Well, as I said, geothermal would create taxes. For Esmeralda, we don't necessarily need a lot of jobs. We need taxes to put in the coffers. You don't really get that much out of residential taxes because you've got to provide a lot of services to them. But a geothermal plant would probably generate some good taxes. Well, that's after the abatement because the state took a lot of that money away from us, too, if they can apply for an abatement of their taxes of 55 percent.

RM: What does that mean?

NB: If your taxes were going to be $1 million, abating at 55 percent means you don't

have to pay 55 percent of that. Itôs set up for 20 years for geothermal, solar, and wind.

RM: So again, the little community takes it in the shorts.

NB: Oh, it gets worse. If the abatement is granted to them, out of the remaining 45 percent, 45 of that 45 percent goes to the Nevada Energy Office to support their operation. The only part that the local government ends up with is, basically, 25 percent of what would have been the total.

RM: I had no idea.

NB: Itôs kind of taken away a lot of the incentive to accept these things. We were promised four times in this last legislature that they were going to change the money that was going to the Nevada Office of Energy back to the local counties. But the state needed it more than we did. It would make a big difference, Bob, a big, big difference.

RM: What do you see as the big holdups on doing something progressive? Is it our Washington leadership or our state leadership?

NB: For Esmeralda County, itôs Washington. Itôs like the resource management plan. Itôs been in place about 30 years now and in that plan youôre supposed to be anticipating everything you might need, like land for sale, where a power lineôs going to go, or any of that. And look at how much has changed in 30 years.

RM: Itôs a different world.

NB: It is a different world. Now theyôre updating our plan but the regulations are so onerous when you try to change any of this stuff.

RM: If we had political leadership in Washington, could that be changed?

NB: Yes, because thatôs where the regulations emanate from, legislation.

RM: So our congressional delegation could put pressure on them to say, ñLetôs change these.ò

NB: Yes, and sometimes they ease up even when we have different presidents. It depends who they appoint as Secretary of the Interior and so forth. Actually, there has been a pushback. Secretary Ken Salazar issued something that he sent out to the people in the Department of Interior saying that they were supposed to inventory all the public lands again for wilderness. He called it the wild lands designation. We, among many other counties in Nevada and probably some other western states, saw that and we just went livid because the way we looked at it, they did an inventory of all the public lands in the ô70s. To continually inventory to look for the wilderness characteristics that he talked about, these characteristics werenôt the same ones that are in the Wilderness Act, for one,

and the whole thing was really fuzzy. It was sort of like, ñIf it looks good, call it wild.ò

Our problem in the state of Nevada was that, okay, if weôre in a mining slump, a lot of these areas that still have mineralization recover on their own. If youôre looking at it then, you say, ñWell, this might be classified to be managed like wilderness.ò Once you do that, when the mining comes back, ñOh, well, no, weôre managing it as though it were wilderness. Thereôs not going to be mining there.ò That means that eventually it turns into wilderness if it didnôt start that way.

So we all really had a problem with that one, and I know in Nevada we got ahold of Dean Heller right away about it and he fought to get that overturned. It has been overturned now. The Republicans pretty well did that. I think in some respects these people donôt even know the implications of some of these pronouncements they come out with. Iôll bet Salazar wasnôt even looking at it that way. When this came out, they were probably thinking ñThere may be lands that we would want that are smaller than the classic wilderness area that we want to try to take care of.ò I would hope that that would be the case but I have my doubts. I think they were doing exactly what I think they were doing, making it all into wilderness. But the pushback there helped.

RM: What would happen if they did an inventory for resources for economic development? Not to trash the place but to say, ñOkay, this is a good site for some economic development,ò of whatever form and so on, and help get things going that way so that some land could then be released?

NB: That would be nice, and thatôs whatôs supposed to happen during the resource management planning process. But for the state of Nevada right now, even if something is already in the plan that could be sold, thereôs no money in the Bureau of Land Managementôs Nevada state budget to do that so itôs a moot point. Even if it was already

designated, it wouldn't happen because they don't have the money. It's the same problem we have with the horses.

RM: Talk about the horses.

NB: They don't have enough money to manage the horses in a way that they'd like to. They don't even have enough money to feed the horses. They've got so many right now that they're trying to feed they run out of room to keep them, which holds up the horse gatherers, which means that the horses are populating more and more. The poor BLM are stuck between a rock and a hard place because they want to try to do the right thing but they have a lot of these people who do not understand.

RM: Of course, the wild horse issue involves a discussion of the range.

NB: Over the years there has been continual reduction of cattle grazing in Esmeralda County and for a certain time there, there was expansion of horse range– mostly by the numbers of horses. We historically have had a problem here with overpopulation of the horse herds on the public lands and have often had to remind the Bureau of Land Management that certain areas were overpopulated and the horses were creating problems. They do eventually gather them.

Historically, they have not kept good track of the populations by doing head counts. They're doing better now, by the way. But this has caused some problems for wildlife and for people who have cattle allotments, especially in recent years where the people who run cattle are generally mandated to haul water to their cattle rather than using natural waters.

RM: They can't use the natural water?

NB: In most circumstances, no.

RM: Why?

NB: Itôs because of regulation changes at the federal level. It used to be that if you had a grazing allotment you had to have a base camp within the allotment and you had to have a certain amount of acreage within the allotment.

RM: But you owned the base camp?

NB: Yes.

RM: So it was deeded land.

NB: Right, you had to have that. Things changed over the years and now, you need to have room to put your cows, but it doesnôt have to be in that allotmentô years ago you had to have it within the allotment. The idea is that you need to have a place where you could take all of your cows and if you needed to feed them, and put them somewhere.

The situation now is that there are instances where people who, for instance, are grazing cattle here but donôt actually live in Esmeralda County or arenôt land owners in the county, and what used to be large allotments have been split into several different leases. So itôs created a change about where cattle occur and who owns the water.

Under the old arrangement, if you had a ranchô Lida Ranch is a good exampleô because that had historically been the center of that grazing activity over the years, they acquired stream rights and spring rights and they kept those developed and used the water through pipelines to water cattle.

Whatôs happened now is because the people who might be grazing at Lida Ranch no longer own the ranch, they no longer have the water rights. And the Bureau of Land Management has discouraged keeping these springs up. So now we have the situation where it was helpful for someone on horseback on a pack trip or people who were out camping to have pipelines and troughs where they could get some water. You might not want to drink it yourself, but there was water available, or in an emergency you could

probably get it out of the pipeline before it got into the trough and have something that wouldn't kill you.

A lot of that flow has now ceased and the springs have gotten down to the point where they are not even really good for wildlife anymore because they are not developed. The spring boxes have collapsed and there is no flow from them like there used to be. To me that's not only bad for cattle grazing and people enjoying the public lands, but hauling water causes a lot of damage on our roads and it makes it more expensive for people who are grazing cattle.

RM: So the cattle raisers have to haul water to their cows because they don't have the water rights and can't use them legally, and the water source is not being well-maintained and you have a whole deterioration?

NB: Right.

RM: What do you see is the root cause of that problem?

NB: I think it's actually because of federal policies. Once you disjoint the grazer from the historic center of the activity, it creates a problem. It used to be that the water went with the operation and the operation was centered on that land. When you separate that unison, it's a problem. We did have one local cattleman who has grazing in the Yellow Hills and part of the Montezuma allotment. He hauls water from Silver Peak out to tanks. Not only do they have to move those tanks around but they have to use a water truck or something else that holds a lot of water to get water to them.

RM: And there is a natural water source in the area, but he just can't use it?

NB: Right. Or there are some waters that are close to Goldfield, for instance, but they're in a horse-grazing area. They are not in the cow-grazing area and so he couldn't use those.

RM: Can the horses graze on a rancherôs allotment?

NB: Oh, yes. Thatôs the other problem with the horse overpopulation because, of course, nothing really stays where itôs supposed to. They are hauling water and the cows are going to know where the water is; but the horses go everywhere. They arenôt fenced in so they end up being wherever the food is. The horses force the cows away from the water because horses do that sort of thing. Burros will, too.

RM: Oh, really? They displace the cows?

NB: They wonôt let them come in. They guard water from wildlife, from cows, from anything. So thereôs a lot of damage. And some of the springs are marginal because horses will go in there and rip up the ground trying to get their water and they wonôt allow other animals, like mule deer or antelope, in there. Well, thatôs why you use horses to gather cowsð they naturally will do that in their herd unit. They have sentries. If you see burros or horses near water there are going to be some sentries out there and theyôll watch while the other ones go in and drink. They take turns and stay around and have a bite to eat. Even another herd wonôt come in when one herd is there.

So that creates problems for the ranchers. And if they donôt control the populations there is overgrazing. There are places in Esmeralda County that are pretty well devoid of any vegetation for that reason. One is between Tonopah and Goldfield; itôs called the Alkali Springs Valley. What happened is there are two horse areasð one is called Paymaster, closer to Tonopah, and the other is Montezuma, which is closer to Goldfield. They were very overpopulated and I think a year or a year and a half ago they did gather and took off horses to get it down to the populations that are supposed to be there. But theyôd eaten that thing just bare. Itôs completely barren, especially between the two natural waters.

They were watering at the sewer ponds outside of Tonopah, the effluent, and watering at a hot spring thatôs on the Silver Peak Road. Theyôd go in between those two and that whole center was eaten down to nub. It was so bad down that the grass would probably never come back; all thatôs in there now are the California poppies. Youôll see this big bunch of California poppies and the types of sage that horses and cows donôt eat. The cows donôt eat poppies, either. Anything that was edible they just ate down so far itôll probably never come back.

RM: In your view, when did the competition for range between the horses and the cows become a problem?

NB: The damage wasnôt so severe when I first came, letôs put it that way. There was a wide range of horses and cattle grazing at the time. I think it is more because of overpopulation, but we had that drought for so many years, too, and that didnôt help things. But they donôt really have flexibility at the federal level. Once they say, ñOkay, hereôs the area and here is the horse population,ò they canôt really change that. The Wild and Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 came in that set this up, and wherever the horses were then, they are supposed to be now.

They have removed the horses from the Silver Peak range because there just wasnôt enough feed for them. They gathered them all up, but they did leave burros and if they found mules they left them.

I also have a problem with not letting them rotate some grazing. For quite a few years when there was no permit for Lidaðwhich is actually Magruder, they call it, Magruder and Mount Jackson grazeðthere were no cows there for quite a number of years. That is a really heavily vegetated area on the top of the Palmetto Mountains. There hadnôt been anything in there in a long time and it was really getting overgrown and I

pointed that out and they did actually let some cows in there. I said, ñWhy donôt you get something up there to graze?ò Itôs for fuel reductionð we have one little place back there thatôs burned twice, and when it burned it just grew back all up in tall grass, which makes it an even worse fire hazard.

They did finally let some back in there, at least for seasonal grazing, because that will at least keep the grass closer to the ground and keep it healthy instead of having a lot of dead grass lying down year in and year out.

Years ago when we could still slaughter horses, I donôt think the horses were near the problem they are now.

RM: You mean they would round them up and gather them to sell for dog food and so on?

NB: Right. And way back, the ranchers used to be able to gather them and use them for something. As it is, right now the BLMôs whole budget goes to just feeding what theyôve got. They donôt have room to put a lot of them in their corrals so that restricts their ability to gather up overpopulations. Itôs a big circle and I think itôs really cruel to these horses to let them be overpopulated. I like seeing them out there, but not when youôre seeing something that is skin and bones. They end up defeating the purpose of people putting wildlife out there because that hurts the deer and antelope populations.

RM: Are the deer and antelope down in terms of numbers in your domain?

NB: I think the antelope has gone up. We never used to have antelope when I first came here, then they seeded some of them. I refer to them as long-legged horned jackrabbits because they are really a nuisance on roads.

RM: Because you run into them?

NB: Yes, and theyôre not scared of anything. They just stand there in the middle of the

road; theyôve become so used to traffic. There were quite a lot of deer and I donôt know if the deer population has gone up or down, honestly. I suspect that that has more to do with the mountain lion population. One thing Iôve noticed is that we havenôt had so many lion hunters through the area. We used to have seasonally quite a few who would come in and hunt mountain lion, so itôs hard to know. I still see quite a bit of deer when Iôm out and we have a lot more mountain sheep now, too, than before.

RM: Where do you see more mountain lions and so on?

NB: There are a quite a few mountain lions on the Palmettos. I imagine there are some higher up in the Silver Peaks, too, because thatôs where the sheep areð you see them at the higher elevations in the Silver Peak range. Theyôve come back a lot. You donôt see mountain lions all that often. The last time we saw one, there was a cub on the side of the road that the mother must have left. We were heading up towards the Palmettos and kind of where it was flat, we noticed something on the side of the road and went back and there was a little mountain lion cub. He ran. He had been asleep.

It was where the drainage is on the side of the road, and we just happened to notice it kind of by the berm there. And sure as the day is long, it was a little cub. My husband said something about getting out to take a picture and I said, ñI donôt think thatôs a good idea. Mommy may be lying down there, too. Weôll just remember we saw him and go on our happy little way.ò That was down in the flats, really out in the open, so I think they were down there hunting antelope.

RM: Since youôve come into this country, whatôs the status of ranching now?

NB: Itôs not as local as it used to be and itôs a lot more splintered, rather than having the great big outfits. Iôm just going to guess that the cattle headcount has probably gone down simply because of some of those changes that I mentioned, but itôs still a very

strong component of our economic future.

RM: But the ranches are smaller?

NB: Well, because of whatôs happened, you might have a guy who lives in Fallon whoôs grazing cattle here so in his head count, he gets that little part of the ranch. There was a big ranch in Fish Lake Valleyð the owner passed away a couple years backð that was quite a big grazing operation. There havenôt been any cattle where cattle used to be there. Actually, his property has been divided; weôll call it a quiet subdivision. Thatôs why Iôm saying, I think the headcountôs down. And also, they came up with all this stuff where you canôt keep the cattle there all year long, you have to move them from summer range to winter range.

RM: Ben Colvin isnôt grazing anymore, is he?

NB: I think Ben has some cows, but theyôre down south of here. Two of our grazersð Jack Vogt, who owned Lida Ranch, used to have all the allotments and Ben Colvin had the allotments around Goldfield and part of Montezuma alsoð had a problem with the government. This was after the Sagebrush Rebellion. There was an objection with the federal government by the grazers about the fees. Many of the grazers, like Wayne Hage and some others, took their rental fees and put them in trust accounts. Ben and Jack didnôt put them in a trust account, they just withheld them.

Things came to a head between the federal government people and both of those guys and what ended up happening is something that the sheriff refers to as the ñThe Great Cattle Rustling Affair,ò where the feds showed up without warning and gathered the cows from Lida and they did it to Ben out here, too. Our sheriff was not happy about that because they had agreed to coordinate with him on that but they purposely waited for a time when he was gone. They were actually on private land when gathering Colvinôs

cattle; they werenôt even on public land. Iôd like you to talk to Ken Elgan about that because he can more colorfully relate that story. But it was very tense between our law enforcement and their law enforcement over that issue.

RM: And why did the feds round them up?

NB: Nonpayment of fees.

RM: What did they do with the cows?

NB: Presumably sold them for fees. I know that Ben can tell you all the details of that. Well, I donôt know if he can or not because I think he settled with them somehow or another.

RM: But it included Benôs cows?

NB: Yes, there were two separate gathers. They did Lida and then did Benôs at a different time.

CHAPTER FIVE

RM: You said a lot of environmental legislation happened in the 1970s. Did it come out of the environmental movement of that era?

NB: Most of what we deal with today was passed in the ó70s; I donôt know if the environmental movement caused it. I think the desire was maybe to consolidate separate pieces of legislation into one thing. Thatôs also when FLPMA and FLCFA came out. FLPMA is the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1978. Itôs all-inclusive-type act that addresses the public lands. When they passed that, they repealed many parts of the old US Code, like the Townships and Public Lands Act, so you could no longer do patented claims or patent townsites on federal lands. The only thing that stayed in place was the Mining and Minerals Actð I think that was from 1872.

When FLPMA came, they wiped out everything else. Thatôs created a bone of contention, too, because in the old law there was a thing called RS2477, which was a section of one of the older acts that said that any road that had belonged to the county, if it was there to serve a public purpose, would remain as a road under the new legislation. What ended up happening is when they put this new thing through, they didnôt really repeal RS2477. So another big bone of contention we have with them is who owns the roads; and that causes a lot of trouble.

RM: Are they contending that they own the roads?

NB: When they make decisions, they have their set of data and their own maps and so on. So if some guy wants to drill a geothermal well outside of Silver Peak, they look at their map and their map doesnôt have our roads on it; it only has the rights-of-way that theyôve granted. Theyôll look at their map and not even note that there is going to be any

impact from the heavy trucks and drill rigs going up and down some road that we have out there already. And they do this without notifying the county that this is going to happen. It irritates us because we don't get any money from the federal government to maintain our roads to speak of. They're the ones making the money off of this thing, and they study everything else to death. That's been a problem and it's hurt us a lot as far as their decision-making. If they don't see a road they don't know it's there.

RM: And then if they go in and mess up the road, that's just another financial burden for you?

NB: That's right. So it's important that they at least recognize the fact the roads exist.

RM: Do you know Darrell Lacy? He's the Nye Country nuclear waste guy.

NB: Yes, I know Darrell.

RM: Darrell was telling me that Nye County has a hairy problem right now because NV Energy came down and took, like, a zillion miles of Nye County road and said, "Oh, we're going to widen it to 45 feet," and Nye County said, "Wait; we didn't even know you were doing that."

NB: That's right. NV Energy will go into the BLM office and say they want to apply for a Title 5 right-of-way when it's already a county road. This issue came to my attention real early on.

RM: What is Title 5?

NB: Title 5 refers to the federal codes. Title 5 is the code on public lands– it's called Title 5 through Section this and that.

RM: And is it your perception that the federal government is adequately following their own laws?

NB: I don't think so. I'll give you an example. They're working on a resource

management plan now and we went to a training in Battle Mountain. Commissioner Pappalardo and I went up for that to prepare the kick-off for the thing.

Thereôs a section where theyôre supposed to have public meetings to help kick off the plan so the people are aware of it. They had meetings scheduled in Beatty, Tonopah, and in Battle Mountain, and they are also doing a northern one for Eureka and Lander counties. I brought up the fact that, ñYou know, thereôs another county in here.ò

RM: [Laughter]. What did they say?

NB: They figure Beatty, Tonopahð letôs not get off Highway 95 here. And they went, ñOh.ò

I said, ñWe have people who live in the Fish Lake Valley.ò Itôs 100 and some miles to go up to Tonopah. I said, ñItôs an hour drive for them to get to Goldfield, and thatôs shorter. Wouldnôt you consider having a meeting over there? We have a pretty good little hunk of our population that lives there and we have a place you can use.ò But it just never dawned on them.

For the resource management plan before that, they had one meeting in Goldfield, Nevada, and that was when the thing was all complete. I know Esmeralda County probably didnôt even really know that it was happening. All of a sudden this document six inches thick comes out and we are going to have a public meeting now for comment. They probably hung up a sign or publicized it in some paper that nobody around here reads. They had been getting a lot better with that and trying to communicate better, but they only have certain levels of things where they need to solicit public comment. If itôs just an exploration permit and itôs a small area, they donôt have to tell the county that itôs going on.

But for the larger projects, like if youôre going to open a mine, theyôre compelled

to do that. Years ago with the state of Nevada, because of the way everything was done paperwork-wise, we probably missed more things than we knew about. Now you can get on their mailing list and they send you every comment period notice for the whole state. The mailing list will have all the notices you want for mining, minerals, water projects, and everything, and if it doesnôt pertain to you you can just delete it. That way you can go through the state clearinghouse comment period, so that makes a big difference these days for us. The BLM doesnôt have a thing like that. They say, ñWell, we published it in the Federal Register.ò

RM: [Laughter] Yes, I read that every day.

NB: Thatôs my morning reading material. Iôm not exactly sure how do you find those out. Usually by the time Iôm reading the Federal Register itôs too late. When theyôve come to a decision they put it in there and thatôs when I see it. They are doing better at communicating but it could be a lot more coordinated and user-friendly than it is.

RM: Does the state have an authoritative role in these issues that weôre talking about or are they kind of a bystander?

NB: They are kind of impotent, unfortunately. The state of Nevada is very much behind the counties on these issues but they really don't have any authority. Like with the road issueð they've done everything that they can to help out with it. The legislators have done that and NDOT, Nevada Department of Transportation, has done that because part of what it says in the federal law is that if the state recognizes it as a road, it's a road. They have really stepped up a lotð gone out and done their own mapping and taken their historical maps and made those available to people and really upgraded their map. Because pretty well if you prove it was there before 1979, itôs an RS2477 road and it means as county people that we own the road.

RM: But the county doesnôt necessarily have ownership. Is that right?

NB: Well, you could try to rely on that RS2477 clause to claim it.

RM: Are there other clauses you could use?

NB: Weôve actually started to do that now. Theyôre called Title 5 right-of-ways. You can get a Title 5 right-of-way with an RS2477 road. If itôs an RS2477 road, you cannot make it wider, you canôt change the course. It has to follow the exact course that it had on the shut-off date. So if you want to pave it, widen it, anything like that, you need to do a Title 5 right-of-way. Weôve been doing that now. We didnôt do it for quite some time because our concern was that if we admitted we needed the Title 5 right-of-way, what was that going to do to our RS2477 claim?

The other reason we didnôt do it is because nobody told us that they could issue these right-of-ways in perpetuity. Normally, when you get a right-of-way from the Bureau of Land Management for something over public lands theyôre renewed every so many years. We didnôt want to go there because we donôt have any staff, and whoôs going to keep track of when you need to do a renewal? When youôve got 3,700 some miles of road in a county, whoôs going to keep track of when road number ding, ding, ding is due for renewal on these right-of-ways? So for those two reasons, we never took them up on it.

One good thing that happened was the Nevada Association of Counties held some workshops and we sat down at the table in Carson City. We had the Bureau of Land Management state-level people there, some people from Washington on the phone, and talked about this whole issue. There were some people from Utah, too, because they have a lot of case law and theyôve made a lot of progress on these road issues. We were all at the table and I said what I just said to you. I said, ñThis is the reason we havenôt gone for

these right-of-ways.ò

This person from Utah said, ñWell, the Bureau of Land Management in Utah has been issuing right-of-ways to us in perpetuity and has had the clause in there that it in no way affects any RS2477 claim.ò There were a lot of eyes in that roomð there was Nye County and Esmeralda, and weôd been in fits over this going back to Dick Carver, actually. [Laughter]

And our state people are going, ñIs that correct?ò The state director was there and the guy in Washington wasnôt sure, and then the main realty woman for the state of Nevada for the state office of BLM said, ñYes, we can issue them in perpetuity.ò There wouldnôt be a real problem, saying that this in no way overrides RS2477.

RM: So can you now ask for the right to them in perpetuity?

NB: Well, now this plot thickens. We talked about this and the state director at the time was Ron Wenker and heôs really good. Ron said, ñWell, yes, thatôs a good solution.ò They donôt have a good solution for it because of case law and where Congress left this, so itôs really been a problem and they were trying to be there to work it out. So heôs going oh, this is a good solution. He said, ñWeôll start to issue these Title 5 right-of-ways to you guys and then your information will show up on our database and weôll have fewer conflicts.ò

And it was Oz Wichman from Nye County who said, ñHow are you going to be able to handle that workload?ò [RM Laughs]

They were saying, like, no problem. Iôm looking at Oz thinking, ñYeah, how are they going to handle that problem?ò They have no idea of the mileages and the number of roads. They did it for a while for us and now theyôve stopped doing it. They say itôs because of workload.

We started applying with smaller roads, the ones that we were worried about regarding where wilderness might be. We did it that way because we didn't think that anybody would deny the existence of, like, the Silver Peak Road. There are historical maps of Esmeralda County and the main roads show as clear as the day is long, and even some of the smaller ones show clear and they haven't changed a dime, you know. We felt a little more secure with those. But for some of the roads that are a little further out, we said, ñJust to make sure that the claim is clear,ò we started there with Title 5s. I think they stopped because they realized that we might be doing that to protect those areas from a wilderness designation. They're too busy all of a sudden to grant them to us but I know they are still granting them in other places.

RM: To Utah?

NB: Well, no. I think in Nye County, too, they keep doing it. They actually just offered to do some more Title 5s for us because it turned out that they still think they own the streets in Lida. [Laughs]

RM: It sounds like this in-perpetuity grant for roads is a solution for that particular part of the problem.

NB: Yes, it could be.

RM: Now, what's the solution for the wild horses and the grazing and that kind of thing, in your view?

NB: I really think they need to reduce the herd numbers. I don't like to see the horses killed either, but it's breaking our government, feeding these horses they've got confined. And it's not much of a life for them. There are thousands and thousands of them in these holding areas and they can't put any new ones in until the old ones die, and the horses live longer there than they do out in the wild. I think they need to start doing some birth

control on them.

RM: Can they do birth control?

NB: Yes. They don't have to surgically do anything. They can do those implants like they do in people. They've known about doing birth control for years. It's just like when you put microchips in animals. They can do it the same way and it's good for a couple of years. That's one way of helping out the situation so that they are not propagating quite as well as they do.

RM: What if there were a rule on the numbers of horses?

NB: There is a rule on numbers.

RM: But they don't follow it?

NB: They can't. They say they don't have the money or the place to put them. They're in a bad pickle on this stuff and they realize all these facts. The local governments and the Bureau of Land Management are exactly on the same page on this one. But again, changes were made and there is a no-kill policy and they only have so much money and people don't want to adopt the horses and burros so much any more.

RM: Where do the wild horse lovers, the people who feel the horses should be able to breed unrestricted and all that, fit into this equation?

NB: They are, I think, the root of the overpopulation problem. Unfortunately, there are so many horses in those impoundment areas. I would hate to see them all get slaughtered but something needs to give because of a lot of the Department of Interior's budget is devoted to these horses.

RM: I've never really understood the horse lovers' deep interest in this. I mean, horses are not native here.

NB: They're not and they're not actually wild; they're feral, you know? I think people

have a picture of ñMy Friend Flickaò roaming wild and free, going in the breeze and all that. I donôt think they are really horse people. If you talk to people who have horses and know about them, they realize that itôs probably a tough life out there for these wild horses. And if you see something that is skin and bones out there, you just feel sorry for it; or you see some poor thing out there with a broken leg and itôs against the law for you to do anything. You have to find someone in charge. Which means more suffering.

RM: Are you hopeful that the horse issue will come to a more rational solution?

NB: I sure hope so, or that at least we can reduce the numbers.

RM: What about the cows and the ranchers and their problems? What needs to be done to make it better for them?

NB: One recommendation I would have is to put the cows where the water is. [Laughs] And stop charging exorbitant fees for pipeline right-of-ways over public land when it has to do with grazing.

RM: They charge exorbitant fees for those pipeline rights?

NB: They charge exorbitant fees for waterworks even to county governments. For instance, in Silver Peak we have less than a five-acre facility and we have to pay $500 a year plus a fee for them to look over it, which they never do.

RM: You pay 500 bucks for your pipeline right?

NB: Actually, itôs about $600.

RM: And what does a rancher pay? How long is the pipe?

NB: Itôs not just the pipe. Itôs where our wells and our water tanks sit and our pipeline. We have another little one, too, in there. Thatôs for where the water tanks are in the 13 miles and the pipeline. I donôt know what the ranchersô fees are, but they would be more because they say theyôre giving us a break. And they figure it by acreage, so if a pipeline

goes five milesð which some of the ones from a spring to a trough mightð and itôs five feet wide and five miles long, just figure how many acres that is.

RM: And presumably Tonopahôs paying for their pipeline from Rye Patch?

NB: Right. Weôve tried to fight that fee vehemently because we feel that weôre a government and they shouldnôt be charging us. Both Nye and Esmeralda counties have tried to write very thoughtful [laughs] rebuttals about to why we shouldnôt be paying this fee because we are not in this as a business, we are serving a public need.

Thatôs one thing thatôs really irritating. And they charge market fee to ranchers or mines and everything else, but if youôre a solar company or a wind outfit and you want right-of-ways, then itôs $2 an acre. Now, we have less than five acresð $2 times five is what? $10? Okay. Weôre paying $600, so that I think really needs to be remedied. There should be some price breaks in there. So if youôve got to pay all this money for a right-of-way, now how many cows do you have to sell?

RM: Do you know that? I have no idea what a cow is worth nowadays.

NB: I donôt either, but even if itôs a dollar a pound and youôre selling them at about 300 weight, itôs probably going to be more than two cows, right? That would be the recommendationð and to let the ranchers use that water as much as possible to avoid hauling water.

The rotation is a good thing, but they should be more flexible. They should keep some of it out of grazing so that if the need arises, like if a wildfire happens or thereôs severe reduction in vegetation in one of their leaseholders, they could move somebody over to that fallow land to give them a place to put their cows.

RM: How does a rancher keep his cows on his allotment?

NB: Water. They need that every couple of days. There are cattle guards between the

different range allotments and they do have those fenced, but water pretty well keeps them close to where theyôre supposed to be.

RM: Letôs say that you own a spring and you want to run a pipeline ten miles and you want to take some water off of the pipe, letôs say three times, to make a water hole. Can you do that? Because the line is going to be crossing public land.

NB: Youôd have to get a right-of-way from the BLM for the pipe. The waterholeôs a different story; the waterholeôs the state. It depends on how big the waterhole is and youôd still need to have something from the BLM to have the surface right for the waterhole, but youôd have to also be talking to the state engineer because there are certain laws that have to do with ponds and dams and all kinds of things. Youôd have to get an ñotherò surface water right for the pond from them when you did construct it.

RM: Oh, my lord. Is that expensive?

NB: It can be, yes. Especially for three ponds. That would be at least $300 just in fees for the permit application, and then youôd have to say what your beneficial use was for the ponds.

RM: But for our discussion here, the first thing to do is to link up the grazing and the water source?

NB: Yes, as much as possible. I think, even with these old sources, it would be possible in a lot of instancesð letôs talk about a situation involving Rancher 1 and Rancher 2. Now, Rancher 2 has waterð heôs got vested rights over here [gesturing] and Rancher 1ôs cows are here [gesturing]. This is cow land and thatôs horse land. But Rancher 1 canôt use this water because he would need to have some pipeline that went from the water down to cow land from the horse land.

RM: Because his cows are not allowed in the horse land?

NB: That's right. Rancher 2 would be fine with even selling Rancher 1 this water right, but Rancher 1 would be a fool to buy it if he can't use it with all of this piping and moving or being able to move his cows up here where the water is.

RM: Does the government have to pay him for the horses watering in his water?

NB: No, that doesnôt work that way. The only thing the government pays us for is Yucca Mountain. [Laughter] Of course, they put a government installation here, or in Nye County.

RM: And the state has done their best to punt on that one, havenôt they?

NB: The stateôs done their best to take any kind of local revenue source we ever got from the federal government away from us.

RM: What are some examples?

NB: Iôve got a good one. The counties were getting 25 percent of all geothermal royalties and profits from competitive lease sales. The state got 50 percent of that and 25 was retained by the federal government. Now that got changed and we donôt get it anymore.

RM: What do you get?

NB: Our 25 percent stays with the Department of Interior. The federal government wanted to keep that because they were broke. And with the state money, the 50 percent that they get is supposed to go into what is called the state school fund. The law says that if the state school fund has in excess of $700,000 in it, the proceeds from (in this case geothermal) are supposed to be distributed back to the county of origin, in proportion to how they came in. And in 2009, they did a special session of the legislature and they said, ñNo, we need that money.ò

Now, it just so happened that that was the year that Esmeralda County had a lot of competitive geothermal lease sales and they went for a lot of money. We dumped in

about $2.6 million into that state school fund. So thereôs $600,000 that we put in the state school fund and then thereôs other money, of course, that came in. Under the $700,000 rule, Esmeralda County School District should have gotten $2 million. But it didnôt; the state of Nevada took it.

RM: Legally?

NB: Thatôs questionable, as recent court decisions have borne out.

RM: So you didnôt get any of that?

NB: Well, we got their part of the consolidated taxes and property taxes, like normal.

RM: But you didnôt get any of that fund?

NB: Not that bumper crop.

RM: It sounds like the counties are at the bottom of the pecking order.

NB: We are. Everybody keeps robbing our pocket, but nobody wants to help us do the things that counties are legally obliged to do like take care of the health and safety of our people. Thereôs quite a long list in the Nevada Revised Statutes of all the things weôre supposed to do.

RM: And are those things suffering as a result of these problems youôre talking about?

NB: So far weôve been all right with it but if it continues this way, yes, itôs going to suffer. There wonôt be a county left. Everybody else is really suffering. The law enforcementôs been curtailed. The fire protectionôs been curtailed. There are virtually no social programs any more.

RM: In Esmeralda County?

NB: With us, the big question was with Nye County this year because we partner with them for some senior services like a Meals-on-Wheels-type program. We also provide transportation to our seniors because there is no transportation here. We go around to the

communities once a week and pick up the seniors, and in this area we take them to Tonopah, usually, so they can have a meal at the senior center, go to the store or go to the doctor and that sort of thing. In Fish Lake Valley they go to Bishop sometimes and up here sometimes. Itôs the same with Beatty, the same with all of these little townsð somebody picks up the seniors so they have a way to get to town because some elderly people canôt drive anymore.

Thatôs something weôve been doing for a long time. The seniors have to make appointments for this, but we also take them to bigger places, to doctor appointments. We take them to Hawthorne, Fallon, Reno, and Vegas but they have to prearrange that. That is something we were really worried that we wouldnôt be able to continue to do because of this very funding issue. Thankfully, we were able to continue it this year, but that would probably be one of the first items that weôd have to stop.

RM: And then what do these people do?

NB: Youôd have to ask the governor and the people in the legislature because they have gutted it. For years there have really been no social services, especially in this rural area. Mental health services was the first thing they chopped. I mean, it just goes on and on.

RM: What else have they chopped?

NB: We used to have a lot better medical care out here than we do now.

RM: And these problems all fit together, donôt they? They are all interconnected.

NB: Right. The state dumped a lot of stuff on the counties this timeð all the juvenile services like parole and probation services. If you need your restaurant inspected, the county has to help pay for the inspector to come down to inspect your restaurant. Instead of the state legislature saying, ñLetôs raise the fee that the state collects to help cover the

hole,ò they didnôt. They said, ñOkay, we are going to bill the county for this service. Weôre still going to perform the service, but we are going to make them pay for it.ò And if you donôt pay for it thereôs been a veiled threat here that theyôre just going to withhold part of your consolidated tax and take it off the top before you even get it. Thereôs a long, long list.

RM: As a county commissioner, this must be extremely distressing and stressful to you.

NB: It is to all of us. And itôs not only just for this county, but with the Nevada Association of Counties.

RM: Is it the same for all the rural counties?

NB: No.

RM: No? Some of them have money?

NB: Well, we still have some in the bank, and Eureka does, but actually the rural counties are probably doing better than the large counties like Washoe and Clark. There was actually property tax money that was siphoned away from those two in the millions of dollars; the state took it. The state thinks that to attract these renewable energy projects, they should give them an abatement of property tax, as I mentioned before. They think that itôs okay to give these people 55 percent off their property tax right from the beginning.

RM: And the county gets that property tax money?

NB: Yes, we are the primary recipient of it. They abate the county share but not the share that the state getsð they get a very small amount of property tax. Another thing the state did is that many years ago, there was an agreement between the counties and all the hospitals in the state of Nevada to solve the problem of nonpayment by indigents. There

is a little bit of property tax that is devoted to indigent care.

That little bit of property tax was always deposited in something called the Indigent Accident Fund that was set up by an agreement. That money has built over the years so that if it needs to be tapped by the hospitals, thatôs where they get their money and then can hold the counties harmless because the county is obliged to pay for indigent medical costs for accidents that happen in the county. The injured people donôt have to be residents. So all these lovely visitors that Las Vegas wants and northern Nevada wants who pass through all of these little counties and get into car crashes here could conceivably end up with the citizens of Esmeralda County paying for their medical bills.

So what the legislature did in their wisdom, because they needed money, is take the money that was in the Indigent Accident Fund. This, again, happened in 2009. Thereôs millions of dollars in there. Now because of this scenario, the hospitals have sort of agreed with the countiesð because they know the counties did not do this. They have been trying not to come back and sue counties out of existence. Conceivably for a small place like ours, one bus crash and thatôs it. But our people are still paying the property tax portion that was supposed to go exclusively for that indigent. So yes, they have not been too kind to us in the state of Nevada on a lot of these things.

RM: I get the feeling in talking about these different issues that the interior of Nevada, particularly away from the big cities, is kind of being hollowed out economically.

NB: Yes. When itôs something that might be good for us like geothermal, wind, and solar they grant an abatement for that.

RM: Itôs just one thing after another that is impeding the rural counties to even almost survive.

NB: Itôs very, very difficult. Yes.

RM: How do you see the future for this?

NB: We are just going to have to fight as hard as we can. We have been fortunate, actually, because everybody, including Clark and Washoe, have stood pretty solid about this. When I first got elected, the counties were talking about trying to get a question on the ballot to amend the constitution to say that the state shall not have unfunded mandates. But itôs really expensive to gather signatures for a statewide ballot question. Youôve got to hire somebody to do it because as a county commissioner itôs not a good thing to be out there gathering petition signatures. And there are already laws in the state statutes that say that theyôre not supposed to pass unfunded mandates without providing some funding stream or doing something.

RM: Thatôs on the books?

NB: Well, thereôs language to that effectð if thereôs more than, I think, a $5,000 fiscal impact steps have to be taken. When you see these bills come through, they will quote that section of the NRS, Nevada Revised Statutes, and they get around it by saying, ñOkay. Weôre going to make this exempt.ò So thereôs no winning. Itôs like if you sue them, they pay the Nevada Supreme Court judgesô wage so whoôs going to win?

RM: Yes. In a way itôs like the big guy eats first.

NB: The big guy does eat first. Itôs just very annoying. When we went to the governorôs state of the union speech, we were thinking about what we might want to say to the press. I came up with the following: ñWell, if you dial 911 and no one shows up, donôt be surprised.ò Iôd just tell them that. It could get to that state.

RM: This sounds a lot like the Sagebrush Rebellion, or is that kind of a different focus because it concerns the state instead of the federal government?

NB: All of these things go back to oppression of local governments by something

bigger. In the Sagebrush Rebellion case it was the feds getting heavy-handed with the citizens of the counties. Theyôd go back with the whole law-enforcement issue. It calms down for a while and then we start having these incidents like we had with the cattle gathering I spoke about earlier.

We had an incident here a year or better ago where they had found some marijuana up in the wilderness areas outside of Dyer. It was partially on BLM land so the BLM comes in force with their law enforcement people and they see a little place out there with a toilet and a hot pond and water. This is something the county hasð itôs called a recreation and public purposes lease on this area, which means that weôre in control of it, not the BLM.

But they see it and theyôre tired so they decide they want to camp here with their crew. One of their rangers goes up to people who are out there minding their business who happen to live in Esmeralda County, and tells them they must vacate this immediately, no if, ands, or buts. He is law enforcement, heôs telling them to leave, and this is the public land and he can do that. So we got to another one of those situations where guns were almost drawn. It was not pretty.

RM: What happened?

NB: Well, [laughs] it did get straightened out and nobody got killed. Our law enforcement people went out there and reminded these guys that we lease this thing. It got pretty heated. Now, the BLM field office manager here in Tonopah is a really good guy. Heôs been around for quite some time so he understands a lot of this history and he knew what was going to happen if we just heard about this cold so he immediately called all of the commissioners and explained what happened. He said he was going to discipline the guy, have a talk with him, and he was good to his word.

But in turn, one of us put on the agenda of our next meeting something about writing a letter to complain about this incident. The young fellow, the ranger who had started this, showed up at the meeting and told us, ñIôve learned my lesson. Iôve been disciplined and Iôm never going to do this again, and you probably donôt really need to write this letter.ò

I said, ñNo, I think we need to write this letterò for several reasons. I tried to thump it into his head. I said, ñLook, youôre one man. Something our law enforcement people understand is that without the support of the citizenry, their job gets a lot worse. And they know, too, that if something bad really goes down, probably not only is a gun going to be drawn against the opposition, but they are going to have ten to 15 citizens right behind them backing them up.ò I said, ñYou need to learn to deal with our public that way, to treat them with respect and be polite instead of demanding.ò

I said, ñThe other thing is, you do not understand the history of this area and the problems that have happened in the past, and when an incident like this happens, it rubs all those wounds wide open again.ò And thatôs exactly what I put in that letterð that when they brought people here, especially law enforcement people, they should be given a lesson about some of these things that have happened in the past so that they donôt go and inflame folks.

One of our county deputies would not ask people to leave in that way. If they had an emergency and they needed that area they wouldnôt walk up to somebody and say, ñIôm law enforcement. We have an emergency and we need you to leave, please.ò

RM: Did that incident make the papers?

NB: No. Itôs in the public record but weôre never in the paper, Bob.

RM: Thatôs another part of the problem, I think.

NB: The *Tonopah Times* ought to give up that ñGoldfield Newsò moniker, Iõll tell you right now. Iõve shown up more in the *Pahrump Valley Times* than I have ever shown up in this paper because Mark Waite calls me when some of this stuff happens. But no, we arenõt covered.

RM: Thatõs part of the problem, too, isnõt it? They canõt get the news out there and people donõt know whatõs going on.

NB: A lot of people donõt even subscribe to that paper anymore because they never talk about anything that happens here.

RM: I wonder why they donõt cover your county.

NB: They say they donõt get enough advertising from Esmeralda County. They might if they put something in there about Esmeralda County from time to time. [Laughs]

RM: Interesting. Now, in your understanding of the Sagebrush Rebellion, when did it begin?

NB: It was in fairly full bloom in õ79.

RM: And Iõve heard that was the second flowering of it?

NB: Yes, it was. There were an awful lot of resolutions being passed in 1976 and 1977 having to do with roads. Weõve got a really nice thing that I found in our files that Dick Carver authored. I think itõs when the bill that created FLPMA was passed. Things started to change and all of a sudden theyõre showing up saying, ñI want this, I want that,ò because of the regulation(s) they themselves authored.

RM: In your understanding, was Dick Carver the leader of the Sagebrush Revolution or were there others who were co-leaders?

NB: There were a lot of others but Dick was the public face of it. There were others that were equally concerned. I know Senator Blakemore was very much involved on the

side of Dick Carver.

RM: Is he still living?

NB: No, he died quite a few years ago. I think his wife, Angieôs, dead, too. Their sonôs around someplace; I donôt know where he lives.

RM: I used to work for his mother. She had a little house in Tonopah and I would help her clean it and paint it.

NB: They are really nice people. And the Hages were involved and Iôm sure Ben Colvin was, and his brother probably had at least a minor role in it, because seeing his brother or his uncle or whoever it is, heôs near the Hagesô place out there.

RM: Is there more that you want to say about the Sagebrush Rebellion?

NB: Only that Iôm very proud of anybody that started that and was involved in it because it taught us a lessonð that if you made enough noise and you were determined enough, you could get the federal government to back down to a certain extent.

RM: And what did they back down on?

NB: They stopped trying to close roads and things like that because there were a number of lawsuits.

RM: So in the long run, or the medium run, government can be made responsive, but it takes action.

NB: It does. The same thing happened with the MX missile programð there was such a vehement opposition to that the plan was ultimately dropped. These things kind of fall together, but thatôs the keyð you canôt just say, ñOh, well, it isnôt going to do me any good to express my displeasure over this because I wonôt make a difference.ò Sometimes you can make a difference. And if we had more media coverage weôd probably make a bigger difference.

RM: Maybe you could use blogs?

NB: Well, if somebodyôs got enough timeð thatôs a problem. And I canôt blog, thatôs not a good idea for somebody who represents a county government. I mean, you canôt be Chuck Muth when you are an elected official.

RM: You canôt speak ex officio?

NB: You can, but does it do any good to your function as a representative of your county? You want to be able to access people as a logical human being whoôs trying to do the best you can for your people. If youôre really vehement and one-sided and saying negative things all the time, youôre not going to be effective. If youôve got a logical reason, people will listen to it.

RM: I agree. How do you see the future of the Sagebrush Rebellion and the problems that weôre talking about?

NB: Iôm kind of disillusioned because I think that the people who live here now are a lot more apathetic than they were. I donôt think theyôre as involved in issues as they once were and most donôt even comprehend a lot of these issues with the range and the wild horses; I donôt think itôs even in their sphere. Some people understand about the roads, but not in the way I or someone else involved with this government does. Even regarding Yucca Mountain, itôs like they go, ñWell, if theyôre going to do it theyôre going to do it anyway so letôs make some money at it if they do.ò And then thatôs fine. A lot of them, I think, are sometimes not aware of the issues.

RM: And does that augur poorly for the future?

NB: Iôd say so, yes. But on the other hand, we had an advisory question on our last regular election ballot and all the counties got it on their ballots except Mineral Countyð their clerk didnôt understand how you put an advisory question on the ballot,

unfortunately. It was saying that the state of Nevada should not mandate services without giving us the ability to pay and the state should not take money away from a county government without the okay of the local county government. And that passed with very high polarity. In Esmeralda County it was like 95 percent or something who were in favor. The only county, interestingly enough, where it didn't pass was Nye County. It passed in Clark, it passed in Washoe, everywhere.

RM: What happened in Nye?

NB: That's what we were asking ourselves.

RM: It had to be Pahrump because they're the largest part of the population.

NB: Well, it didn't pass. [Laughs] I'm just saying that it won in every other county— it was a resounding yes.

RM: I wonder what happened.

NB: Maybe there are a lot of people in Nye County who don't read the ballot questions and just vote no to everything. [Laughs] I put forth the lazy-voter theory to make the Nye County Commissioners feel a little better. [Laughs] There're a lot of people that just vote no to any question because they don't want any change. Because usually a ballot question involves change, and there were a lot of ballot questions that particular year.

RM: That is certainly puzzling. [Laughs]

RM: Any more thoughts on the Sagebrush Rebellion? Whatôs your take on overgrazing versus drought, and is drought a major player now in this whole discussion?

NB: Yes. We had a good year this year, but if youôre a believer in global warming, this whole scenario is going to get a lot worse. So whenever plans are made about how many head of horses or cattle can graze on an allotment, there needs to be some flexibility in the planning, some way to reduce or increase the grazing. They can do it with the cows, but they donôt do it with the horses. Thatôs a conundrum as long as things stay the way they are with the horses. They could give out permits like they do with woodcutting and let somebody who actually might do something with the horses gather ñXò amount of head and that would alleviate some of the problem.

RM: Could it be an income source?

NB: It used to be. This would be instead of going through the whole adoption process. Thatôs what they do nowð they pick a horse up here and take it to Palomino Valley or wherever theyôre going to take it, transport it all the way up there, and then hope someone shows up to adopt it. Then whoever adopts it has to transport the horse back to someplace where you can keep a horse, which probably isnôt in Reno. Or they have the prisoners train it or whatever. But at this stage of the game, because of the no-kill policy, the horses have virtually no value because of the price of feed and hay and so forth.

RM: Years ago, they used to round them up and ship them out for slaughter.

NB: They did that until they changed the law.

RM: It was an income source for the ranchers.

NB: Right, or they didnôt have to buy horses. A lot of them would go out and get their

remuda horses from a herd on the range and when they were done with them, they were decent riding horses for somebody.

RM: Incidentally, I think they were also consuming them. I came across a couple of cases years ago where the story was that a stranger would come to dinner, ñUm, thatôs good,ò and all that, and the host said, ñWell, you liked horse meat.ò [Laughs]

NB: Probably. Itôs like theyôre eating a cow. But people are disconnected from that, too. They think cows are wrapped in cellophane and already butchered. [Laughter]

RM: One of the problems we talked about when we met last week is that it takes the government so long to make a plan and do something. There is a huge lag between establishing a need and the need finally being addressed by the government. Do you have any elaboration on that?

NB: The reason it takes them so long is they have to go through so many gyrationsð the NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) process, considering alternatives: no action, action A, B, C, D, E, and so on. Then, if you add all the actions together, is there a cumulative effect of the actions with other things that are going on? It just goes on and on and on. Thatôs why it takes so long to get something built, for instance.

RM: And it takes them a long time to even get to the assessment.

NB: Yes, especially if it is a great big thing like this resource management plan. We wonôt see that done for another five years. And when they do make these plans, they donôt make them flexible, and then thatôs where I have a problem. My idea is called adaptive management. Say with the grazing issue when you say, these areas are where cattle will be grazing and, like I mentioned before, maybe it would behoove them to keep something in reserve in case somebody needs it or drought conditions might occur. Under adaptive management you would have that written into the plan and say this area is going

to be kept fallow or thereôd be rotation available or when this gets too overgrazed they would move here and let that rest.

You could do the same thing with roads or roadless areas, or where you wanted to restrict people to stay on roads. You could say okay, this area is getting really beat down and overused; we want to have on-road-only use in this area, and keep it that way for five years or so and let the vegetation come back. In the meantime, maybe youôve got something over here that is recovered that you could open up, but they never function in that respect. This road or this situation must be this way forever.

They are so specific sometimes, and thatôs not good. With things like grazing or droughts, like I said, thereôs a lot of unpredictability involved. If you get a drought or global warming, they need to have a way in the plan to take pressure off maybe this certain piece of land; they need to be able to move things around a little bit. But those plans are not built with that kind of flexibility.

Even though they say they ñmanageò the land, they donôt. Theyôre managing it on paper, sitting in an office and perusing a piece of paper. They do go out in the field, but by and large, those are specialists who are looking at one specific thing. When the minerals guy goes out, heôs looking at the mines; when the wild horse person goes out, heôs looking for the wild horses. The only time they all get together in the same room and talk about all their specialties, as they have to do with land use, is when a big project is going to occur or when they are doing something like this resource management plan.

A lot of them donôt live here. Theyôre looking at it from Battle Mountain, for instance, and they donôt really go out on a field tour. They have to have a hand-in-hand relationship with local governments; there should be some money paid to local governments so that they can actually execute some of these plans.

RM: What is your take on wildernesses, and are they part of the Sagebrush Rebellion?

NB: I think all of the issues of the Sagebrush Rebellion keep raising their head from time to time. We recently had a little roundabout on wilderness. We have a little town called Gold Point that we always thought was legal, a real townsite, and it turned out that it wasn't legal and the federal government owns it. Esmeralda County charges the people down there for their houses that are on the land but it turns out they don't own the land. [Laughs] Unfortunately, the county found this out after they passed a law that you couldn't patent townsites anymore so they have been in limbo just like Ione is. There's been legislation going back to Chic Hecht trying to get them legalized, and it never goes anywhere.

So there was some discussion about how to fix this and the idea was brought up that we might consider a lands bill. At that time Mineral and Lyon counties were asked to consider a lands bill and I think the idea was that we're going to be one great big lands bill for all these counties.

Well, the problem is that in order to get a lands bill through Congress, monied wilderness groups have to go along with it. I'm hoping some of that's changing now, but that's why people want the government out of people's lives.

A congressional staffer said there should be some preliminary discussions with these people. Some people from the wilderness groups started floating by and I know they visited with Commissioner Kirby and then they came by and they were visiting with me and they wanted to go out and look at things. Some of the senator's staff came out and I took them on a bit of a tour to show them the edges of where wilderness study areas were in Esmeralda and show them a little bit of the county. None of the people from the wilderness groups said, when we were looking at something, ñWe think this should be

wilderness.ò They were congenial and acting as though ñWeôre just going to work this in where we really think it should be wilderness,ò and talking about if these areas are created you could put something in the bill to say roads would stay.

What ended up happening is that the congressional peopleôs representative wanted to have a meeting and to talk to our people in the county about one of these bills. The day before we were supposed to have this meeting, I finally saw a map that the wilderness people were proposing for wilderness areas to put in this bill. The congressional staff were saying, ñWhat do you want to see privatized?ò We have the list with Gold Pointð an exception for towns and a few recreation areas weôd like to have under our control. But I had not seen what these wilderness groups were thinking.

Two days before we were going to have the meeting they showed up in my house and the idea was that we were to review their map for roads. They had our data layerð actually, the GIS layer. I already told you how many miles of road we have. Itôs kind of difficult to look at the whole map of Esmeralda County where people have got these wilderness areas to make sure theyôre contented with all roads and everything else.

When I was looking at this map and at road parts, I was ready to kill them. I seriously was. I held my temper and I didnôt say anything then. The day before the meeting the representatives of the congressional staff came and they were sitting at my kitchen table and I told them I would seriously advise that the wilderness people not show that map. I said, ñIf they do, Iôm taking the commissioner hat off and Iôm going to be right out there with the people with the pitchforks and the torches,ò I said. ñThose people may not leave that building alive if they show them that map.ò

They had penned 86 percent of our county down as wilderness. They had not vetted it for mining, they had not vetted it for anything. Theyôd just put where they

thought roads were and what was enough. They were looking at it completely from their point of view and not from any other point of view.

RM: Oh my lord, 86 percent of Esmeralda County? When was this?

NB: I think it was 2008. We've got plenty of newspaper articles. Mark Waite's got a thick file on this. It was because of this that I got in trouble with Harry Reid's office for a while.

RM: So in their eyes it would be perfectly okay to take 86 percent of the county and turn it into wilderness?

NB: Yes. And they weren't necessarily even using what's in the Wilderness Act.

RM: What wilderness groups did they represent?

NB: It was, like, the Sierra Club. They were operating independently all this time with their little group. That's why I told the people who were representing Harry Reid's office and John Ensign's office, "They'd better not show that map." I really thought they would have been torn limb from limb, and I'll bet you they would have.

RM: So they didn't show it?

NB: No, they took my advice when I said, "That is just not acceptable." I did go on for a bit. I told them that I felt that I'd been mislead and lied to. I said, "Those people never said a word when they were asking to be shown around the county that they were contemplating this area or that area as wilderness. They wait until this moment and come here and show me this thing to vet roads, and then come to find out that they're going to show this at our meeting." I said, "It's completely unacceptable."

RM: I don't understand their thinking. What do they think people are going to do in an area when they come in and take 86 percent of the place?

NB: Anyhow, that really never went anywhere because they started with such an

extreme point of view. If youôre bargaining, then I start here, you start here, and we work to something reasonable. But if this guyôs asking for 100 percent, right off the cracker Iôm going to zero, right?

RM: Right.

NB: So thatôs the way I was looking at it. I sort of said, ñYouôd better kick this damn thing out and start over because you donôt have anything. Youôve got to consider our minerals. How are we supposed to be making a living here? You want this all wilderness? Thereôs mining and all kinds of stuff up there.ò Actually I donôt even think theyôd had the private land layer put on the map because they were kind of crowding that.

So we had a meeting over here and everybody got pretty hot at that one and then we had meetings in all the communities and what we were getting from folks is that, ñYouôre asking too much and youôre giving us too little and letôs just not do it.ò We didnôt think the areas they were proposing were suitable for wilderness and we didnôt want to go any further. So we made some resolutionsð theyôre actually on our website to this dayð and we just told them no.

RM: When they went into the other counties did they also want the whole pie?

NB: They wanted a lot there, too. One thing Iôm very happy about is that if I hadnôt said that we needed to have a public meeting with our citizens, it would have been even worse in Esmeralda. What had happened in the Mineral and Lyon counties is that a group of environmentalists had sought out a certain core group of citizenry to help work with them on the plan and the public in general was not necessarily aware of the negotiations or what was going on so they were sort of dividing and conquering.

I didnôt like the fact that they were talking to me and then talking to another commissioner, and I asked, ñAre they even talking to the commissioner from Goldfield?ò

That concerned me a lot so I said, ñItôs time to get this out and hear what our people have to say before I even mess with it anymore.ò And we heard, ñNo, we donôt want this.ò

RM: Where has the issue gone over the last several years?

NB: Well finally [laughs] the other two counties said no. I donôt think they did it as strongly as we did, but they did it after we had done it. So the bill idea was dropped and Senator Reid made some comment about that we just didnôt know how good we were going to have it if the bill had passed.

RM: So Reid was behind the whole thing?

NB: Yes, Ensign was willing to go along with it if that was the solution we wanted. But he dropped it and thatôs when Mark Waite called me up, because heôd heard this. Mark said, ñWhatôs your take on it?ò so I got in trouble.

RM: Are there any wilderness areas in Esmeralda County now?

NB: There are wilderness study areas.

RM: But not actual designated wilderness?

NB: Well, study areas are almost worse than having wilderness because if theyôre a study area, they are wilderness, as I said the other day.

RM: Are there a lot of wilderness study areas?

NB: The Bureau of Land Management is reassessing it now that theyôre doing the resource management plan. Weôve also tried, and all the counties haveð Dean Hellerôs been very supportive of thisð because there was an idea that came out from above about wild lands and that the Bureau of Land Management should continually study to see if it was suitable. We were all dead set against that and a number of Republican senators actually said no to that so they had to give up on it. But I think thereôs quite a collection of environmentalists who were hired by the Bureau of Land Management here lately.

RM: To advocate and try and designate and so on?

NB: Yes. Thereôs been a noticeable change since we changed administrations.

RM: So your perception is they want to do more in the way of creating wilderness?

NB: Yes. Interior goes the way of whatever administration is in, and that goes in cycles, too. We get a different president who says okay, letôs not do this, and then it all goes away for a while.

RM: What are the prime contenders for wilderness in the county in the environmentalistsô thinking? What mountain ranges or valleys or whatever?

NB: They would like the whole southern tip of our county and those areas adjacent to Death Valley National Park. Theyôd like that almost all the way up to Gold Pointð thatôs where one of the wilderness study areas is right now. The other oneôs on the Silver Peak Mountain Range to the west of Silver Peak. Thereôs quite a big area up there thatôs in a wilderness study area.

RM: Is Mount Magruder part of that?

NB: Yes, they had Magruder in there. I donôt think the Indians wouldôve liked that too much, I think thatôs why they kept the Palmettos out of it, too. There are still some cabins up there that time hasnôt completely covered over.

Mount Jackson was also part of it and so was the entire northern part of our county. So were the volcanic hills. So was part of Mineral Ridge outside of Silver Peak. I mean, you wouldnôt have been able to drive out of Silver Peak along the county road without having one of these wilderness areas abutting you. Oh, and the sand dunes outside of Silver Peak. It was terrible. They left us a few flat places on the valley floor and that was about it and they left the Palmetto Mountains off it.

But that would be just horribleð there could be no mining, no grazing, nothing.

And if you did have a water in-holding you can't use it. I mean, how are you going to fix your pipeline without a back hoe? That would be a lot of hand-digging. You can't have anything motorized in a wilderness area, not even a chainsaw. You could cut wood but you'd have to do it by hand and pack it up and put it on your pack mule or your horse. You can't haul a lot that way. So we just said no. Hopefully we'll escape that, but I don't think any of it is suitable, even the parts that they have in wilderness study now. There are study areas right now outside of Silver Peak that don't need to be wilderness.

RM: What are your reasons for saying that?

NB: For one reason, there are mineral values out there that could profit the United States if properly mined. That was one of the reasons that the BLM initially said they didn't think it should even be a wilderness study area, because of the mineral values. It's sort of a compliment to Esmeralda County that these people thought so much of us was suitable for wilderness. That means we took darned good care of what we've got, right? The whole idea of wilderness under the Wilderness Bill is that it's supposed to be a roadless, pristine area with no evidence of man.

RM: There are not many places like that in central Nevada, are there? They've all been trodden over and picked in and grazed and so on.

NB: This is where having your roads included in the BLM's information is very important. Because what they thought was roadless we don't think of as roadless.

RM: And you could go up there and show them a road if need be.

NB: Right, but looking at it from a distance you won't see them. They take a picture from several miles away up a mountain and say this should be wilderness, but I never did see any of them hike up there. I never saw any pictures from inside the area. To me, that's a way of further killing the economy out here. And it speaks to what I said

beforeð let the locals aid in deciding what goes on in public lands a little more. I think youôd have a lot less damage and youôd have a lot wiser decisions on these things; youôd probably be keeping the land in better shape.

RM: Where do you see the wilderness issue going?

NB: It depends on the administration. The way the wind is blowing right now with the setup in Washington, a lot of the people associated with the Tea Party movement and Republicans have really seized on getting the government out of your life. When theyôve been involved in things in the House, itôs been, ñOkay, quit this stuff. Enough is enough.ò I think they already identified anything that needed to be wilderness in the ô70s, and to keep going on and on and on this way is not a good thing.

The more wilderness they create, the more pressure it puts on some other parts of the public land and the more headaches we seem to get. We seem to be finding big growths of marijuana in the wilderness area up on the White Mountainsð weôve made the national news four or five times on that one. They found it on Forest Service land a couple of times. That almost shoot-out I told you about was BLM and Forest Service. They help pay the cops some but that puts our people in jeopardy, too. Say youôre up there in a wilderness area and youôre on horseback and you happen upon somebodyôs little project up thereð what if theyôre there? You could get killed.

If youôre going to have a thing like a wilderness area and you say youôre managing and administering it, then why arenôt you up there on horseback yourself checking it out? When they go up there they donôt go horseback. [Laughs]

RM: At its core, actually almost all of the issues weôve talked about are economic, arenôt they?

NB: They impact our economy or any opportunity to have an economy, actually. Then

when progress happens it further cuts into our economy, the little bit weôve got.

RM: Letôs say that youôre a rancher and youôve got a nice spring up in a wilderness area that your cows have been using for a long time. The rancher canôt use that anymore?

NB: They might allow grazing in there. But the problem would be he canôt use motorized means to get there unless they cherry-stem a road to his spring.

RM: I was wondering about the issue of takings.

NB: Thatôs something that they donôt want to address. The way those groups get around that when they propose wilderness is they say, ñWe can write anything we want into the act and if we knew the spring was there it wouldnôt be a problem. In the act weôll talk about some access or the pipeline right of way.ò But whether or not you could identify all those springs is a problem.

RM: How about if Joe Blow has a patented claim in the area?

NB: They thought it was okay to do things like thatð if there was an inhold patent all theyôve got to do is allow access to that guyôs place. Again they say, ñWeôll write the bill to allow for that.ò But I donôt think so. How would you do that? Do you write a bill to allow people to go in there and cut wood? Itôs okay for them to fly in here and say things like that but would they actually do it?

And thatôs a problem too. Not only do you have marijuana farms growing in the wilderness but thereôs no wood-cutting to speak of. Sometimes itôs good to thin down forest. If you get a big beetle kill and everything up there is heavily wooded; itôs like a good, big bonfire waiting to happen that is going to hurt adjoining lands.

RM: So again, it comes down to politics.

NB: Yes, primarily. I think most of our citizens love our land and we take good care of it.

RM: Yes, I think you do.

NB: By and large we do, and I think thatôs prevalent throughout the West. If something truly is a magnificent area that is pristine, perhaps some wilderness is okay, like maybe some of the land over in the Whites. But when you have multiple use for the landð like where youôre now mining, youôre grazing, youôre doing a number of things over those same few acres, it might be pretty but it looks like a lot of other things that are already in wilderness.

CHAPTER EIGHT

RM: As chair of the Esmeralda County Commission, how much of your time and mental activity is devoted to these issues weôre talking about that you might rather devote to something else?

NB: Well, a lot of it, too, is because Iôm very active with other county commissioners in Nevada through the Nevada Association of Counties. I spend a good 60 percent of my time on these bigger issues.

RM: On dealing with the government?

NB: No, dealing with the government is Iôd say 70 percent of our time. Yesterday, most of my day was involved with something involving the NDOTð Nevada Department of Transportation. Weôre at the tail end of money that was available in 2008 under the Recovery Act for paving. That money got split evenly among the counties. If you had a shovel-ready project that could be submitted, then you could use that money. In early 2009, the Nevada Department of Transportation said, ñA lot of these projects are kind of small and if you guys want, weôll take care of the bidding and the contractual part of it for you,ò because itôs easier for them to do it; they could probably get better bids.

We said okay, we signed up for that, and then they asked for paperwork for a valid right of way, which part of the road, and so forth, and we got all that into them by February 2010 or even in 2009. So weôre supposed to have this project. Well, we waited and waited. Now, people from NDOT do a sort of state-wide tour once a year where they come by with the state transportation plan and ask for your okay as county commissioner. Every time they showed up weôd keep asking, ñWhen are we going to get this paving project?ò and none of them really know.

I finally got so exasperated about it. I was thinking, ñWhat did they do? Did they take our money and give it to somebody else or did they forget about this project and is the federal government going to call that money back because it hasnôt been spent?ò I was getting really concerned about. Iôd gotten ahold of people I know at the higher levels of NDOT, and said, ñQue pasa?ò

So yesterday I called another person at NDOT to get the project ID and all that material because one of the big-wigs had got back to me and said, ñIf you can get this information Iôll found out about it for you.ò

I got that together and I said, ñWell, for the heck of it Iôll do some phone-calling myself.ò

As the afternoon went by, all of a sudden people who hadnôt known anything about this project said, ñOh, youôre calling about that Esmeralda paving project, are you?ò Because I was going to call the governorsô office. I called someone I knew there and found out who the legal counsel was who dealt with NDOT. I was getting ready to call the director of NDOTð the legal counsel to the governor had been in a meeting so I didnôt get a chance to talk to him. But by early afternoon, all of a sudden people knew about it. That tells me that the big guy has been reaching out.

I finally found out who was in charge of this thing and flashed them off an email right before I had to go to a meeting at 2:00 saying, ñHey, I hear youôre going to start this in seven days. Make sure weôre on your distribution list in case you need to coordinate locally for detours or extra signage.ò That was pretty well all day yesterdayð I was late for the meeting that started at 2:00. So yes, itôs a lot of time, and going up to testify in front of the legislators also takes a lot of time.

RM: Did you get your money for that paving project?

NB: Yes, I found it was supposed to start in seven days and weôre now on the distribution list. Poor Ed Rannells here had been trying and trying to find out about it.

RM: So another example of problems with the bureaucracy.

NB: Oh, they go on and on. One time we were in the middle of doing a sewer project in Goldfield and weôd had a committal from the Army Corps of Engineers; weôd signed the paperwork with them. The way we were working the deal is that we were going to draw from their money lastð we had several different pools of money. When we were at the point where we needed to draw on their money they were going, ñWell, weôre not sure.ò We had contractors working here; this was a go. How are we supposed to pay for this when they come back and go, ñOh well, you know.ò That was another one. I donôt know what she did, but the woman at Senator Reidôs office did something and those people had the money in the bank for Esmeralda County. It was Thursday when I talked to her and they had the money in the bank the next Tuesday. This happens all the time; all county commissioners go through this.

RM: So in your position you have to have a lot of capacity to deal with this kind of thing.

NB: And know-how.

RM: Yes, knowing how to deal with things and being able to tolerate the stress.

NB: Well, governmentôs goofy. But I never realized just how messed up our government was before I became a county commissioner.

RM: Do you think itôs always been like that? That itôs just the nature of the human condition?

NB: Iôm sure itôs always been convoluted but I think if it was a little bit smaller it wouldnôt be as slow as it is. Theyôre crawling all over each other doing the same job

sometimes because they have crossover of authority. Itôs like when you do certain projects here youôve got to have the Bureau of Land Management involved, you might have HUD involved, you might have USDA involved, you might even have the EPA involved in some instances, plus the state of Nevada. They all have different requirements that youôve got to meet so you have to have a lot of patience to deal with all that.

RM: Weôve got two more major topics Iôm charged with dealing with. One is MX and the other is Yucca Mountain.

NB: I didnôt actively participate in MX, but I heard about it. Again, that was something where they selected Nevada to be the place to put all these rail lines to move missiles around and they didnôt ever ask anybody here. It wasnôt well vetted at the federal level, as it turned out, because the whole thing probably wouldnôt have worked anyway, and thatôs why it ended up being dropped. But again, it was the federal government saying to the state and counties, ñIôm coming in, Iôm going to do whatever I want.ò It strikes me as odd because they thought everything out here was suitable for rail lines, and they were going to hide things in mountains. Itôs okay to saturate the entire state of Nevada with rail lines and missiles, but then you turn around and in no time itôs all suitable for wilderness. That is a classic federal government turnaround.

RM: Yes, they were going to take, I forget the figureð half the state or something.

NB: And they werenôt offering to pay anybody or move them. They probably would do exactly what they do when they propose a rail line to Yucca Mountain. They engineer it so that it doesnôt go over private land. It would irritate the hell out of that little town of Silver Peak, where you can hear a pin drop, but, ñWell, youôll get used to the noise.ò Actually that line is one of the prime views over my house. They showed me that and

said ñWhat do you think of it?ò

I said, ñI think itôs just fine if you pay us all to move, buy us out.ò I can see why everybody got so fired up about MX. They spent all that money and theyôre drilling all those wells and so on.

RM: Itôs like thereôs a lot of land out here that doesnôt have any houses on it and they think itôs good for this project and itôs good for the next project.

NB: Yes, but it never dawns on them they might sell some of it at a reasonable price so there are a few more heads living out here and you could support a little store or something. [Laughs] And when they do sell land, boy do they think itôs worth a lot of money.

RM: Does that bring us to Yucca Mountain then?

NB: Yes, thatôs our latest one. My take on it is that people here thought if it was going to happen it would have provided some income and the possibility of some economic expansionð another engine to drive, so to speak, and not terribly intrusive for what was planned for us. And we would have had the side benefit of being able to ship things out on the rail line they proposed because we have a lot of industrial minerals and it would make it much more cost-effective to ship them that way.

RM: What minerals are there?

NB: Lithium is one and weôve got quite a few othersð big potassium deposits, silica deposits, sulfur. You could make more money on those kind of things if you could ship large amounts of them. There are a few more minerals that we have here but a lot of times they havenôt been developed because of the cost of trucking them out. Rail is a whole lot more effective and efficient.

RM: What was the route the railroad was going to run?

NB: That was another problem we had. When the idea first came up it might have been the line later called the Mina 1 or 2, coming down from the north and kind of following Highway 95. You should ask Ed about that one. Then all of a sudden the Caliente line showed up, which was fighting the topography of the entire state of Nevada [laughs], crossing every mountain range east to west until you got to central Nevada. It was probably the worst place in the world to try to build a railroad, but that was the course they selected.

I think originally most of them hardly came into Esmeralda County but they did listen to us about that and we pointed out that they might have a whole lot better path if they took something that was sort of a natural way through our county.

RM: Which would have been how?

NB: Youôve got to look at the map, but it swings to the other side of Highway 95 a little bit before Goldfield and then for a little while it follows the course of the old water pipeline that served Goldfield from Lida for a little while. Then it goes through the valley on the west side of Mount Jacksonð thatôs all flat out that way. Then right about at Lida Junction, where the Cottontail Ranch was, it would go south and into Yucca Mountain.

RM: So it would have been west of here?

NB: Yes, just slightly. So we talked them into that. The Mina route resurfaced a little later on. Either one of those would have had a lot of rail line coming through Esmeralda County, and it would have been probably a lot better, too, for north-south shipment of other goods to go that way because you were ultimately connecting with the major railhead in Reno instead of just over in Caliente on the Salt Lake route. It would have been much more beneficial to the whole of the state to do that because not only do we have some of those minerals, but Mineral Countyôs got some, too.

RM: In talking to people over the years, do you have any general impressions about what people thought about the Nevada Test Site and the radiation that resulted from the nuclear weapons testing?

NB: The people who have been here a long time knew what happened and knew there wasn't anything they could do about it so it was acceptable. The radiation really hasn't shown up in the water up here so that's one blessing. And most of the wind went due east so there wasn't that fallout.

RM: So there wasn't any general predisposition toward hysteria about it?

NB: No. But I think people, and not just in our area, feel that after those events transpired we found out many things about what happened during those days that were kept secret from us and purposely withheld from the public and that the public suffered because of it.

RM: You mean, because of the radiation exposure?

NB: Yes. They wouldn't even publicize properly that when the wind blows this way you might have a problem. Unfortunately, in the time I grew up in I've seen over and over and over that our federal government does not tell the truth. Having been a fairly young person watching people getting killed in Vietnam on the nightly news and being around at the Kennedy assassination and finding out some of the medical experiments they did on black people, purposely giving them venereal diseases and watching them die, you find this stuff out later and you think, "What kind of government have we got here?" I think if they were more truthful things would be better. I think they did make an attempt to tell the older stories but it still makes you wonder, what aren't they telling you?

So when something like Yucca Mountain is proposed I think it does not help it

because thereôs a certain component that is thinking, ñWhat arenôt they telling me about this?ò And theyôve done everything they can to keep it out of the public.

RM: Yes. I interviewed Senator Richard Bryan on this issue a few months ago, and that was his take. He said that the federal government hadnôt been totally truthful about weapons testing, so what arenôt they telling us about Yucca Mountain? He said that was the basis of his opposition to the Yucca Mountain waste repository.

NB: I think thatôs understandable, I can see the logic of that. And he probably knows more than you or I because he has been a senator; he probably found out some things when he went to Washington that he didnôt know when he was governor.

RM: My dad and brother and I were out in Reveille Valley when they were shooting off those A-bombs. We used to get up and watch them go off in the morning and Iôve always thought that the government was not deceptive. They were not appreciative of some of the dangers and everything but I never felt like they were lying. This was back in the ô50s.

NB: Yes, but when the problem with radiation started showing up in Utah and whatnot they werenôt exactly forthright about it.

RM: Youôre right.

NB: Theyôre patting these people on the head saying ñWell, you just got the flu; leave.ò I can see logically why someone would feel the way Bryan does.

RM: Oh I can, too. And that suspicion of the governmentôs honesty had something to do with the opposition to Yucca Mountain.

NB: I think this ties in with our conversation because for our state and federal elected officials, this was their form of the Sagebrush Rebellion. When Yucca Mountain was proposed they were saying, ñThey shoved it down my throat; I donôt like the idea.ò It was

like the MX. The MX law passes and the target's on Nevada and the government's building it whether you like it or not; same thing with Yucca Mountain. Law passed, we're the target, a repository was never studied to be placed anywhere else. Okay, Nevada, you're the waste dump.

And knowing some of our illustrious people who were around for the MX, like Governor Bryan, later Senator Bryan, a reaction to that by a Nevadan might well be to say, "They're doing it to us again. To hell with you. I don't want it, I'll never accept it, and we're all sticking together." And they still are.

RM: That's true, but here's the difference as I see it. This attitude was pretty heavily true in Vegas, and maybe in Reno, but in the rural counties like Nye and Esmeralda there was not such a strong feeling against Yucca Mountain.

NB: Right, because they were trying to make a living in the counties. They were looking at it as, "Oh, there may be some hope that we can stay around and enjoy our lovely residence and have some relief for taxes so we can do some good things for our people." That's how they were looking at it years ago– "And I can maybe make a living on this."

RM: So you're saying that they were willing to overlook their fears of radiation and the government for economic reasons?

NB: I don't know that they have those fears. They tended to look at it not so emotionally but from a logical standpoint. If you're looking at this and saying, "I might be able to make a living off of this," and you're aware that the scientists and engineers are going through all these studies before it starts and on and on, and having a facility where you've got something local where you can go ask questions, I think it was looked at differently, I think they looked at it with logic.

But I think a lot of our higher-up elected officials were looking at it from an emotional standpoint because now it wasnôt just Esmeralda County that the BLM was bullying around, it was the federal government telling the state of Nevada,ò We think youôre sub-par and weôre going to locate this thing here whether you want it or not. Weôre not going to pay you, anyway.ò And probably down south Clark County would say, ñThis is horrible for the gaming industry,ò so they wouldnôt have liked it. So between those two I think that covers it.

RM: Youôre right. However, I interviewed Senator Chic Hecht about Yucca Mountain before he died. Of course, he was very pro Yucca Mountain and his interpretation was that the opposition by Bryan and Reid was cynical; that it was a political issue. I asked him, ñHow did they decide in the beginning to oppose Yucca Mountain?ò I was at the very first meeting proposing Yucca Mountain when Governor Bryan spoke out and said, ñI am unalterably opposed to this.ò And ñunalterablyò means that Iôm not going to change my mind.

NB: ñAnd Iôm not going to listen anymore either.ò

RM: Thatôs right. I asked Hecht, ñHow did Bryan and Reid know that it was a good political issue?ò He told me, ñFear always makes a wonderful issue for a politician.ò His take on it was that they milked the issue successfully, whereas I thought from the beginning, ñThese guys are on the wrong side of this issue and theyôre going to get burned by it.ò

NB: Every one of our political people who have come since Bryan, whether they be Republican or Democrat, have picked up that gauntlet and you will get the same opinion from them.

RM: One exception was Barbara Vucanovich.

NB: Well, she just didn't talk much about it. But after Barbara got out, they're all in lock step.

RM: Is it your perception over the years that people in Esmeralda County were pretty receptive to the whole idea?

NB: From my point of view, the only benefit in that thing is somebody might make a living off it. I mean, we might get a north-south somehow rail connection in the state of Nevada.

RM: But would the repository itself help the economy?

NB: Slightly, yes. It depends on how much PETT (payment equal to taxes) money we'd get out of it. That's one of the reasons we try to have an installation put in the county and one of the reason we kind of favored having a rail line go a little bit to the west of Goldfield instead of the way it was going to go. Otherwise you end up with, once again, an additional burden. Because even if it came close here, whose law enforcement is going to get called? Whose emergency services are going to get called? If it's closer to Goldfield, even it's just over the Nye County line, who are they going to call? That's one of the good things we get out of the low-level nuclear waste that goes to Beatty; we do get some money for shipments that come through here and that has been very helpful to us. But we can only use it for emergency services.

RM: So in your eyes it's a little bit of the same old, same old issue, isn't it?

NB: I really think it echoes from one to the other. I think there's a certain component of the Yucca Mountain opposition as a Nevadanð if you love this state, it kind of makes you mad that they just waltz in and say, ñOkay, you're it.ò

RM: Do you think if presented the project differently it would have made a difference?

NB: It's so hard to tell. But that's been my take on some of the political pushback on

itð they were just being bull-headed about it, and I donôt see that I blame them. If I was governor, like Governor Bryan at the time, and something like that happened and it was my state, Iôd probably have said the same kind of things he did. Iôve never been, like, ñBring on Yucca Mountain.ò Weôve got two other commissioners who take care of that. [Laughs]

RM: Theyôre in favor of the project?

NB: Oh yes, to the extent that sometimes they get higher elected officials ticked off at them.

RM: Do you think Yucca Mountain is dead?

NB: I donôt know. The federal lawôs still on the books. That brings us back to one of those headaches for Esmeralda Countyð as I told you before, we donôt know which way itôs going now. Nye County is sort of stuck there, too. Weôre trying to figure out creative ways that we can draw some dollars in and get something shaking. Thatôs why weôre working so closely on getting power lines built for these renewables, hoping that maybe we can make a lick out of that if Yucca Mountain isnôt going to come. But thatôs the thingð theyôll turn around and say, ñWell no, we donôt care about geothermal, we donôt care about solar, weôre going to build little nuclear plants.ò As soon as we get lined up to do something itôs going to change, just like it always has. But we keep trying.

RM: Thatôs right; thatôs all you can do.

NB: Yes, outside of making the whole damn county a park, like the wilderness people want them to do. [Laughs]

RM: Do you think that DOE did an adequate job of educating the public on Yucca Mountain?

NB: No, not at all. Actually, they were really laughable. The few meetings that Iôve

gone to on this, every one of them, somebody came out saying a really stupid thing. The first one I went to was over at Caliente. It wasn't that long after I'd gotten elected and it was the transportation board– they were having a meeting. Somebody from DOE, or a consultant who had been studying it, stood up and said flat out, because the rail might take a while to build, "The highways in the state of Nevada are adequate for transportation of this until the railroad is built." I'm thinking, "You've never seen a 90-degree turn in Goldfield."

We had a public meeting here, too, when the Caliente rail corridor was first being proposed, and one man was working for one of the consultants. They had a meeting here in the school auditorium and I went to it and I got a moment of truth out of this guy because I sat there and we were talking a little bit and he realized that I probably had somewhat of a brain and understood certain aspects of engineering and earth moving. I said, "Wouldn't you have been a lot happier if they'd stuck with that first route? Talk about giving an engineer a headache. These idiots picked this line that you're fighting, and I told them that they're fighting the topography of the state of Nevada like nowhere else possible." I said, "They did you a big favor. I know you wouldn't have designed a railroad through this if you had the choice."

And the guy said, "You're right." I mean, it was all smoke and mirrors. Even the report– it was DOE and BLM that did it. The Caliente route that they had initially had silly stuff in it, stuff like this is going to be closed to mineral claims but they're going to keep it open for leasable minerals. Now excuse me, you'll lease it but you won't let somebody claim it? And you want to lock this land up for how many years while we're studying it? A three-mile wide corridor, shrink down the study area– [laughs] those reports are usually pretty interesting but not very practical.

Itôs like one of the Mina routes, the one that went by Silver Peak. Thereôs a spring called Railroad Springs, so somebody thought that Railroad Springs was probably where a railroad line went. They didnôt understand that the old railroad line to Silver Peak stopped at Blair; it never even went up through Silver Peak. But they initially had it routed through Railroad Springs. One of these people, in their wisdom, just visioned this. So then they did whirl this thing around and send it down right where the county road is, basically, to go to Railroad Springs.

Not a one of them had ever checked to see what the grade was. If I recall correctly, the Yucca Mountain line had to have less than a two percent grade, but that route may be even a little more than a ten percent grade. Lida Wash goes through there and thatôs a big huge wash so thereôs at least about a five-story drop from here to there but it goes down fairly gradually in the wash. Not a one of them had ever checked that. Where did you get the two percent grade? I think youôd better check your reading. When they did the final plan, of course they had this thing going all over the mountain, circling back and forth to keep to their two percent desirable grade.

RM: Another thing that they did was they hired virtually no one from Esmeralda or Nye counties to work on Yucca Mountain in the early stages. Thatôs probably part of the reason why they made the mistake you were just talking about.

NB: Yes. This route was a little later on but they never walked it, they probably never flew it. They just were looking at that map in isolation, like happens to us so often.

RM: Very early on in Yucca Mountain, a group in Tonopah called up Senator Hecht and said, ñWhatôs going on? We canôt get any jobs there, theyôre bringing them all in from other places.ò Another error theyôve made.

NB: Well, Nye County does that all the time when they hire someone. [Laughs] Look

at all their county managers.

RM: Oh. [Laughs]

NB: Well, they think no one here knows anything.

RM: Yes, they think theyôre all a bunch of rubes out here.

NB: Yes, uneducated. People made that mistake with me.

RM: So weôre back to saying, ñHey, throw a little money their way out there if you want to sweeten them up a little bit.ò

NB: Yes, but youôve got to throw us money we can use anywhere; thatôs the problem. Usually the federal money has so many strings on it that you have to be extremely creative in order to get some kind of lasting benefit.

RM: Exactly. I think Iôve covered most of my list here but if some other things come up please let me know.

NB: Weôll send you press clippings. Iôm sure Markôs got quite a file on Boland down there.

RM: Iôll ask him.

NB: Yes, please do. He remembers that virtual blackmail quote really wellð thatôs the one Reid got angry about. [Laughs]

RM: Tell that story.

NB: Mark called me and told me what Harry Reid had said about this land bill thing that they gave up onð he said, ñWell, weôre going to drop this and they donôt know what they missed out on,ò or something to that effect.

Mark said, ñWhat do you think about that?ò

I said, ñYou know, Iôm relieved,ò I said. ñIôm glad.ò I was worried they were going to continue with the wilderness plan whether we said we wanted it or not. We

talked a little further and I said that I looked at this plan as virtual blackmail, so he puts the virtual blackmail remark in his article in the *Pahrump Valley Times*.

RM: What was the blackmail for?

NB: All we wanted, really, was Gold Point and a few little scraps of land here and there. And then they said, ñWe want the other 86 percent of your county as wilderness.ò

I said, ñI felt it was virtual blackmail just to get this.ò Well, I said it. But then, boy did I get a call.

RM: From Reid?

NB: Not Reid himself, but his office. They said, ñHeôs going to damn you to hell when he sees this.ò I explained exactly why I said what I said.

I told them, ñWe have tried and we have tried and we have tried to do this through methods other than this land bill thing. I asked John Ensignôs office if they would put our little piece of legislation on another land bill that they were working on and John Ensignôs office said yes we will but we want to make sure that Senator Reid is all right with that.ò Because he started this process to try to get the town done. So we donôt want to make him think weôre superseding him.

I said, ñThen I called your office and I was told no, it had to be our bill or no bill.ò But it wasnôt Harry Reid who said thatð it was one of his higher-up staffers. And when I explained that to this person who was so mad I said, ñI think I was justified in saying that because that was our only resolution. It was the refusal to bring this legislation in about Gold Point, and you kept saying it wonôt pass because itôs not big enough.ò

But I guess theyôve forgiven me because Harry Reid calls me Nancy when weôre on those conference calls. [Laughs] He invites all the county chairs every once in a while if heôs got something he wants to communicate to youð especially when heôs running for

election, he has a lot of those conference calls. He'll talk about legislation, like when he did something about the fires.

RM: Just as an aside I'll mention here that Nye County was offered, through Steve Bradhurst, who was the Nye County consultant on Yucca Mountain years ago, a number of things if the county would take the repository. This guy in Secretary of Energy Harrington's office said to Steve, "What will Nevada take to want to take the repository?" And Steve said, "How about the super-collider super-conductor?" The guy said, "Okay, what else do you want?" and Steve said "How about a super train from Vegas to L.A.?" He said, "Okay, what else do you want?" and Steve said, "I'll have to get back to you on this."

Chic Hecht told me that Secretary of Energy Harrington called him into the office and said, "If Nevada will take Yucca Mountain, we will build a multi-million dollar nuclear research facility focusing on nuclear medicine on the Test Site associated with UNLV. In ten years it'll have more Nobel Prize winners working at it than any institution in the world." Troy Wade, who's a big guy in nuclear energy, was in the office at the time.

Chic took the idea to the then-president of UNLV, who said, "If I accepted that I'd be out of a job."

NB: Politics are really something.

RM: Now we've got not a whole lot to show for the whole Yucca Mountain thing. It's very sad.

NB: It is sad. And we're still out here in limbo land. Probably every county that this has affected is in limbo land. I'm not taking it out of consideration but it makes it hell to try to determine your future.

RM: That's one of the key points that you've made all of the way through this interview– that you can't control your own fate and you're dangling half the time.

NB: It's mining boom and bust– that's the only consistency in our lives in this county. Hardly any population, but millions and millions of dollars worth of water system improvements and water treatment we have to have because there's a law that says we must.

RM: Where does the water come from?

NB: From wells halfway between here and Tonopah. There's 11 miles of pipeline.

RM: Are they deep?

NB: I think they're about 400 foot, something like that; they're not that deep. They've got two pump stations. There's the well and two transfer pumps to get it in here because this is where the water tank is.

What makes it fulfilling being a commissioner is when you do solve problems. When we got the money from the geothermal thing we split it into three regions evenly. The first thing I did was pay off the water loan in Silver Peak. Every year we saved $7,000, most of it interest, because it was a 40-year loan. So we told USDA to go away and had one less government agency messing around in our lives. We got a second well drilled so that we didn't have to worry about the government coming back for a while. We're doing pretty good over there right now.

RM: When were you elected commissioner?

NB: I got elected in the 2004 elections so I took office in January 2005. That's when I was a newbie and now I wish I didn't know half of the things I know. [Laughs] Yes, you don't want to give bull to Nancy if you're a bureaucrat because she's just like a pit bull. I know how to work bureaucracy. I'm a really good money person. I can find money–

when there were government monies, I found them. As a chair I didnôt hesitate to put in for an appropriation because I figured we deserved it as much as everybody else.

RM: Thatôs right. This has been so interesting. Thank you very much for talking with me.

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