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CALIFORNIA DEMOCRATS' GOLDEN ERA, 1958-1966

Cyr Copertini Campaign Housekeeping,
1940-1965

Martin Huff From Grassroots Politics
to the California
Franchise Tax Board,
1952-1979

With an Introduction by
Elizabeth Gatov

Interviews Conducted by
Gabrielle Morris
in 1986

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PREFACE

One of the primary charges of the Regional Oral History Office is the documentation of California government and political history. Since 1969, the Office has conducted extensive projects focused on the administrations of Governors Earl Warren, Goodwin Knight, Edmund G. Brown, Sr., and Ronald Reagan, covering the period 1932-1974.

In addition to elected and appointed officials in the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government, the Office has been especially interested in collecting data on the Democratic and Republican parties and election campaigns, as well as the work of citizens active in formal party work and advocacy of crucial public issues. Documentation of the history of the Democratic party includes thoughtful oral histories with such Democratic leaders of the 1950s and 1960s as Don Bradley, Edmund G. "Pat" Brown, Elizabeth Smith Gatov, Roger Kent, and Thomas Lynch, among others.* Many of these interviews mention the devoted and expert roles of Cyr Copertini and Martin Huff in significant activities.

In addition to close political cooperation, personal friendships developed among many of those who worked together in those years. This volume of interviews is a tribute to those friendships. After the death of Don Bradley in 1981, friends and associates presented a gift in his memory to the Regional Oral History Office for continuing work on the history of the California Democratic party. After careful consideration, Cyr Copertini and Martin Huff were invited to be interviewed because of their unique perspectives on day-to-day operations and finances of the state central committee during the era when Bradley managed key Democratic campaigns.

The Office takes this opportunity to thank the many friends of Don Bradley who made these interviews possible. They are listed on the following page.

Gabrielle Morris, Interviewer-Editor
Regional Oral History Office

August 1987
Regional Oral History Office
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University of California, Berkeley

* Don Bradley, Managing Democratic Campaigns, 1954-1966, 1982
Edmund G. "Pat" Brown, Sr., Years of Growth, 1939-1966: Law Enforcement, Politics, and the Governor's Office, 1982
Elizabeth Smith Gatov, Grassroots Party Organizer to Treasurer of the United States, 1978.
Roger Kent, Building the Democratic Party in California, 1954-1966, 1981.
Thomas Lynch, A Career in Politics and the Attorney General's Office, 1982.

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INTRODUCTION

It was a genuine grass-roots effort that engaged the prolific talents of Martin Huff and Cyr Copertini. An effort that lifted the Democratic party in California from the political basement to the penthouse of representation and administration in Sacramento and Washington, D.C.

Some have joyously labeled it the Golden Age of California Democrats.

In those days, because of the numbers of people involved in the party's efforts to win elections, two particular linchpins were required to keep the operation on track and functioning.

One was a financial manager who could answer the persistent question, "What did you do with the MONEY?" to satisfy the cynical and assiduous readers of financial reports. That was Martin, whom anyone, on sight, would want to have as executor of an estate, or to be the person to find one unconscious after an accident.

If he had lived two hundred years earlier, Martin very likely would have been a delegate to the Constitutional Convention where he would have contributed enormously to the resolution of conflicts, the major task of those who gathered in Philadelphia that summer.

The other was the gyroscopic impresario who kept happy and motivated the curious collection of individuals who labored in political campaigns twenty and thirty years ago; they thought of themselves as "professional volunteers."

In those days, television consumed a very small part of the campaign budget; the bulk was spent on organization, which meant a network of people and their support apparatus; headquarters, telephones, mailings, printing, etc.

People-managing, therefore, with careful attention to morale and fragile egos, was critically important.

California Democrats, during the period of their political escalation, owed a vast amount of their success to Martin Huff and Cyr Copertini. Their skills contributed directly to the generation of trust among the participants and the resulting effusion of effort by volunteers and contributors who helped nominate the candidates the party offered to the voters and then went on to provide the structure of support needed to win the election in the fall.

Martin Huff, the handily elected auditor-controller of the city of Oakland, was drafted to the position of party treasurer, a position especially sensitive at the time of the quarterly meetings of the state central committee when a statement of the party finances was obligatory.

Martin, whose later career as Executive Officer of the state Franchise Tax Board provided an appropriate field for his talents, was able, before the computer age, to create a financial report that awed even those of us already familiar with the contents. A copy was placed on every chair in the meeting hall. Many pages long, cranked out on a mimeograph machine which was the state of the art in those days, it was so scrupulously detailed that by the time those intending to nit-pick had found the item of their interest, the report had long since been accepted.

After a few of those documents had been examined at consecutive meetings, the cleanup squad found most of the financial reports still sitting on the chairs, squashed, unopened and unread.

Such was the power of the trusted treasurer. And such was the stature he provided to the whole administration of the party. He shared his integrity with all of us.

Cyr Copertini, the disarming ringmistress of the political menagerie, was adroit at creating an upbeat environment whatever the facts might imply. Her usual speaking tone had a musical lilt bordering on laughter that warmed the stoniest who heard it. She had the gift of motivating even the vaguest of volunteers who drifted into the office, of making them feel that without their inspired help the campaign was a lost cause. Yet quietly, without seeming to supervise, she knew precisely what was going on in every facet of the operation and kept a stream of communication flowing in both directions.

To candidates and their staffs, Cyr was the morale officer and the foundation of reliable information. No matter what her spot on the non-existent organization chart might look like, or what her equally non-existent job description might have been, Cyr was IN CHARGE.

Those years of building the California Democratic party and finally winning a record number of elections in the 1950s and '60s could not have happened without Cyr's genius in what are today called "communication skills" and Martin's manner of scrubbed-clean honesty. They built confidence, trust, and abiding affection into the party structure, and were integral members of the "212 Gang," the informal, hardworking group that coalesced around the leadership of Roger Kent at party headquarters in San Francisco.

The firm relationships evolved by these two unpretentious people could not be equated in money. Their talent in human understanding made the system of those days work like a well-lubricated machine; I use the phrase with deep respect because I believe harmony under pressure is a rare condition in this contentious world. Their dedicated work, while painting with a small brush, was on a very large canvas.

Their effectiveness changed the polity of California for the last thirty years, perhaps even longer.

Elizabeth Gatov
Former Democratic National
Committeemember

May 1987
Kentfield, California

Obituaries

Campaign Manager Don Bradley

By Scott Blakey

Donald L. Bradley, the wily political strategist responsible for the victories of three San Francisco mayors and the successes of numerous Democratic Party causes, died Friday. He was 62.

A resident of Bolinas, he died at the University of California Medical Center at San Francisco after several weeks in the hospital.

An irascible and witty man with a gravelly voice tuned by endless cigarettes, Mr. Bradley headed the successful campaigns of mayors Jack Shelley in 1963, George Moscone in 1975 and Dianne Feinstein in 1979.

In a career that spanned four decades, Mr. Bradley ran more than 130 campaigns, some losers and many winners. He was most closely associated with mainstream and liberal Democrats, and his candidates reflected that. He worked to elect Harry Truman, Adlai Stevenson and Lyndon Johnson.

He was one of the key figures in three of Edmund (Pat) Brown's campaigns for governor — his 1958 landslide over the late Senator William F. Knowland, his 1962 victory for re-election against Richard Nixon and his bitter defeat by Ronald Reagan in 1966.

He also ran several glamourless campaigns — such as those involving sewer bond issues — with gusto.

When his personal beliefs were involved, politics became a crusade, and a win — such as the successful 1978 drive to defeat the statewide Briggs anti-gay initiative — something akin to moral victory.

"Unlike many in his profession, he was always committed to his candidate or cause," recalled Corey Busch, who was press secretary to the late Mayor Moscone.



DONALD L. BRADLEY.
Democratic strategist

Mr. Bradley — a large man with a face creased like an ironed shirt and heavy jowls that testified to his delight in cooking and entertaining — built a reputation early on as an astute behind-the-scenes operator in the world of getting votes.

He first ran a campaign in 1948 when he was Napa County Democratic chairman and headed up the Democrats' push for Harry Truman there.

But his move into the mainstream of California political life — and the engineering of the Democratic takeover in Sacramento that endures to this day — came with the victorious senatorial campaign of Dr. Stephen P. Teale of West Point (Calaveras County) in 1953. Teale won by 75 votes, and he went on to become a powerful figure in the state Senate.

Mr. Bradley was joined in the Teale race and in subsequent campaigns by Pierre Salinger, who later became press secretary to President John F. Kennedy. Mr. Bradley went on to manage the capture of a number of mountain county seats, which gradually shifted the balance of power out of Republican hands.

As much as Mr. Bradley cared

about politics, he also enjoyed the good life: travel and sports, good food and fine spirits.

For a while in the 1960s, Mr. Bradley had a part interest in a Bolinas bar named Smiley's. It proved so popular that an ice cream establishment across the street renamed itself Scowley's.

And once after losing a particularly close race, Bradley was heard to growl, "The people have spoken — the bums."

Mayor Feinstein, in Manila heading a trade delegation, said yesterday, "Very few people knew and understood politics and the electorate with the acumen, sensitivity and skill of Don Bradley. Don was a politician's politician with solid organization skills, vast and tested experience in a complex area and a tremendous network of contacts."

"Those fortunate enough to have known him found a leader they could respect, a wily and tough advisor and a man who cared deeply about the overall quality of our political life," the mayor said.

"My heartfelt condolences go out to his family and loved ones."

Mr. Bradley is survived by his sons, Vernon of San Francisco and David of Fairfax, and his daughter, Marsha Gifford of Corte Madera. His former wife, Florence, lives in Novato.

No services are planned.



Top left: Democratic nominating convention for the 13th Assembly District, 1958.
Top right: Oakland ceremonial event. *From left,* City Manager Wayne Thompson, Huff as auditor-controller, Mayor John Houlihan, Council of Social Planning official Norvel Smith, ca. 1962.
Bottom right: Huff and Governor Pat Brown discuss Franchise Tax Board work measurement program, ca. 1965.
Bottom left: Ben Swig (*second from left, front row*) and other Democratic fundraisers meet to discuss progress in San Francisco.

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The Don L. Bradley Memorial Project

Cyr Copertini

CAMPAIGN HOUSEKEEPING, 1940-1965

An Interview Conducted by
Gabrielle Morris
in 1986



CYR COPERTINI

TABLE OF CONTENTS -- Cyr Copertini

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY	i
INTERVIEW HISTORY	ii
VITAL DETAILS OF DEMOCRATIC CAMPAIGNS: 1942-1972	1
The Forties and Fifties: Local and National Politics	
Interweave	1
Building a Volunteer Base	9
Women and Politics in the Fifties	13
The Triumphant Era of Pat Brown	16
The Turbulent Sixties	18
Conclusion: Constant Ideas and Major Changes	25
TAPE GUIDE	29
INDEX	30

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please print or write clearly)

Your full name COPERTINI, CYR MULLINS

Date of birth 2/11/25 Place of birth S.F.

Father's full name THOMAS MORGAN MULLINS

Birthplace MARYSVILLE, CALIFORNIA

Occupation MOLDER

Mother's full name GRACE DORRANCE

Birthplace SAN FRANCISCO

Occupation DEPT STORE WINDOW DISPLAYS; HOUSEWIFE

Where did you grow up? S.F.

Present community S.F.

Education PAROCHIAL GRAMMAR + HIGH SCHOOL;

SOME EVENING COURSES - U. OF S.F.

Occupation(s) ADMIN. SECTY TO MAYORS FEINSTEIN + MOSCONE;

DIST REP FOR CONG. PETE STARK - 9CD, CALIF.; PARTNER,
POLITICAL MGMT FIRM SAUNDERS/COPERTINI; DEMOCRATIC
STATE CENTRAL COMMITTEE, ETC

Special interests or activities BUILDING A HOUSE IN THE
MOTHERLAND; IRISH ANCESTRY, HISTORY + LOVE; PIANO
PLAYING (WHERE NO ONE CAN HEAR); BEATEN UP, LASER TYPE
TOM CAT; UNWAVERING FEALTY TO DEMOCRATIC PARTY IDEALS

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Brisk and petite, Cyr Copertini was a pleasure to interview. It took a while to find time for an interview in her busy life as scheduling secretary to San Francisco Mayor Dianne Feinstein. On April 8, 1986, Feinstein had a meeting elsewhere, and Copertini perched on a chair in the darkly ornate mayor's office during lunch hour and breezed through forty years of nearly continuous Democratic party activity. "I took eight months off in 1950 to have a baby," she smiles.

Her first job, right out of high school in 1942, was as secretary to William Malone, chief northern California Democrat of the 1940s. Before the tape recorder was turned on, Copertini smiled and commented that if she had known how important Malone was, she would have paid more attention to how he worked. In a few brief remarks, she brings to life successful small fundraising for Roosevelt's 1944 campaign, Malone's contacts with national figures, insights on San Francisco politics. She continues with Roger Kent's work in strengthening the party statewide in the 1950s and '60s. Sometimes on the party payroll, sometimes on a candidate's, sometimes as a volunteer, Copertini managed through the years the mechanics essential to keeping political activities moving.

Particularly interesting is her account of the 212 Gang, the energetic, able loyalists who worked together at 212 Sutter Street in San Francisco, while it was headquarters for both the Democratic State Central Committee and the California Democratic Council, the celebrated grassroots organization founded in 1954 on enthusiasm for presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson. Senator Clair Engle's office was there too, for a while, providing additional opportunity for feedback and encouragement between the groups.

The transcript of the interview was lightly edited at the Regional Oral History Office and sent to Copertini for review. She apologized for unavoidable delays in sending back the manuscript for final processing. When it returned, she had retyped many pages so that her careful revisions would be readable.

Gabrielle Morris
Interviewer-Editor

22 April 1987
Regional Oral History Office
486 The Bancroft Library
University of California at Berkeley

VITAL DETAILS OF DEMOCRATIC CAMPAIGNS: 1942-1972

[Interview 1: April 8, 1986]##

The Forties and Fifties: Local and National Politics
Interweave

Copertini: --That was my first job, my first job anywhere [with William Malone, then chairman of the Democratic State Central Committee.] I was just out of high school, and it was also an ethnic hire, which is interesting, because Bill Malone asked the parish priest to send him a "nice little Irish girl" and I was a "nice little Irish girl." [laughs]

At that time--the first war year--the primaries were still in late August--August 25th in 1942. They changed them later so that the soldiers' ballots could get back in time for accountability. So, they were moved to June. I went to work kind of as a summer job and then stayed on forever.

Morris: Forever, was it--?

Copertini: That was Earl Warren and Governor Culbert Olson, it was Olson's try for a second term. It was his campaign for reelection, which he didn't make.

Morris: Did Bill Malone think he was going to make it?

##This symbol indicates that a tape or a segment of a tape has begun or ended. For a guide to the tapes see page 29.

- Copertini: Oh, I doubt that, I think that Mr. Malone was forever the realist. And, you know, you do everything that there is to be done, but I don't think he would think so.
- Morris: Did you grow up in a political family? Was your father, your brothers--?
- Copertini: Not terribly active, but terribly conscious. We were a laboring family from out in the Mission, and I can remember photographs, pictures, hanging on the wall, with campaign buttons stuck in them. And I got my first library card the day that Roosevelt was elected. My father, who was Catholic, used to pray--because he hadn't finished his education--he used to pray, "keep Roosevelt in office until my girls get through school."
- Morris: Oh, that's wonderful.
- Copertini: It was that kind of belief in Roosevelt and the party.
- Morris: Yes. What did Mr. Malone have you doing?
- Copertini: There was a campaign headquarters, but I actually worked for him. I worked out of his law office as a receptionist. I handled his appointments, and then whatever came in of a political nature. For instance, in the only Roosevelt campaign that I was ever in, Cyril Magnin as treasurer was a name on an ad in all the papers asking for one and five dollar contributions. God, they came in in droves, and they came to us on a mailing address, requiring counting and thank you letters. It was pretty routine stuff.
- Morris: And your responsibility was also keeping track of contributions as they came in?
- Copertini: To that extent, on this special "to the small contributor" appeal. There were other finance committees, but this thing was a little bit different, in that it asked for small contributions from people who probably had never contributed to a campaign before.
- Morris: Yes. Did Mr. Malone--he's sort of a mythical creature, having been involved in Democratic politics for so long--did he have the kind of interest in building the party that Roger Kent, later on, did?

Copertini: It was completely different. He certainly had no interest in keeping the party alive and well and in winning elections. At the time I came in, Malone was jocularly known as "The Pendergast west of the Rockies." His power was significant. He had been state central committee chair and county chair for a number of years by the time I arrived. But that summer, in the primary, he was deposed in his bid for reelection as state chair by George R. Reilly [member, State Board of Equalization, 1939-1982], who was already on the Board of Equalization. So while Reilly became the party chair, Malone stayed on as county chair, which he did for a number of years. As an interesting by-product of that, in the following year of '43, he involved himself in the San Francisco mayoral elections, at which there was a truly behind-the-scenes effort at assisting Roger Lapham. George Reilly was one of the contenders, and Chester McPhee was another, and--I think there were five that were running--well, Rossi was up for reelection.

Morris: Why was it a behind-the-scenes effort?

Copertini: Because, first of all, Lapham was a Republican, and secondly, the party did not get involved as such in mayoral elections because they are non-partisan. Angelo Rossi had been in for sixteen years, and I don't remember who his opposition was along the way. But, in between time, Malone, as chairman--most of this relates to county chairman--had built neighborhood organizations here. To back up, I remember him coming to the door when I was a little kid, and he was just a guy out doing precinct work; he had the same name as my doctor, and I was terrified, because I thought I was going to get a shot [laughing]. It was just some guy who wanted to get a vote for somebody and doing it the hard way.

Later, when others wanted to take over the local party, he would be criticized for being a Montgomery Street chairman, but he started, as so many who criticized him started, doing his precinct work. By the time I came in he had risen in the ranks and worked mostly from his law offices. There was a headquarters that was open the year around, and it was professionally staffed, but not with volunteers to the extent that happened in the party a few years later. There was a resurgence when Roger Kent came in and visited the headquarters daily but at this time it was a more contained, more businessman-like effort. There weren't the hordes of volunteers that you saw come along later under Roger and the CDC [California Democratic Councils].

Morris: Right. Then, it sounds like before Roger, it was mostly San Francisco based. There wasn't much of a statewide organization.

Copertini: It was there, but one of the complaints about Malone was that he didn't like to travel. There were things going on out there, and certainly there was a lot of exchange between us and Los Angeles, where Sheridan Downey had come from. He was then U.S. Senator. Ellis Patterson was lieutenant governor; he had come from down there. The structure of the party is such that there's a north and a south chairman. One year a northerner is elected as statewide chair and there's a southern chairman, and the next year the southerner is your statewide, and there's a northern vice. So, I'm sure that the southerners had the counterpart of what Malone had put together here, which was really kind of assembly district organizations.

Morris: Most of his efforts were put on assembly districts? On legislative elections?

Copertini: That's in San Francisco. But he dealt on a much different level too. He had good rapport with Senator Sheridan Downey, and there was lots of interaction with Washington. There was Ed Flynn, who was the national chair there, followed by Bob Hannegan, and he was quite close to both of those, and others before them. You know, his Washington--

Morris: His Irish mafia?

Copertini: It was. They talk about the Kennedys [laughing], this was just as bad.

Morris: Well, they're people from various areas and that's important to have somebody you can talk to, I guess.

Copertini: Well, yes. That's right, they were people in power. He also had great friendly and political relations with other nationalities. The Chows, Jack and Albert Chow, or the Chinese Six Companies here in San Francisco; they were very, very close. And Black friends, labor friends, and certainly Jewish friends.

Morris: Then you continued to work for Bill Malone, until when? Then did you go over to the Democratic committee itself?

Copertini: I got married in '47, and didn't do anything until Truman was running in '48. I just didn't work at all. The Truman campaign was such a poor operation; money wasn't plentiful and they

Copertini: were desperate for help, so they called and asked if I would come back. Then it just flew from there; I never wanted to go home again. I had an eight months' hiatus when my child was born, but it's been pretty much all the time.

When he was small--and you asked, you know, how you could do so many things--I actually was not an employee of the state central committee for their office, so much as I was hired by them for campaigns and projects. The office was ongoing, and from time to time I worked out of there, or was employed by them for fundraising, or something. But I moved around a lot while under their wing.

Morris: Yes. You were on the staff.

Copertini: No; contractual--from time to time. There were three people who were permanently on staff: a secretary, a director, and an assistant, who was a field representative. And then there were those of us who came and went. As I say, sometimes I was on state central committee payroll and worked out of the office, sometimes on CDC, sometimes on a campaign payroll. More often it would happen that either the director or the assistant would be sent someplace and then I would go with that person.

Morris: Doing fieldwork?

Copertini: Not so much that as campaigns and fundraising. Largely campaigns. And then, when that was over I'd come home again to the state central committee office and wait to be deployed.

Morris: You sort of set up a headquarters for the campaigns?

Copertini: That's right, yes.

Morris: Tell me about the first one of those you remember. This was in Roger's era?

Copertini: Well, let's see. The first one I remember was under George Miller [Jr.]. The [Estes] Kefauver delegation had won, and there was a change of command. The Malone people were out but someone I had known--Don Bradley--was involved and important to the new effort. He had been a county chair during the Truman campaign, was in the winning campaign of Jack Shelley and worked for Jack in his office and I knew him from there.

Copertini: Then George Miller, who became his good friend and was chair when the Kefauver delegation won, hired him as executive director. Earlier in 1952, I had been working in the campaign of a candidate, Clinton D. McKinnon, who, under crossfiling, lost in the primaries to Knowland. But the permanent state headquarters was only a block away and I spent a lot of time at the state committee when there was an attempt to put together an unpledged delegation to take up the slack when Truman pulled out of the race so I saw more of Don. The effort didn't work and, as we've said, the delegation pledged to Kefauver won and Bradley went to work for the chair. He hired me for interim things, fundraising, conventions, campaigns--he and then Roger Kent. When Don opened a headquarters I would go with him.

Morris: Great. This is traveling around the state?

Copertini: A little, but not so much. Don, at times, took up residency in southern California, and would leave us behind here in San Francisco. A statewide campaign doesn't do well unless the main bases are here in San Francisco and in Los Angeles. You can't, for instance, have the northern headquarters in San Mateo or have it in Oakland. It just doesn't work.

Morris: And if it's a statewide campaign, you need to have an office both in Los Angeles and in San Francisco?

Copertini: Absolutely.

Morris: Does that get to be kind of complicated sometimes, if the people in charge of those two offices aren't on the same wave-length?

Copertini: It never did, because although Bradley would be sent down to Los Angeles, obviously, anybody who ran the operation here would be somebody that would be compatible with him.

Morris: Were there the same kinds of Don Bradley people in southern California, real political campaign experts?

Copertini: Well, there was only one Bradley. There really was. But, obviously, there were competent people who worked down there, many of whom were his proteges. For instance Joe Cerrell, who, you know, is still in, and well respected, in the campaign business. He was a young Democrat when Bradley found him in a '57 campaign. Let's see, there's Lee, now Cerrell's wife--

Morris: His wife would campaign?

Copertini: Yes, right. She's worked for the party since 1958.

Morris: Somehow I think of Mr. Cerrell running special campaigns, and that makes me think of Dick Tuck. When did he appear on the scene?

Copertini: [laughs] Don Bradley had lived in Santa Barbara. He knew Tuck from his Santa Barbara days. When did he appear? He was heartily entrenched in '56, so it was, maybe, '54 or '55 when Don went to Santa Barbara on the Senate campaign.

In '56 we went to Chicago for Stevenson. Dick was along and that was the caper where Dick did the fake convention badges that Life magazine eventually wrote about-- because it was more of an honor to have one of those two dozen fake badges we put together, than to have the real ones.

Morris: Oh, my goodness.

Copertini: He's a funny man and clever. The badges were so unsophisticated! All we did was to go out and get some paper and a printer to do some italic lettering on it. I got a fine-point pen and a bottle of red ink and drew a red border. I was in charge of drawing the union labels, and they got bigger and bigger, until they looked like beetles [laughs]. And we took them out and plasticized them, because we didn't have enough credentials and they passed, clumsy as they were.

Morris: This was for Stevenson?

Copertini: That was for Stevenson, yes.

Morris: This was because Stevenson was having trouble getting his delegates on the convention floor?

Copertini: Only because of the size of the California delegation when you attempted to accommodate uncredentialed staff and visitors. There are always more people than you have tickets. So we made these phony badges. The news crews picked it up and wrote about it. As I say, it finally ended up in Life magazine. Humor was good and even the convention chair appeared on the podium wearing one of these collector's items. That was Tuck's first recognized effort!

- Morris: Had Dick been a student at Santa Barbara?
- Copertini: I don't know, but he had been a Coro intern although he was a few years away from that.
- Morris: Right. That's interesting. Was the Coro Foundation a good place to look for bright new talent?* Or was it just by accident?
- Copertini: Some wonderful people have come from Coro--notably Libby Smith (Gatov) the U.S. Treasurer under Kennedy, and Dianne Feinstein, present mayor of San Francisco, just for starters.

My initial feeling about it when I'd had interns before was that they always came in to find out what you were doing wrong rather than to learn. In fairness, they didn't have a great deal of time with us in campaigns, so they didn't handle anything with a lot of teeth in it.

There was a major change in 1954, though, when we got two people who really became family. One was Tom Bendorf and the other, Mary Farrell. Bendorf was given tasks with great responsibility and stayed on to volunteer even after his stint with us, through Coro, was finished. He went on to Washington where he worked for Senator Clair Engle and has held other positions of note in and around government.

Mary Farrell suffered from what was the woman's dilemma of those years. While very much interested and wanting to be there she complained she was never given anything to do but typing. It was one of the earliest complaints I'd heard on that score and quite justified. Most women just assumed that the men were going to get the more interesting assignments, such as field work, and the higher pay and that they would do office chores.

- Morris: And this was in the '50s?
- Copertini: This was in 1954. That year they came on as interns in the campaign of a man named Richard Graves, who was running for governor.

*San Francisco public affairs internship program.

Morris: Of course.*

Copertini: I just found some of his campaign matchbooks. They said, "We dig Graves. He's the most." Can you believe it?

Morris: Was that the kind of a campaign that, within the central committee, there was the thought that he really had a chance of winning, or was it more of a place holding kind of a thing? I've heard the suggestion it wasn't a good year for Democrats, so Pat Brown didn't want to run.

Copertini: There was hardly anybody who [laughs] wanted to run, and Graves, until just a few months before he was asked to do it, was a Republican. But you hype yourself up, and you get so immersed in it that you don't really ever think you're going to lose. You know, you get three good letters in a row, and you think, hey, we've got it made.

He was running against Goodwin Knight, and there were some unfavorable things in Knight's record that were thought would be to his detriment and give Graves his chance. You have to remember I was enthusiastic and starry-eyed. These realists-- they didn't confide in me if they thought that he was going to lose.

Building a Volunteer Base

Morris: Could we talk a little bit about using volunteers? When did you begin to be aware that there were more people around to do fundraising, and letter stuffing, and--

Copertini: Well, again, under the Malone regime, the attitude was more-- and I don't mean to denigrate it, it's just the way that things were then--you know, keep this place neat, don't let all these people in. You sent letters out to a letter shop and

*See Richard Graves, Theoretician, Advocate, and Candidate in California State Government, Regional Oral History Office, University of California, Berkeley, 1973.

Copertini: got them back all tidy and ready to go. The volunteer movement started rolling under Miller, I guess, and it came full bloom with what we learned when CDC was organized and when Roger [Kent] became state party chairman. Don was executive secretary of the party then, and the thing that he drummed into us when we were there, over, and over, and over again, was inclusion; inclusion. And God forbid if you turned somebody away who wanted to help, or if you didn't have something for them to do.

We used to have a standing joke about the box of three-by-five file cards. If somebody came in and said, "I want to help," well you went out and took the three-by-five cards in the back room and brought them out and said, "Please alphabetize these," if you didn't have anything else for them to do. It's a joke you can't always tell, because people don't like to think that, maybe, their time hasn't been well used. But on the other hand, if somebody comes in, and there really isn't anything at that moment, you don't want them to go, you want to say, "Sit down. Here, this needs doing right away, I'm glad you arrived. You're needed." So that's what we'd do in an emergency, but we didn't do it much, because usually there was plenty to do.

Morris: Once you get into a campaign. And people don't turn up in between campaigns, is that right?

Copertini: Well, there was hardly ever an in between, because with the development of the CDC, when one thing was over, something else was starting. For instance, while people from the state central committee were away at campaign headquarters, there was also an effort called "Dollars for Democrats," that came out in '60, that was run out of the permanent state and CDC headquarters. That required bodies. There were the CDC conventions that came up annually: Democratic state central committee conventions and meetings and fundraising, so there was always enough to do. We started--I think around '55, '56, to put out a monthly newsletter, and that newsletter was like 1,500. And we had, I mean, zero equipment. We had a mimeograph machine, and we had dupli-stickers that we did by hand and postage that we applied by hand, and we licked and stuffed and sealed and sorted.

And these went out monthly. You no sooner finished one than you were in the throes of doing it again. There were two staffers: the regular staff secretary for the state central committee, and the CDC secretary. So help was always needed and with this inclusion policy--

Morris: And this was when they were sharing office space, 212 Sutter Street?

Copertini: Yes.

Morris: How did that work out?

Copertini: There was an earlier address when we were newly formed, and it was so successful we both got too big for it. It was six-something Market. It worked out just fine. It worked out just fine. It was very necessary that we did share office space, because I think if the CDC had gone off on its own, the story would have been quite different. Without any contact, or with just casual contact with the state central committee, there could have been cross purposes or even animosities. You know, struggle over turf and all. In this way each was consulted and knew exactly what the other was doing, each was involved with what the other was doing. When it came convention time, or delegate selection time, each worked cooperatively for the very best of the party. And Roger was as warm and friendly and interested in the CDC as he was in the state central committee.

Morris: It sounds like he may have encouraged the founding of CDC.

Copertini: Well, he was one. It happened under George Miller, and Alan Cranston was monumentally important to it.

Morris: Yes, he's often spoken of as the founder in order to further his own political career.

Copertini: Whatever the reason, it was a very good move for the party.

Morris: Yes.

Copertini: I remember the times we still had cross-filing and, you know, we were losing elections right and left. So this helped in that you could identify candidates and say, hey, this is the endorsed Democrat, stay with it. See, you couldn't put the party designation on in the primaries. So that gave a way, an endorsement of the California Democratic Council, to validate the candidacy as a Democrat.

And then, after Stevenson lost in '52, there was such a continuation of the outpouring of interest from everyone, particularly young people who had found out a little bit about campaigning, cared about who was going to run the country, and

Copertini: never went home again. The older, pre-war generation had been more quiet during the Eisenhower years. But now, these young people just--God, they were like bees coming out of a hive, they were wonderful.

You know, Jack Kennedy is credited with inspiring this activity of volunteers and youth in politics, but it wasn't really he. It started with Stevenson. It was ready for Kennedy to make use of when his time came, but if we were just to get started then, we might not have been ready. Without this earlier awakening of interest we might not have been able to make the effort that we did to elect a president in 1960.

Morris: I'm trying to get a picture of what it was like. The people turned out for Stevenson meetings, or they came to work on his campaign in numbers that you hadn't had before?

Copertini: Those things are true. They not only came to but helped on the rallies that we gave, the public things, the street events. Even raised money to help candidates. But more than that, they joined the clubs, so that they could have some continuing voice in politics, necessary because the state central committee--you're aware that the appointment process was not structured so that everybody might get in.

Morris: You have to be appointed.

Copertini: You have to be appointed by a legislator, yes. But in the clubs, anybody could get in, and they did. The clubs were very, very large.

Morris: You said the newsletter was a 1,500 mailing.

Copertini: That was the state central committee newsletter. The CDC probably had much the same thing. There was always some kind of a mailing, something going on. If it was a quiet time, then you quick put together a fundraiser, because, well, you always needed money too.

Morris: And the fundraisers that you worked on, were these the ones to get a lot of people giving at a lower price, or were these the \$500 dinner kinds of things?

Copertini: Well, it could be both. In those days, it wasn't \$500; I don't think we ever got above \$100, and that was very daring. There were both, and I worked on both and they were traditional and

Copertini: in San Francisco always. Others were considered--like more rallies and you tried to have events that people of every financial level could participate in.

We did try to do a traditional Jefferson-Jackson dinner in the fairgrounds in San Mateo, and it just didn't work. You'd be surprised how attached people are to the old formulas. You can have a variety of fundraisers to this day, but nothing succeeds like the events in one of five city hotels where everybody gets dressed up and is seen, and seeing. Really.

Morris: That's interesting. Even though it's the same people--?

Copertini: Even though it's the same people. They don't recognize it as official unless it goes this route. And now, of course, they've gotten smaller and more expensive and all, but the mayor still does it, and we're having one in June. When it comes to the raising masses of money, (and it's also a show of strength) the reception or dinner formula is tried and true. But other things that have been tried--theatre parties, auctions, any number of things--it doesn't work.

Morris: Isn't that interesting. Even though there have come to be some very talented women who specialize just in doing fundraisers.

Copertini: And mostly what they do is this traditional format. In the city here, the oldest is Madlyn Day, who taught me everything I know about it. She worked for Senator Downey and had an office across the street from Malone, and, you know, I had contact with her. Later on she, too, worked for the party, then specialized in fundraising and is still doing it. She's been doing it since 1940, or earlier.

Morris: And isn't Anne Eliaser--?

Copertini: Anne Eliaser, who was National Committeewoman. I don't think she takes politics so much any more. But her firm does its share with fundraising dinners, and the formula is true; it just abides.

Women and Politics in the Fifties

Morris: How about women? You said when you started, it didn't even occur to you to do anything but make the coffee and type.

Copertini: Well, as a paid employee. Certainly there were women's committees and women who shared leadership for the party. Elected party officials Elinor Heller (national committeewoman) and Julia Porter, women's chair of the Democratic state central committee, are two who were active when I came in, and later, of course, Libby Smith. A candidate was Helen Gahagan Douglas who ran for Senate in 1950.

Women were always recognized and the election laws were set up so that the legislator who had appointments to the state central committee had to make them 50-50, resulting in lots of men walking around with their wives' proxies!

Morris: Did you work on the Helen Gahagan Douglas campaign?

Copertini: Not directly. I was in the state central committee headquarters at that time. Don was, but I wasn't. That was the year I'd had a baby, so I didn't work in a primary but came back in the fall.

Morris: That was your year off.

Copertini: Yes, eight months. I came back, I think, in August.

Morris: Oh, that's wonderful. Did you bring the baby with you?

Copertini: At times [laughs], at times.

Morris: That's marvelous. Okay, then, my question about Helen Gahagan Douglas' reception as a woman and how the central committee felt about the red smear kinds of things. You wouldn't have heard about--?

Copertini: Well, we were outraged about the red smear, and they liked her. They certainly liked her as a person but there were many, even other women, who were critical of her running, feeling that a woman candidate was not electable. Persons who would never want a woman--any woman. And the traditional party in San Francisco, under Bill Malone's leadership, had been attracted to Manchester Boddy rather than Douglas. However, Douglas was nominated and a very good effort was made to elect her. However, it was with newer, emerging people--younger, more liberal. Again, Bradley ran that campaign. It was right after he'd worked for Jack Shelley's election to Congress.

Morris: Right. Okay, going back in time; the 212 Gang. Were you pretty much the same people over the years, or were new people added?

Copertini: Yes, pretty much the same nucleus. There was Roger for the state central committee, there was Don, there was a wonderful man named Van Dempsey, a field organizer. There was Martin Huff, who was treasurer of everything and crossed lines to be enormously involved with both DSCC and CDC. There were two women who served, successively, as secretary for the state committee during these years, and a CDC secretary. Then, of course, those of us who were hired for campaigns, fundraisers and other special events. ##

Morris: Did they by and large have the same ideas in the group, or was it just that you were all in touch with each other, saying, what can we do next, or where is the need that we can do something about?

Copertini: We never had to stop and think "what will we do next." There was always something. A campaign ran into a fundraiser, which ran into a convention or conference leading to a campaign, and so on. We were all pretty compatible in our thinking and in our preferences of candidates and issues. We were, or we wouldn't have been there. If you didn't agree philosophically with what was being done, you couldn't stand being there. Working was enormous fun, but it also took a great deal of your time, your energy, and your emotion.

Morris: Where had he and Don gotten interested in this idea of inclusion, including more and more people in the--?

Copertini: I think Roger, as a candidate--he ran for Congress a couple of times--sometimes felt shut out by the old order. Don had learned his politics as a very young man on the waterfront where numbers as a show of strength was important. If there was any lesson learned there it was that everyone was needed; you don't lose anybody if you can help it. And he saw it worked. Then during the time that he was formulating opinions about the work of the state central committee and accepting a leadership role himself, I think he was told by a lot of people that the party was a "closed corporation"--you weren't allowed to be involved. I think he wanted to make sure that never happened. He recognized the need and value of manpower but more than that the RIGHT of people to have a voice in the affairs of their party.

The Triumphant Era of Pat Brown

Morris: Everything seems to have come together about '58 when Pat Brown was elected and--

Copertini: Oh, yes. It was just a triumphant year.

Morris: And then, did Pat take an active part in what was going on at the central committee?

Copertini: Not in the day-to-day workings; elected officials don't. But certainly in the negotiations and decisions. He was the highest elected Democratic official as attorney general and ran and became governor. That year there had been three or four-good sized campaigns; three of them housed under one roof, a building up the street from 212. Brown was down on Market in a building they called "The Gore" and together with him were Engle for Senator, Mosk for Attorney General and Bert Betts for Treasurer.

These took a hefty amount of staff and you draw from every place where you find interest. Help came from the CDC; people who left their jobs, took leaves of absence to go to work on these campaigns.

Morris: Really!

Copertini: Yes, absolutely.

Morris: How can you talk somebody into leaving their job for nine months to a year?

Copertini: You didn't have to. They were keen to do it. Those times were so exciting, so hopeful. A case in point is a man named Tom Saunders who, over in Kensington, was an early CDC club president. Professionally he was an insurance safety consultant with a lot of interest in politics. He was able to take time out to go to work on the Brown campaign and then go back to his insurance company. I don't know why they allowed this, but I guess he was a very valuable employee. He really wanted that campaign job.

Morris: And he did that several times, over the years?

Copertini: In a way. After Brown won, Saunders accepted a job with the state.* Then Brown, the second time around, asked him to run his campaign in the north, an adjunct to Don who had the statewide role but functioned out of the south. So Tom took a leave, I believe, or quit outright to work on the campaign.

Ultimately he went back, after the election, into a much higher position.

Morris: Into his insurance company?

Copertini: No, no. In state government. Brown had given him an appointment after his first campaign. When he left to do the second one he returned to the state in an elevated position.

Morris: Then Brown lost him as a campaign worker.

Copertini: Well, yes. But that doesn't mean he didn't have free time to participate in other ways. In '66 he was still with the state but he would take vacation and other accrued time for special field trips or projects or whatever. And he was around the headquarters a great deal evenings and weekends.

You stacked up all your vacation and comp time and used it for the campaign. I want to tell you, if you offered such people a trip to Tahiti--anybody who was in this generation of the 212 Gang--they would much, much rather have spent the time on the campaign. Absolutely. I used to get up in a morning and think how lucky I was. I'd say, "You know, I'd go if I never earned a cent." And sometimes in the early days that was the case. I was paid in postage stamps or whatever was left at the end of the campaign, if it wasn't a good one, meaning prosperous. The Clinton McKinnon campaign is a prime example.

*As a member of the state Industrial Accident Commission panel in San Francisco in 1963.

The Turbulent Sixties

Morris: Were things beginning to change, about '64, '65?

Copertini: Yes, yes. The attack on Kennedy hit everybody really hard. In early '63 we were going to a CDC convention and we all said, "What will we DO next year? Kennedy's going to be reelected and so is Engle." And six months later Engle was suffering from a brain tumor and Kennedy was dead! So that put us into '64.

At the CDC convention that year the crowd voted handsomely for Cranston, but there were those who felt that there wasn't any real opposition and they would have liked to see some other choice. Then Pierre Salinger found that he could run for Congress, that he didn't need to reside in the district, so he ran.

And Don and I went with Pierre which, probably, was not the best thing we could have done, to say the least. We had both been involved in putting together the delegation for the National Democratic convention in Atlantic City. So, of course, taking on Salinger meant we moved from the official party headquarters and others took on that task. After Pierre won the primary, Roger Kent, in a great demonstration of genuine desire to see "the family" be put back together--because there were residual feelings that win or lose it was wrong to have supported Salinger--involved Don and me in the business of bringing California's delegation to the convention. We were working with a lot of the other people who had stayed with the state committee and had been with Cranston, too, so we had to work hard to make an amalgam there.

Further, Don was taken off the Salinger campaign and put into running Lyndon Johnson's campaign out of the south, which might have contributed to the defeat of Salinger because Don was just not able to participate as much as he was needed.

Again, Tom Saunders got a leave somehow--I don't know, but all very legal--and ran the Johnson campaign up here.

Morris: By then there's the beginning of the legislative campaign committees, too.

Copertini: Yes. I think '65 was the year that Si Casady ran as president of the California Democratic Council and left a lot of people disenchanted with the result.

Morris: Well, was it Casady himself or was it the anti-Vietnam concern that caused the trouble?

Copertini: Casady was not too familiar a figure in the north, at least, and the anti-Vietnam views were certainly part of it. I wasn't that close to it and I really can't answer, but, again, it disenchanted a lot of CDC regulars.

Then something else was happening. A lot of the people who were involved and who were even part of the Roger Kent years were getting tired at that time. Don't forget that Roger was chair for over ten years now, and in addition to the toll that takes he felt our losses keenly. Kennedy had died; Engle, a good friend, had died; then later that year we lost Adlai Stevenson, too. It seemed to take some of the heart out of Roger.

Morris: That must really have been a shock to people from the group.

Copertini: Yes. But Roger stayed on for a while. He gave some thought to retiring and tried to persuade Bill Orrick to run because he thought he'd be someone who would be able to mend the wounds between CDC's Cranston and the Salinger forces. But Orrick didn't want to run.

Morris: Oh, yes. He'd been doing fundraising for the party.

Copertini: Yes, right. And more than that. He'd been campaign chair for several campaigns and held other significant roles.

Morris: Well, it's sort of odd. Roger went over to become a chairman in Pat Brown's reelection campaign in '66, but somehow that doesn't ring quite right. It sounds like there were some people who were also trying to ease Roger out gracefully--

Copertini: Oh, no, no. I don't think so. Aside from having had the party responsibility for so long, he had monumental health problems. He had emphysema and a very bad and painful hip problem. And he was tired and missed those we had lost through death.

Morris: He had been at it for ten years.

Copertini: Eleven. He used to leave his law practice and come over to headquarters almost every day. And he traveled a lot, and you know, was well met. He was a vital part of any group he saw, and it wasn't bed at eight o'clock: it was two, or three in the morning or whatever time he went--if he went. And he had traveled to Washington a lot.

I think he was ready to quit. But he stayed on to accomplish all he could accomplish. So he retired. But then, you know, when your old friend Pat gets you on the phone and says, "Hey, I need you--" Being chair of the campaign gave him just the right amount of involvement without having responsibility for the entire party.

Morris: Right. Well, you need people you can call on and say "why did we do what we did?" Who were the people of the 212 Gang or newcomers--who had that same kind of dedication to politics and to the good of the Democratic party?

Copertini: There were many--out of the clubs, legislators, fundraisers and people who made themselves close-in friends of the office. And our "out of the office" authority--Van Dempsey. He was the field representative, the second spot in the office, and he was much beloved.

He had a completely different style from Don, who dealt mainly with the legislators and people in authority. Van went from county to county visiting people in small communities in small numbers over and over and over again. He was much beloved and thoroughly dedicated and stayed on until it was necessary for chairman [Robert] Coate to close the headquarters in 1967 for lack of funds.

Morris: That's tough to recover from. If you've had year-round offices for ten years.

Copertini: Yes, well, even before that--even before Roger--there were year-round headquarters. One in the Sharon Building in the very early Roosevelt days, graduating to the Balboa Building under Bill Malone. All in all, to my knowledge there's been a headquarters for 10 years before 212. Maybe longer.

Morris: It had been headquarters, in his office?

- Copertini: No, no. It was in another place. It was at 2nd and Market while Malone was nearby on Montgomery Street. It was in the Balboa Building, had glass all round so that everyone was visible and was called "the fishbowl."
- Morris: Who was it that got the office open again?
- Copertini: In '68 Roger Boas became chair and he opened headquarters.
- Morris: Now, had Boas been one of the proteges of Roger and Don?
- Copertini: In 1958, in the Engle campaign, there were three notable volunteers. One of them became a San Francisco supervisor, Ron Pelosi. Another was Roger Boas who had a deep interest in seeing that California had a Democratic Senator, and the third was--Dianne Feinstein!
- Morris: Yes, you really got them started.
- Copertini: I'd like to take the credit, but they were very much self-starters. They really weren't very good volunteers [laughing]--they didn't stay around too much. But Roger Boas always had this keen interest and he later ran for office himself. You know, he was a supervisor and then ran for Congress. So he certainly had a strong feeling for the party and brought much to it by way of knowledge, experience, and business sense. He was a friend of Roger's and very friendly with Don. So he became chair and opened headquarters in the Orpheum Building.
- Morris: That's about the era, too, when you get the big national party McGovern reforms. All the business about opening up delegate selection and participation.
- Copertini: You kind of lose me there because I did not work for [George] McGovern. My inclinations were to [Edmund S.] Muskie and I went to work in '71 as the Northern California campaign coordinator and then stayed with the campaign until it folded in '72. Then, after it folded, I didn't want to work for McGovern and signed on with a local candidate--Ron Pelosi, who was running against State Senator Milton Marks. I liked Ron, but an equally compelling reason for doing this is that Marks, a Republican, held a seat that by every right should have been Democratic.

Morris: What was the central committee's involvement in, or response to, the business about changing the delegate selection to the conventions?

Copertini: For details, you'll have to go elsewhere. I wasn't a part of it. But I can't think that it made that much of a difference in California. We had always been concerned about what we called a "balanced" delegation.

Morris: Okay, and how has that affected later campaigns?

Copertini: I really don't know except to conclude that there were now official and maybe slightly more stringent rules for what we had always sought to achieve in the way of fair representation on the delegations.

In 1967 the same Tom Saunders I've told you about and I went to work together in the Joe Alioto mayoral campaign-- a 54-day wonder. After Brown was defeated I'd "retired" and was volunteering in Jack Shelley's reelection campaign for mayor. He pulled out and I went to work for Alioto. Tom was campaign manager. After that, we decided to open our own office.

Morris: Did you?!

Copertini: Yes. We did that for about four years. One of our first accounts, that was in '68, was the Lyndon Johnson delegation. Okay, Lyndon Johnson announced in March that there wasn't going to BE any more Lyndon Johnson. So we hurriedly put together an uncommitted delegation pledged to Thomas Lynch, who was the ranking California Democrat as attorney general. That was the fateful Chicago year and obviously our delegation certainly did not win.

As I mentioned, the procedure had been, at the time we put together a delegation, always to keep an eye on balancing. That was the word we used all the time, balance. So many legislators, so many contributors, so much labor, so many CDC representatives, so many women, and so many of each of the minorities. People really sweat putting those delegations together to try to make all facets of the party feel they had a stake in it with a truly representative slate.

Morris: How did you start? Did you use your three-by-five cards from the previous years?

Copertini: Even better. After the CDC clubs started to flourish there were caucuses called in each of the congressional districts. Out of that procedure came recommendations for delegates and alternates. Then the state central committee would get those recommendations back and, with a selection committee (also representative), evaluate who had done what that merited him/her a spot, look at how many at-large delegate spaces you have for emergencies, and then go to work sifting and refining and putting together the delegation.

Morris: How much weight do you have to give to, say, the governor or the senator, if they're a Democrat who says, "I want this guy on, or I want that guy--?"

Copertini: Oh, you listen. [laughs] Usually it's not unreasonable, though.

Morris: Is there fierce competition for those delegate slots?

Copertini: When I was involved, yes.

Morris: And what happens if--presumably--there's another group somewhere working on another delegation for another candidate? Do you have any contact with them, or any forced trading?

Copertini: Not trading. But you would try to persuade those you felt should be part of what you were doing and who would be an asset to the delegation to see it your way.

In any event, the balance was operative. And it took many, many hours of very precise work to get it to be representative.

Morris: And how many of those people usually ended up being able to go to the convention?

Copertini: Virtually all who were chosen, plus families and children and whatever. So you were dealing with a horde of people: you were dealing with six, seven hundred people when you took a California delegation to a convention. It's true that sometimes the money was a problem because, no matter where you go, it's expensive. There were the normal transportation, hotel, living, and entertainment expenses plus a \$100 delegate fee for financing the operation--you know, organizational staff, convention headquarters room, printed materials. But that was little enough and people who applied managed to make it.

Copertini: I think in later years, just about as I was doing other things, there were fundraisers to make it possible for people who didn't have the money to go. This was desirable because a lot of younger people were now on delegations and simply didn't have the means.

Morris: Special events to raise money for delegate expenses.

I know you have limited time, could we spend a couple of minutes on voter registration, if that was something that you spent a lot of time on, or was important to Roger and Don.

Copertini: It was very important; it was essential. Somebody in the state central committee would be assigned to organize it and there would be chairs in each county. Much aid was provided and close track kept. The voter registration expert in San Francisco was and is, although he is now "retired" Agar Jaicks who was for many years chair of the county central committee and how he did it so well for so long is his story to tell.

Morris: I'll remember that.

Copertini: The county central committee were the people who got the troops for that, largely from CDC club members. And we managed to find a little money here and there to pay deputy registrars 15¢ a name. Most of them put it back into their club or a favored campaign. Maybe registrars are still getting something, I don't know.

Morris: It's up to fifty cents a name. You hear that in some cases candidates who are sending out registration people pay a dollar or more.

Copertini: Really, we were marvellously organized. Obviously you can't turn anybody away who wants to register, but you sure knew where to go where the people you register will be the people who are likely to vote as you'd wish. There's a whole science to it. As I say, it was happening around me, but I never participated directly. It obviously couldn't be operated from a campaign headquarters.

Morris: That wasn't one of your specialties.

Copertini: No.

Conclusion: Constant Ideas and Major Changes

Morris: I have a wrap-up question. It has two parts. One is, whether the ideas from Roger and Don's heyday are still important, and what kinds of things have been the major changes in the central committee's activities?

Copertini: I can answer only part of that. I'm so removed from the operation of either of the official committees now.

As regard what was left from Roger and Don: I think what they began in the fifties stood the party in good stead and does still today. They involved PEOPLE rather than relying on just media. Because you erred on the side of generosity, of sane liberalism, and the inclusion of as many people and tolerance of as many ideas as you possibly could. The party belonged to everybody and if a point of view other than that of the leadership prevailed, so be it. You worked darn hard to make sure it didn't, but you went with it. It's everybody's party. That was the abiding thing and it characterized the whole era.

Morris: Do you get the feeling that that is less so now than it was twenty years ago?

Copertini: No, but I think a couple of things have changed. I don't feel that there is the strong leadership that we had under Roger. I don't think there is the fundraising capability that there was on an ongoing basis. The reason we were able to do the things that were done was because there was an ongoing war chest. Money was raised constantly. Also people were able to contribute more freely and more generously. The contribution laws have changed, with limitations and restrictions on what you could do. People back then contributed in different ways--I don't know if I should be saying it, but--

Morris: You can look at the transcript, if you want to change your mind.

Copertini: I remember being payrolled at times by different companies. Somebody would have a business and say, "Well, I'll put one of your staff on my payroll as my contribution." So you were able to finance staff, campaign staff, by means which you couldn't possibly use any more.

Morris: Because it's a bigger operation now?

- Copertini: No, because of the campaign regulations and reporting laws and because it's illegal to take as a tax deduction someone who hasn't actually worked for you. We were deprived of another very lucrative source of income when it was ruled that ads placed by businesses in campaign material or fundraising dinner programs were not legally deductible.
- Morris: I understand there are still ways around the payroll restriction even within the government. You carry somebody on the Department of What-Not, but they're really assigned to work for the governor.
- Copertini: Do you mean in a governor's campaign? That was never all right. As I said before, people who did this took leaves; went off the payroll.
- Morris: It's considered good form for a corporation to delegate somebody for six months to go to work for the United Crusade. I tend to think that political party activity is a special kind of volunteer effort.
- Copertini: Well, it is, but one is altruistic and the other completely in self-interest, one way or the other. And, you know, it's the thought that the biggest corporations, with the most employees to send out there as contributions as well as actual money, they're going to be the people who call the elections.
- Morris: But nowadays you have a world in which individuals in significant corporate positions give money to both candidates in a race. If your company is large enough, I would think you could send two people--let one go work for the Democrats and one go work for the Republicans.
- Copertini: Well, it's a thought. But when you win, you would still be reminded of where your help came from even though it was not special, not based on principle. There has always been some sort of bet-hedging. But payrolling has stopped; although if I'm ever thrown back in the labor market, I think it would be delightful to contemplate that it could still happen. [laughs] But the reporting laws, the maximum contribution laws and Internal Revenue have put a stop to it.
- Morris: Am I right that the CDC is no longer a major source of volunteers in local political action?

- Copertini: It doesn't touch me, and maybe that is a partial answer to your question. Nobody comes to me and asks if I will go to this place or that to volunteer. Nobody solicits me to join a club. There still are clubs that exist but I don't think the recruitment is anything like what it used to be.
- Morris: That's interesting, that something that was so important--
- Copertini: Yes. It was beautiful, it was just beautiful.
- Morris: Everybody I've talked to who was involved in the CDC talks about it as the Golden Age of political participation.
- Copertini: Yes.
- Morris: The other question is: Do you take any time to keep an eye on what the Republicans are doing? Is there any trading of information? Or is that not considered appropriate?
- Copertini: It's not practical and could well be detrimental to your own cause. The danger of saying more than you intend is always there. There may be a couple of people who are friends who sit down and have a drink and talk politics, or even meet to iron out a point to their mutual advantage, but on the whole it's not appropriate.
- Morris: Anything else that you would like to add about party operations and what works well?
- Copertini: Well, I think the Democrats throughout the country would have been in real trouble had not Roger Kent taken the chairmanship when he did. California is important to national elections. After Truman declined to run and Stevenson lost, the party was in bad shape. It was deficit-ridden, people had become disenchanted or tired. There was no more patronage, the way it had been in Malone's day, largely under Roosevelt and then Truman, for post office jobs and the like. The Kefauver delegation won and was considered by the old guard to be much too liberal. The [Eugene] McCarthy days were troublesome and people looked askance at Democrats. But Roger Kent, with that significant and eminently respectable family name, his record of achievement in the law, in the Navy and in Washington was really responsible for putting it back together.

He had respectability in communities where none of us ever set foot. People from old established families who had respected names and means to raise and give funds. The people who came into the party because Roger was there would often

Copertini: say they were the first Democrat ever in their families, and they became important to the look and function of the party. I think Roger's election was very, very important.

Morris: Yes. He was somebody that everybody could look up to?

Copertini: Exactly. He gave the party--again, that word--respectability and he gave it entree.

Transcriber: Johanna Wolgast
Final Typist: Anne Schofield

TAPE GUIDE -- Cyr Copertini

Date of Interview: April 8, 1986
tape 1, side A
tape 1, side B

1
15

INDEX -- Cyr Copertini

- Alioto, Joe, 22
 appointments, by governor, 17
 assembly districts, 4
- Bendorf, Tom, 8
 Betts, Bert, 16
 Boas, Roger, 21
 Boddy,, Manchester, 14
 Bradley, Don, 5-7, 10, 14, 15, 17,
 19-21, 25
 Brown, Edmund G., Sr., 9, 16-17, 20
- California Democratic Council, 3,
 5, 10-12, 15, 16, 18, 19, 22,
 23, 24, 26-27
 campaign finances, 2, 5, 10, 12-13,
 15, 17, 19, 20, 23-27
 campaign management, 1-28, passim.
 Casady, Simon, 19
 Cerrell, Joe, 6
 Cerrell, Lee, 6-7
 Chow, Albert, 4
 Chow, Jack, 4
 Coate, Robert, 20
 congressional districts, 23
 Coro Foundation, 8
 Cranston, Alan, 11, 18
 crossfiling, 11
- Day, Madlyn, 13
 Democratic party, Democrats, 3, 9,
 11, 14, 20-22, 27-28
 Democratic National Committee, 4,
 21
 Democratic National Conventions,
 delegates, 17, 18, 22-24
 Democratic State Central Committee,
 1, 3-6, 10-12, 14, 15, 16, 19,
 20, 22, 24-25
 Dempsey, Van, 15, 20
 Dollars for Democrats, 10
- Douglas, Helen Gahagan, 14
 Downey, Sheridan, 4
- elections, 1942, 1
 elections, 1944, 2
 elections, 1948, 4-5
 elections, 1950, 14
 elections, 1952, 5-6, 11
 elections, 1954, 8-9
 elections, 1958, 16, 21
 elections, 1960, 12
 elections, 1962, 17
 elections, 1964, 18
 elections, 1966, 17, 19-20
 elections, 1967, 22
 elections, 1968, 22
 elections, 1972, 21
 Eliaser, Ann, 13
 Engle, Clair, 8, 16, 18
- Farrell, Mary, 8
 Feinstein, Dianne, 8, 13, 21
- Gatov, Elizabeth Smith, 8
 Graves, Richard, 9
- Heller, Elinor, 14
 Huff, Martin, 15
- Irish, in politics, 4
- Jaicks, Agar, 24
 Johnson, Lyndon, 22

- Kennedy, John F., 12, 18
 Kent, Roger, 3, 6, 10, 11, 15, 18,
 19-20, 21, 25, 27-28
- Knight, Goodwin, 9
- labor, and politics, 4, 15
- Lapham, Roger, 3
 legislature, legislation, 14, 20,
 22, 25-26
- Lynch, Tom, 22
- Magnin, Cyril, 2
 Malone, William, 1-4, 9, 14, 20-21,
 27
- Marks, Milton, 21
 McKinnon, Clinton D., 6, 17
 media, 7, 25
 Miller, George, Jr., 5-6, 10, 11
 minorities, in politics, 4, 22
 Mullens family, 2
 Muskie, Edmund S., 21
- Orrick, William H., 19
- patronage, 27
 Pelosi, Ron, 21
 Porter, Julia, 14
- Reilly, George R., 3
 Republican party, Republicans, 3,
 9, 21, 27
- Salinger, Pierre, 18
 San Francisco, politics in, 1-3,
 13, 21-22, 24
 Saunders, Thomas N., 16-17, 18, 22
 Shelley, John, 5, 14, 22
 Stevenson, Adlai, 11-12
- Tuck, Dick, 7-8
- volunteers, in politics, 3, 8,
 9-14, 16-17, 18, 21, 22, 26-27
 voter registration, 24
- youth, and politics, 8, 11-12, 24
- women, and politics, 8, 13-14

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Berkeley, California

The Don L. Bradley Memorial Project

Martin Huff

FROM GRASSROOTS POLITICS TO THE CALIFORNIA
FRANCHISE TAX BOARD, 1952-1979

An Interview Conducted by
Gabrielle Morris
in 1986



MARTIN HUFF

TABLE OF CONTENTS -- Martin Huff

CURRICULUM VITAE	i
INTERVIEW HISTORY	viii
INTERVIEW SUBJECT'S PREFACE	x
I SEVERAL SHORT TAKES FROM A LONG POLITICAL MEMORY	1
Preliminary Conversation	1
Master's Thesis on the U.S. Supreme Court	3
1952 Election Bet: A Political Education	4
Party Field Worker Van Dempsey	6
Democratic Leadership Figures	9
The Kennedy Campaign: Oakland 1959	13
II A PERSONAL POLITICAL HISTORY	18
The Early Years	18
Democratic Party Activist	20
Appointment as Oakland Auditor-Controller: 1958	21
State Party Organization, North and South	23
Working with the Legislature	24
Unwinnable Elections	25
Family Issues	26
III PARTY POLITICS	27
The Kennedy Election	27
Adlai Stevenson and the California Democratic Committee	29
Thoughts on Political Career Building	33
Party Divisions Begin	36
Single Issue Politics	41
IV AN INSIDE VIEW OF STATE GOVERNMENT: 1963-79	43
Mr. Huff Goes to Sacramento	43
A Question of Style	46
Political Philosophy and Personalities	49
Mr. Huff Meets Governor Reagan	52
Establishing State Income Tax Withholding	54
V CONCLUSION	59
The Legacies of Roger Kent and Don Bradley	59
Closing Thoughts	61
TAPE GUIDE	65
APPENDIX	66
"Tax Collector Huff--Politicians' Enemy No. 1," Carolyn Street, California Journal, November 1977, 3810383	66
"Improving the California Personal Income Tax," Martin Huff, University Extension, University of California, 1978	69
Comments at Memorial Service for Roger Kent, May 22, 1980	71
INDEX	72

Curriculum Vitae

MARTIN HUFF

Residence 1909 8th Avenue, Sacramento, CA 95818. Tel: 916/441-5410

Profession Management Consultant/CPA

Experience

Current

Martin Huff and Associates, Sacramento, California
Consultant - Management and Taxation

Sacramento Regional Transit District (public agency)
Member, Board of Directors, 1980- (President, 1983)
Chair, Finance & Administration Committee (1986)

Paratransit, Inc. (non-profit corporation)
Member, Board of Directors, 1984- (President, 1986)

Prior

1978-80 Calif. State University, Sacramento
Faculty (part time), Public Administration

1963-79 Calif. State Franchise Tax Board (public agency)
Executive Officer

1958-63 City of Oakland, Calif.
Auditor-Controller (non-part. elective office)

1953-58 Timpson, Boyle & Huff, CPA's, Oakland, Calif.
Senior Accountant to Partner

1951-53 Peterson Tractor Co., San Leandro, Calif.
Assistant Chief Accountant

1949-51 Mulgrew Printers, Inc., Oakland, Calif.
Treasurer

Education

Federal Executive Institute, Charlottesville, VA
Graduate, Senior Executive Education Program (1976)

California State University, Sacramento
M.A., Government (1970)

University of California, Berkeley
B.S., Business Administration (1949)

Antioch College, Yellow Springs, OH
Freshman (1940-41)

High Schools:

Boys High School, Brooklyn, NY	(1939-40) [5000]
Vallejo Sr. Hi School, Vallejo, CA	(1938-39) [2000]
The Principia, St. Louis, MO	(1937-38) [250]
American School, Guam, M.I.	(1936-37) [10]

Professional
Associations

American Institute of CPA's (1958-85)

Calif. Society of CPA's (1958-85)
 Vice-President (1968-69)
 Govt. Acctg. & Auditing Comm. (1960-65)
 Chair (1963-65)
 Prof. Development Comm. (1971-74)
 Chair (1973-74)

Beta Alpha Psi, Nat'l. Honorary Acctg. Society (1949-)

Nat'l. Assn. of Tax Administrators (1963-79)
 President (1978-79)

Federation of Tax Administrators (1963-79)
 Chair, Board of Trustees (1978-79)

Municipal Finance Officers' Assn., U.S.&Canada (1958-68)
 Chair, Northern California (1960-63)

Society of Governmental Accountants (1958-63)
 President, Bay Area Chapter (1959-60)

Community
Service

Current

Developmental Disabilities Service Org., Sacramento
 Member, Board of Directors (1982-)

Prior

Suicide Prevention Service of Sacramento County
 Member, Board of Directors (1980-82)

U. S. Savings Bond Drive, Calif. State Govt. Campaign
 State Chair (1977)

United Way, Sacramento Area
 President (1971-72)

Community Services Planning Council, Sacramento
 Member, Board of Directors (1969-71)

Citizens' Advisory Comm., Sacramento Unif. Sch. District
 Vice Chair (1968-69)

Council of Social Planning, Alameda County, Calif.
 Treasurer (1962-63)

United Bay Area Crusade, San Francisco, Calif.
 Member, Board of Governors (1962-63)

Oakland Symphony Assn., Oakland, Calif.
 Member, Board of Directors (1961-63)

Alameda County United Fund, Oakland, Calif. (1958-63)
 Member, Public Relations Comm. (1963)
 Member, Executive Comm. (1960-63)
 Vice Chain, Central (1961)
 Chain, Public Employees (1960)
 Chain, City of Oakland (1959)
 Vice Chain, City of Oakland (1958)

Alameda County Institutions Commission (1959-63)
 Chain, Executive Comm. (1960-63)

Council of Community Services - Oakland Area
 Chain, Commission on Leisure Time Services (1959-60)

Recreation
 Service

Current

Sacramento Book Collectors' Club, Sacramento
 President (1986)
 Treasurer (1981-86)

USS SACRAMENTO, Chapter #91, USCS, Sacramento
 Treasurer (1985-)

Prior

Sacramento Council of International Visitors, Sacramento
 President (1984)

National
 Service

U. S. Merchant Marine
 Able Seaman to Second Mate (1941-46)

U. S. Naval Reserve (inactive)
 Apprentice Seaman (1941-44)

Personal
 Data

Born: Hutchinson, Kansas 10 March 1923

Married: Anne E. Milburn 3 June 1944
 B.A., Antioch College (1943)
 M.S.W., Calif. State Univ., Sacto (1971)

Children: Roger M. Huff (39), Attorney-at-Law &
 Comdr., USCGR, Chicago

Douglas M. Huff (37), Principal Bassoonist,
 Regensberg Philharmonic Orchestra,
 Regensberg, West Germany

Susan M. Wagner (34), Housewife & Mother
 of 2, Ex-Insurance Supervisor

Hobbies: Philatelic covers, book collecting, swimming,
 white water river running, travel, classical
 music

Trade Union
Activity

Cannery Workers Union (Teamsters Affiliate) (1946)

National Organization of Masters, Mates & Pilots of
America, West Coast Local #90 (1945-46)

International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers,
AFL (1944)

National Maritime Union, CIO (1943-45)

Political
Activity

Democratic Party Positions:

Democratic State Central Committee
Treasurer (1956-58, 1960-63)
Co-Chair, 8th Congressional District (1954-56)

California Democratic Council
Trustee (1957-58)

Democratic Council of Clubs, 8th Cong. District
President (1956-57)

Democratic Central Committee of Alameda County
Secretary (1952-54)

15th A. D. Democratic Club (1950-63)
Co-founder

Conventions:

Democratic National Conventions
Delegate, Los Angeles (1960) - Kennedy/Johnson
Delegate, Chicago (1956) - Stevenson/Kefauver

California Democratic Council
Delegate, Mem., Finance Comm., Fresno (1958)
Delegate, Mem., Credentials Comm., Long Beach (1957)
Delegate, V.C., Credentials Comm., Fresno (1956)
Delegate, Mem., Credentials Comm., Fresno (1955)
Delegate Fresno (1954)
Delegate (Founding Convention) Fresno (1953)
Scribe (Pre-Founding Meeting) Asilomar (1953)

Democratic Endorsing Convention, Alameda County
Delegate Oakland (1958)

Democratic Endorsing Convention, 8th Cong. District
Delegate, Perm. Convention Chair San Leandro (1956)
Delegate San Leandro (1954)

Campaign Activity:

1962 General Election

Treasurer, Brown for Governor
 Petris for Assembly (15th A.D.)

Primary Election

Treasurer, Brown for Governor
 Petris for Assembly (15th A.D.)

1960 General Election

No. Calif. Treasurer, Kennedy/Johnson
 Manager, Petris for Assembly (15th A.D.)

1960 Primary Election

Manager, Petris for Assembly (15th A.D.)

1958 Primary Election

Manager, Petris for Assembly (15th A.D.)
 Treasurer, Holmdahl for State Senate (16 S.D.)

1956 General Election

Treasurer, Stevenson/Kefauver - Alameda Co
 Treasurer, Richards for U.S.Senate - Alameda Co
 Treasurer, Dollars for Democrats - No. Calif.
 Treasurer, Dollars for Democrats - Alameda Co
 River for Assembly (15th A.D.)

Primary Election

Treasurer, Stevenson Campaign - Alameda Co
 Treasurer, Richards for U.S.Senate - Alameda Co
 River for Assembly (15th A.D.)

1955 Kinwan Dinner Committee - Alameda Co

Treasurer
 Stevenson for Pres. Org. Comm. - Alameda Co
 Treasurer
 Holmdahl for Council Campaign Committee - Oakland
 Treasurer

1954 General Election

Treasurer, River for Assembly (15th A.D.)
 Miller for Congress (8th C.D.)
 Bjornson for State Senate (16th S.D.)
 River for Assembly (15th A.D.)
 Graves/Roybal Campaign Committee - Alameda Co

Primary Election

Treasurer, River for Assembly (15th A.D.)
 Miller for Congress (8th C.D.)
 Bjornson for State Senate (16th A.D.)
 River for Assembly (15th A.D.)
 Graves/Roybal Campaign Committee - Alameda Co

1952 General Election

Stevenson/Sparkmen Campaign Comm. - Alameda Co
Miller for Congress (8th C.D.)

Primary Election

Potstada for Assembly (15th A.D.)
Miller for Congress (8th C.D.)

1950 General Election

Miller for Congress (8th C.D.)
Douglas for U. S. Senate - Alameda Co

Primary Election

Moore for Assembly (15th A.D.)
Miller for Congress (8th C.D.)
Roosevelt for Governor - Alameda Co
Douglas for U. S. Senate - Alameda Co

1948 General Election

Vernon for Assembly (14th A.D.)
Miller for Congress (8th C.D.)
Truman/Barkley Campaign Committee - Alameda Co

1946 General Election

Miller for Congress (8th C.D.)

Primary Election

Roach for Assembly (14th A.D.)
Miller for Congress (8th C.D.)
Will Rogers, Jr. for U. S. Senate - Alameda Co
Kenney for Governor - Alameda Co

1944 General Election

Irwin for Assembly (14th A.D.)
Miller for Congress (8th C.D.)
Roosevelt for President - Alameda Co

Political Publications:

Alameda County Democrat: Co-founder/Editor (c.1950-53)

Family

Background

Both parents, both maternal grandparents, and one paternal grandparent were born in Kansas. My paternal grandfather was born in Missouri.

Both parents were first generation college graduates (baccalaureates).

Father enlisted in the U. S. Navy in WWI. At end of WWI, he elected to stay. As Ch. Pharmacist (Ch. Warrant Officer) (pre-WWII) & Lt. Comdr. (WWII) served as hospital administrator: Great Lakes, IL (2x); Mare Island, CA (2x); Guam, M.I.; Brooklyn, NY (2x); Londonderry,

No. Ireland; Portsmouth, VA.

Neither parent was a registered voter until my father retired from the Navy in 1947. They registered as Republicans. My father had a personal dislike for FDR because a fellow hospital corpsman who became FDR's masseur was promoted by presidential directive rather than through competitive examination.

My social conscience was awakened by my junior year history/English teacher. He had the most profound affect on me of any teacher/professor in high school or college.

In 1940, I was a Willkie supporter. In our freshman Hall at Antioch College (a liberal school), of seventeen of us, fifteen supported FDR and two of us, Willkie. (All fifteen were later non-political types, but myself and the other Willkie-ite wound-up being active California Democrats!)

My first political activity was in 1943. While waiting in the union hiring hall for a ship, volunteers were called for to punch doorbells for Mike Quill, the head of the N.Y.C. Transport Workers Union, who was running for City Council.

My wife and I were married in New Jersey in 1944 and came directly to the Bay Area after our honeymoon. My wife had never been west of Chicago. In California, she found she was disenfranchised. New Jersey had no provision for absentee ballots and California had a one year residence requirement. (I had travelled 1200 miles round trip from New York during the war to register in in Ohio Republican so I could vote against Robert A. Taft for U. S. Senate in the Ohio primary).

Anne was the first to hold a Democratic Party position when she was appointed to the Democratic State Central Committee in 1948 by Assembly nominee Ernie Vernon. As a State Committee member, she sat on the platform when Harry Truman came to Oakland that year.

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Martin Huff is a treasure trove of thoughtful observations on Democratic strategies, successes, and failures from his long career in the nuts and bolts of party politics. An earnest, attractive person, active in many causes though officially retired as executive of the California Franchise Tax Board, Huff and his wife, Anne, got involved in Alameda County legislative and congressional campaigns soon after they moved to California in 1944. A stickler for detail and accuracy, Huff became treasurer of the local congressional district committee and then of the Democratic State Central Committee, where he worked closely with Roger Kent and other statewide leaders.

The interview provides a picture of the sleepy local politics in Alameda County in the 1950s, including a vignette of the awe inspired by old Joe Knowland, publisher of the Oakland Tribune and long considered a Republican kingmaker.

I finally concluded that they [the city council] were second-guessing--they had no direct orders or knowledge--what they thought Old Man Joe wanted. ...just from the little exposure that I had, I was convinced that his philosophy and views on issues weren't anywhere near as harsh, or conservative, or reactionary, as the people that were executing policy--they thought--in his name. [page 33]

Nothing daunted, Huff and friends succeeded in electing new blood to the city council, and Huff himself served a term as city auditor.

Early meetings of the California Democratic Council are also described, and local and state Democratic conventions. They convey a sense of the excitement of those days and provide insights on Governor Pat Brown, Senator Pierre Salinger, Assembly Speaker Jesse Unruh, Huff's close friend State Senator Nicholas Petris, and on several notable political crises.

Although the interviewer had hoped to obtain information on organizational developments after Roger Kent retired from Democratic leadership, Huff stated that he had withdrawn from active party work when he accepted an appointment from Pat Brown in 1963 to head the Franchise Tax Board. What he provides instead is a fascinating account of the FTB accomplishing a complex administrative innovation: the institution of income tax withholding in 1972.

Ronald Reagan was then governor and strongly opposed to tax withholding. Huff's account tells of securing the governor's agreement and of the simultaneous passage of enabling legislation and setting up FTB procedures to meet statutory deadlines. We see at work the skills of negotiation and precision handling of detail learned in political campaigns, and also something of the operation of a little-known, important state agency.

Two interviews were recorded with Huff on April 2 and 23, 1986, in his small, comfortable home on a tree-lined street in Sacramento. At the first session, he sorted through a pile of photographs of political events and gave the interviewer a brief glimpse of a fine collection of press clippings he had kept since 1966 and letters to his son and grandson that comment on public affairs. It is hoped that these materials will eventually be deposited in the State Archives or other depository where they will be available to scholars.

A lightly edited transcript of the interviews was sent to Huff for review. In making revisions, Huff entered the entire manuscript on his personal computer, a labor above and beyond the call of duty. Shortly thereafter, his son, Roger, arrived for a brief visit, read the transcript, and made a few additional suggestions. These were entered and a second printout sent to the Regional Oral History Office. In appreciation of his helpfulness on a tightly budgeted project, the interview is presented as Huff prepared it. Minor variations from ROHO's usual style reflect capitalization policy in state government.

Gabrielle Morris
Interviewer-Editor

22 April 1987
Regional Oral History Office
486 The Bancroft Library
University of California at Berkeley

INTERVIEW SUBJECT'S PREFACE

While I accept sole responsibility for the content and substance of my remarks during the interviews, I wish to acknowledge the editorial assistance of my wife, Anne M. Huff, and older son, Roger M. Huff. They identified typographical errors, pointed out instances where more specificity as to names and dates would be helpful, and questioned comments and words of art that needed clarification and/or amplification.

Martin Huff

26 January 1987

MARTIN HUFF

I. SEVERAL SHORT TAKES FROM A LONG POLITICAL MEMORY

Preliminary Conversations

- Huff: Do you want to take a quick look at the pictures now?
- Morris: Sure.
- Huff: There's a '212 Gang' picture [Northern California Democratic headquarters were at 212 Sutter Street, San Francisco in the 1950's and early 1960's; when the California Democratic Council came into being in 1953, it was housed jointly with the Democratic state central committee, as well as ad hoc groups and campaign committees 'in season'].
- Morris: That looks like it's in the fifties.
- Huff: Yes. Here's another. See if you can identify what it's all about. It even took me a few minutes to dope it out.
- Morris: They're all delegates to something.
- Huff: Study the faces.
- Morris: And they all look rather pleased. There's George Wallace.
- Huff: Sure. These were all governors.
- Morris: Good heavens! [laughs]
- Huff: 1966, the governors of the United States.
- Morris: Meeting in Los Angeles?
- Huff: Yes, the 1966 National Governors' Conference.
- Morris: I don't see Pat Brown.
- Huff: He was the host governor and was probably called away when they snapped the picture.
- Huff: See the picture on the far wall? That's autographed both by Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey and Governor Edmund G. (Pat) Brown. That was taken at the conference at one of the large hotels in Beverly Hills. I was at the conference on special assignment. I was in charge of the 'little' Governor's Office for the conference. I was responsible for all subject matter issues that might come up. It blew my mind because I had never been that directly involved in the actual operation of the Governor's Office in Sacramento. I can't even recall how I got the assignment, but I assume it was Hale Champion's idea [Pat Brown's Director of Finance at the time and formerly his Executive Secretary; Champion, also, was one of the three members of the State Franchise Tax Board, of which Huff was Executive Officer]. I had all these issue papers, but knew only what was on an eight-and-half-by-eleven-inch sheet of paper on any particular subject. When you suddenly have the whole scope of issues dumped in your lap, it really gives you a massive headache!
- Morris: Awe-inspiring.
- Huff: Yes. This was the day that Life photographers were following Pat Brown around all day. Pat went in to see the vice president and talk politics for a few minutes. Everybody else who was waiting to see Humphrey was sitting around the bedroom on the chairs and the beds. We were just like cattle in a chute. When Brown finished his little private chat, I had a particular assignment to get Humphrey to take some action at the federal level on a labor issue. As a result, I was the first one in. I wasn't even aware there was a photographer in the

room. The thing about the photo was that both of them were sitting their with their mouths shut listening to me. These are two men who were rarely caught not talking. They both autographed the photo. It's a collector's item.

Morris: I should say.

Huff: There's Ronald Reagan as governor.

Morris: You're looking very formal there.

Huff: Well, I really didn't want to be in a picture with the governor. That was one of my employees.

Morris: I see.

Huff: Here's one on the last days of Pat Brown as governor.

Morris: Putting some plans together?

Huff: Yes, reviewing our department's proposed work management program.

Here's a City of Oakland picture taken when I was leaving for Sacramento. That's City Manager Wayne Thompson and there's the mayor - John Houlihan, who later went to jail, if you recall. There's a little-known section of the State Constitution that goes back to Hiram Johnson's day, that says that if a California public official accepts free public transportation it acts to terminate his office. It's a self-executing provision. [A Johnson reform to help break the hold of the Southern Pacific on state and local officials.] Houlihan had flown--some time before this picture--on an inaugural Delta flight from Oakland to New Orleans, and had done it gratis. After he submitted his travel expense claim, I called him into my office (not something even an elected auditor-controller does every day!) and told him he had three choices before I processed the claim: have the City Council pay for the air fare; pay for it out of his own pocket; or forfeit his office as mayor.

Houlihan would have been better off in the long run, if he had taken the third option. Politically, he didn't want to take the claim to the council, for some reason I didn't know. George Christopher [former Mayor of San Francisco] had been, in my opinion, violating the Constitution for years, and Houlihan had been using as a precedent the fact that Christopher had done this with the Chamber of Commerce paying for some of his junkets. When he proposed that the Oakland Chamber do likewise for him, I told the mayor that wouldn't satisfy the Constitution, so he paid for the flight out of his own pocket. For all that, he was a brilliant man.

Morris: Houlihan?

Huff: Houlihan. His problems were alcohol and a classic case of the pressures of public office. He ran a one-man attorney office, became councilman, then mayor. The mayoralty pay was only \$7,500 a year, and he tried to maintain his social standing and general standard of living, including raising a good size family, with that pay and a declining law practice. He ended up dipping into his attorney's trust fund and 'borrowed', as I recall, close to \$100,000 from the estate of a widow.

Morris: I know he came to grief.

Huff: He served his time at Vacaville [a state correctional facility] having been convicted of a felony and been disbarred as a result. One of Reagan's last acts was to restore his citizenship, a considerable time after his release and rehabilitation.

Morris: You were in the mayor's office?



Hubert Humphrey, Governor Brown, and Huff at 1966 National Governors Conference, meeting in Los Angeles.

Huff: No, I was the elected auditor-controller.
Morris: That's right.
Huff: I was independent of the mayor and city council.
Morris: So you know about the problems of being elected as auditor?
Huff: Oh, yes.

Master's Thesis on the U. S. Supreme Court

Huff: You wouldn't know what this is, but that's a photo of Federal Circuit Court Judge Haynsworth, who Nixon nominated to the U. S. Supreme Court--Clement Haynsworth. I interviewed him after his rejection by the U. S. Senate. That was the subject of my master's thesis, comparing his rejection to the rejection of [President] Hoover's nominee, Circuit Court Judge Parker. These were the first two such rejections by the U. S. Senate in this century.

Morris: Really? Very interesting.

Huff: Part of the story is how I got to see Haynsworth. I had my two sons with me like a military escort.

Morris: In uniform?

Huff: In uniform. One was a soldier at the Armed Forces School of Music in Norfolk [Va], and the other had just received his commission as an ensign at the Coast Guard Training Center in Yorktown [Va]. They drove down to Greenville, South Carolina, with me to the interview. I later turned that interview into one with U. S. Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black. I consider the Black interview, the high point of my entire life.

Morris: About the process of--

Huff: Well Black had voted as a senator to reject Parker, and I used that, and the fact that I had interviewed Haynsworth as my entree. I have just finished reading [summer 1986] his [Black's] widow's memoirs, and tied in the date that I saw him and interviewed him in his home in Alexandria, VA with a dinner he hosted in his home for Haynsworth six weeks later.

Morris: That's interesting, that they continued to have personal contact, though-- Professional curiosity--did you tape-record the interview?

Huff: No. I was prepared to. I had a tape recorder, but in both interviews I made the judgment not to take notes or tape-record, or even ask. In both cases, I just wrote like mad afterwards. After the Haynsworth interview, my sons were able to jog my memory as we sat in the car outside the courthouse.

In the case of Black, I did take just one note, which was to write down the name when I thought I had a parallel between the wife of the attorney general under Hoover and Martha Mitchell [the wife of Nixon's attorney general]. It's the one thing Black wrote back about to tell me that she was somebody else.

Mine was one of his last interviews. I believe it was held about twenty months before he died. [A good part of that later period Black was in ill-health.]

Morris: How long were you able to talk to him?

Huff: About an hour and a half.

Morris: That's a remarkable job, to recall what you've heard for that length of time.

Huff: I sent my write-up back to him to review afterwards, and of

course, my understanding with him was no direct quotes. It was all third-party attribution. The one human interest part of it was that he had one phone call in the middle of the interview. His phone wasn't at his desk in the study. It was on a table where he had to get up and go to it. I figured it must have been set-up that way on purpose. When he walked over to answer the phone, I wandered around. He had all these large photographs of the court 'en banc' in various years and at various affairs at the White House. The walls were lined with books. There were an awful lot of books about tennis. I didn't know anything about his personal life at the time, but all his life he'd been playing tennis.

Morris: Really?

Huff: I had no knowledge of this at all. So when his phone conversation was over he sat down, and the first thing he did was to pick up a paperweight, which was two bronze tennis racquets tipped together. Of course, I was desperately trying to figure out to reconnect the link after his phone call. As a re-opener, I mentioned that it looked like he had some interest in tennis. There was this kind of pause and he very gently told me that his wife and he were out playing that morning.

This was, as I recall, at the age of eighty-four. Then, of course, when I read his widow's book, it was full of tennis. He even kept at it when he had problems with his eyes--out there trying to hit balls. The Blacks had their own dirt tennis court.

Morris: Marvelous. Probably a great outlet for the frustrations of sitting on the bench.

Huff: There's a couple of shots of me. I think those were taken by Van Dempsey. That would be about 1960, or so.

Morris: How late did you wear a crew cut?

Huff: I don't remember. Quite late.

There's me as a second mate in the Spring of '46.

Morris: That looks like a nice trip.

Huff: It was. Down the west coast of Central America--the coffee run. It was after the war. It was my last trip as a merchant marine officer.

These pictures are all kind of random.

1952 Election Bet: A Political Education

Huff: This is the San Francisco Examiner -- just after the election in '52. That was the first and last time I ever made an election bet. I was assistant chief accountant for a Caterpillar Tractor dealer, and the receptionist was an ardent Republican, so I had bet her a pie in the face on the presidential race. When it came time to pay off the bet, it had become a cause celebre. There were batteries of photographers, including Life magazine and most of the Bay Area newspapers. (Life had earlier east coast election bet photos so mine didn't make it, although it was the highest featured photo story to that time by the local San Leandro paper--they ran it above their masthead as a series of stills with the pie moving to my face as the target frame by frame. I believe locating it that way was unprecedented for them.) I was wearing a black armband with a donkey on it.

My company [Peterson Tractor, the Caterpillar dealer] finally had gotten into the act, and wanted to make a full-scale show of it, so

they asked me not to wear a protective apron, just let my suit be ruined. They promised me a new suit. It was a mess because it was one of those classic retake events. They had a dozen pies on hand.

Morris: And you stood there while they threw all of them at you?

Huff: Not all of them, but there were many retake requests. My kids were small at the time. I think it was my second son who was just terrified at what they were doing to his dad.

Huff: Here's a pretty good group. That's got names on the back.

Morris: This is Ben Swig [manager/owner of the Fairmont Hotel], isn't it?

Huff: He's there. Joe Houghteling [later state highway commissioner, member of the Bay Area Development Commission, and currently member of the California Tahoe Planning Agency], Roger Kent--.

Morris: May, 1961. So this is a strategy session for the '62 campaign?

Huff: For a fund raising event, or something like that. These were all moneybag types. Jane Morrison was there.

Cranston as state controller. I was auditor-controller [Oakland]. The inheritance tax appraiser was the mayor of Oakland back in the late '40's, and that's a whole story in itself.

Morris: Joe Smith?

Huff: Joe Smith. In fact, it was that Oakland city council election in '47 that taught me a lot about what to do and what not to do, in terms of winning and losing political power. The new winning councilmen made the worst political exercise in judgment. They'd had a general strike in Oakland, and--

Morris: In '46?

Huff: About then, and then came the election in '47. Five of the nine councilmen were up. At the time the council chose its own mayor. So there was this group attacking the 'ins', and four of the five won, which meant they didn't have a majority. But they insisted on electing Joe mayor. (He had received the highest number of votes and it was traditional to select the mayor that way.)

Morris: This new incoming group?

Huff: The incoming group, instead of taking the dean of the old group as mayor. The new members were losers from that day on. They rarely could muster five votes on any issue. It was so elementary, but they were all so heady with victory, and the euphoria of it all, and what they were going to do, and--

Morris: And refusing to make any concessions to the old guard?

Huff: That's right, the old guard. Again, the art of compromise, how to be practical.

Morris: Did you take some political science courses along with the business classes?

Huff: At Berkeley? [University of California] Never. I had no use for them, I didn't feel they related to the real world at all. I took government at Sac State [California State University, Sacramento]--I got my masters degree there. But I did that at night.

Morris: That was while you were in Sacramento?

Huff: Well, I'd actually started at Berkeley before I came up here.

Morris: And does the government curriculum include the political aspects of it?

Huff: Not really, no. Well, it would touch on it, but there were no direct courses on the political side, although I was later a part-time

instructor at Sac State and did incorporate the political dimension, including inviting politicians as guest lecturers. I learned all mine the hard way. I had no use for people like Peter Odegard [former Chairman, Political Science Department, UC, Berkeley and one-time aspirant to be a U. S. Senator, circa 1954]. I thought he was a "horse's-ass".

Morris: You were aware of the loyalty oath crisis while you were a student?

Huff: Oh, yes. Didn't affect me directly.

Morris: There wasn't any sense of student involvement in the issue?

Huff: Maybe there was for others, but not with me. I worked full time and was only on campus for classes.

Party Field Worker Van Dempsey

Huff: There's a photo of my wife, Anne, and that's Betty Dempsey.

Morris: I hope along the way that you'll talk about Van Dempsey.

Huff: Oh, I could probably tell you some things that few knew about Van Dempsey.

Morris: He is mentioned in several of our interviews with Democratic party officials. They say he was really a hard worker, and we couldn't have done it without him, but nobody says what he did.

Huff: Well, of course, a big part of his value was that he was a laid-back operator. He was not a bureaucrat--he couldn't stand the office, or office work, and he didn't want to be in San Francisco. He was a field worker, and during special elections, a local campaign manager; he was out there where the action was, talking to everybody, and putting things together. I was trying to think of how I got connected--that was one of your questions--to the state operation. Van was also from Alameda County. If anybody was responsible for dragging me over to San Francisco, it was probably Van, but I can't remember specific--

Morris: He was on the state central committee payroll?

Huff: No, no. Never. Oh, I thought you meant a member of the committee? On the payroll, yes. But, you see, what even Roger [Kent] probably didn't know was that the entire time, even his labor union time, he was independently wealthy. He never had to work a day in his life.

Morris: I see.

Huff: He was the black sheep of his family out of Illinois, who were all conservative Republicans. His widow of now--what, eight years or so?--still lives in the same modest home in Castro Valley. You could never tell by Van's lifestyle, or anything he said or did, that he had this independent wealth. In fact one of his principal problems was trying to manage his investments and get as much of his estate as he could transferred down to the next generation as smoothly as possible. ("Smoothly" is defined as: with as few tax consequences as possible!)

Morris: And he was working for the Democratic party--was his territory Alameda County or was it a broader area?

Huff: No, the whole hinterland.

Morris: The hinterland? The valley and the northern counties?

Huff: The valley and the north, right.

Morris: In northern California?

Huff: Right.

Morris: Southern California?

Huff: Only in rare and special cases. Most of the special elections were in northern California. Van was raised in hard-ball UAW [United Auto Workers] politics. He was a union officer, and there were two other officers in the local at the San Leandro Dodge plant, which shut down not too long after opening as a brand new plant. The local was reduced to the three officers, as I recall. The expectancy was that the plant would re-open at any time. They ended up spending something like two years cleaning toilet bowls, hundreds of them, in a big auto factory--doing every kind of dirty, miserable job, just in the hopes that, next week, or next month, they were going to re-open the plant. Keep that union alive. I mean, it was that kind of dedication.

Morris: Even though the plant was closed, they continued to take care of the maintenance.

Huff: It was a minimum kind of maintenance program.

Morris: On the Auto Workers' payroll?

Huff: No, on the Dodge plant payroll. Well, they were also union--I don't know the facts on that, I really can't say. If it was the union payroll, there had to be some kind of connection formed to be actually working in the plant for insurance purposes, and the like.

Morris: Right. So as far back as the '50's, Van was working on special elections?

Huff: Oh, yes.

Morris: To make sure the Democrats were elected.

Huff: It was those series of special elections that really brought the whole thing--made '58 possible when everything fell together. And also made it possible because they were focused, so you could send in your resources from everywhere. What in effect happened was that these small elections would be invaded by all kinds of outlanders, and we had to be very careful about that because if you were detected as an outsider, that worked the other way.

Morris: Particularly in a small community, where a lot of people knew each other.

Huff: Oh, yes, they knew everybody. Well, one of Van's real assets was this ability--he was virtually a chameleon. He just fitted into the whole country style, and was accepted by the local people long before there was even a hint of an election; just became the nuts and bolts man.

This photo is under the Reagan administration, a press conference of all the department directors in my agency--so that would be, I don't know, 1970-ish. Have I got hair there?

Morris: Yes, you're growing it out. Department directors? In the Franchise Tax Board [FTB]?

Huff: No, the Agriculture and Services Agency. That was the agency the FTB was in.

Morris: [Looking at photos] After Earl Coke left?

Huff: Let me think. You know Earl Coke?

Morris: I know of him by reputation and I've read parts of his oral history.

Huff: Okay. He's a significant person, as far as I'm concerned, because he was my agency secretary [cabinet officer], and he was what I called a 'no bullshit' man. You only screwed up once with him, then he'd just cut your head off. He was my strongest supporter in the Reagan administration. I was the Democrat in the Reagan administration (and that's another story involving the late State Senator George

Miller, Jr. [father of the current Congressman]). It was-- I thought at one time--my sort of end-of-the-world thing.

Back under Pat Brown, Hale Champion one time had tried to get me to create an extra public relations position in my department, so that he could 'borrow' it to use it in the Department of Finance. I wouldn't countenance that. Anybody that was on my payroll had to work for me. One of the old practices around there to this day--I think Bob Williams, in the governor's office right now, goes back to [Governor] Goodie Knight's time, and as far as I know has been on first the Public Works payroll and then CALTRANS, but not on the governor's. The director of Motor Vehicles under Knight used to work in the governor's office--and was just nominally the head of Motor V.

I just wouldn't put up with that. It was contrary to everything I believed in. I felt it violated the integrity of the process. If they wanted a position, they should have to justify it. The excuse was that, politically, it was hard to do, and I never bought that. Anyway, I had turned Hale Champion down, which was very difficult to do, but I did it. One day--this takes me back to Coke--we had hired somebody out of General Services that apparently had been used by Coke's office. We didn't know anything about it, we had just been going through the regular hiring process, selected him and hired him. Once he was on--

Morris: A new hire, or somebody who had transferred within--?

Huff: A transfer within state government who'd been in the General Services department, but assigned to Coke's office. So we hired him not knowing this. He got over to our department, and I got this call from Coke, asking to con--

Morris: I want my man back?

Huff: He wanted to continue the arrangement. I groaned inwardly and to myself said, "No". I paused, took a deep breath, and said, "No" out loud to Coke. And I said to myself, "Here I go" and replayed to myself the 'tape' of the Hale Champion conversation. I started to explain, and Coke said, "No, you don't have to explain." And he hung up. I thought, "My God, Huff, you know it's going to be hell from here on in!"

That actually worked the other way. From that day on, he knew where I stood, and what I stood for. I found out that he had defended me in a lot of situations where they were trying to, you know, get political, and this type of thing, that I never knew anything about at the time. He's a hero in my book.

Morris: I've heard this several times about the '70s, I'm not sure that somebody didn't tell me that this was written into a regulation--that what you did if you wanted more staff, was you got somebody appointed as a deputy--

Huff: I doubt if it was a reg, it was probably an executive order, or something like that, but I'm not sure if that's any--

Morris: To codify the process of--

Huff: Well, or try to legitimize it. But I don't think that does legitimize it, not in my book, furthermore exempt deputy positions are strictly and specifically controlled in the State Constitution.

Morris: It's interesting to find out that it goes back through several administrations.

Huff: Oh, it goes back into antiquity. Matter of fact, one of the jokes--this is a funny story on the Reagan administration--there's this new, bright, young guy--he's still active in Republican politics, but not quite as new, not as bright--but he'd been given the appointment as

secretary of the Toll Bridge Authority. It was an agency that had nominal charge of all the state bridges, but the secretary was the only staff. It was a three-man board, which included the governor as one of the members, but was a pro-forma outfit really run by Public Works. The secretary's position was one of those spots that was used to staff the governor's office, pure and simple.

So here he was, a bright-eyed guy. Over at Public Works they had this huge sign in the lobby that started with the governor and listed anybody that was anybody all the way down the line, including the Toll Bridge Authority members, but not its secretary. He studied the list and found that his position and name were not listed, so he went to whoever was in charge of the sign, and asked to be included. The person looked dumbfounded because everybody who had ever held that position before had made it very clear that they did not want to be listed--for obvious reasons.

Morris: That they thought of themselves as being in the governor's office?

Huff: Well, and therefore they wanted to be anonymous. They didn't want any public record of it. The other piece of the story was that the first time he went down to the Bay Area by car after he had received this august appointment, he came to the Carquinez Bridge, and stopped and wanted to inspect it! The local bureaucrats were non-plussed--here's this young kid, tall, good looking--and they said, "What are you talking about, who are you?" He told them he was the secretary of the Toll Bridge Authority.

One the bureaucrats got on the horn to Sacramento and the conversation as this fellow tells the story on himself was, "Hey Joe, we got this fellow, Dana Reed"--that was his name, he's still around in the private sector--"says he's secretary of the Toll Bridge Authority, whatever the hell that is, and wants to inspect the bridge!" Well, Reed never got to inspect the bridge.

Morris: Oh, dear.

Democratic Leadership Figures

Huff: [Looking at photo] I'm an emcee installing the Oakland postmaster. Here's another where I'm with the governor [Pat Brown] this is AB 80 being signed. That was the property tax reform bill, way back in when--?

Morris: '66?

Huff: Yes, the governor's last year. And that was a tough one. That's the one [John T. (D), 11th A.D.] Knox and [Nicholas C. (D), 9th S.D.] Petris co-authored, and Petris got just a terrible beating in his district on it. It didn't bother Knox at all. That's Petris.

Morris: Yes. That's interesting: Petris took the beating, and not Knox, but Knox has left the legislature, and Petris is still there.

Huff: Well, Knox left to make money. Knox used to carry all the terrible bills, because he could get them through if anyone could.

Morris: Yes, he did all the regional organization things--

Huff: LAFCO [Local Agency Formation Commission]

Morris: Yes.

Huff: Well, he did a lot of good things, but he also carried a lot of stinkens.

Morris: Because nobody else would carry them, or he had some interest

in--?

Huff: Just muscle, and money, and all that kind of--

There's old Pierre [Salinger], who helped bring the party down when he ran for U. S. Senator

[1964]--the whole Engle fiasco. That was kind of the beginning of the end. That photo was taken when he was in the White House, with Kennedy.

Morris: Was that deliberate on Salinger's part, or accidental?

Huff: Oh, no, it was just bad political judgment all the way around.

Morris: Was it that people were looking for ways to dislodge Pat Brown and his authority?

Huff: No, it was just the chemistry of the time. It was, I think, people's ambition. I think this was one of [Don] Bradley's few mistakes in judgment. He didn't make very many. But Pierre was so close to him, had been such a part and parcel of the operation.

Morris: Close to Don?

Huff: Yes.

Morris: Was it also partly that Salinger had been a technician working on the nuts and bolts of political publicity? One of the questions I have come to have is whether the kind of skills that go into publicity and government organization and operation, whether those transfer to actually being the elected office holder.

Huff: Well, we could carry that off into what's happened to the Legislature where so many AAs [administrative assistants] have become legislators. With a few rare exceptions, it's a disaster (Congressman Vic Fazio comes to mind as an exception; he started as a state legislative AA, then to state legislator, and is now one of the real 'comers' in the Congress). My notion of how the system should work--and I think this was one of Nixon's problems--is that everybody ought to bring something to elective office, in terms of their private-sector expertise, experiences and exposure. That they have a perspective, and some depth of being. But this whole business of somebody coming out of college and becoming an AA, and then something happens to the boss, and they end up running and becoming--

Morris: Running for the boss' seat?

Huff: Yes, and the list is pretty long.

Morris: The problem is that they lack other experience, other than governmental?

Huff: Yes, they haven't had any broadening experience. They don't have anything to contribute, they're basically sterile. Nixon came right out of the Navy in World War II. He didn't bring anything, other than how to play poker. Well, that's how he got his start.

Morris: As a poker player?

Huff: Well, that's how he got the kitty that he used in his first campaign for Congress.

There's a photo of George Miller, Jr. (late 1960s). Now that is a nice picture, but it doesn't do justice to Miller in action. When he was chair of Senate Finance, somehow or other it would look like he didn't even have a neck at all. It was just a head sitting on his shoulders. That's right, all hunched down. And he wouldn't move his head, he'd just move his eyes to his colleagues. Those were back in the days when you didn't have recorded committee votes, and he would announce the count of the vote after just calling for they ayes and nays without a roll call. (And as far as I know, no one ever challenged his announced vote no matter how disparate it might seem with the sound of the ayes and nays.)

Morris: I see. Whichever way he had--?

Huff: That's right. I saw him once--remember Randolph Collier [Sen. (D) 1st S.D.], the Silver Fox?--I saw him do Collier in like he'd never been done before. It was a bill that Miller hadn't been briefed on (it was a great Collier practice to come in at the last minute with a 'little old bill' that was innocuous and he had been carrying around all session having just then dropped his meaningful amendments into it), but Miller smelled a rat. So here's Collier presenting his 'little old bill'. And here are those beady Miller eyes, that are shifting back and forth, while he's asking penetrating, searching questions, until suddenly--you could almost see the light bulb pop above his head--

Morris: Miller?

Huff: Yes, Miller. And he figuratively took out his sword and just cut Collier's head off, as soon as he realized what the Silver Fox was up to. [laughs]

Huff: This is an old picture of Nicholas Petris. Back in his more youthful days. I have to tell you about Petris, because he's the closest thing I have to a brother.

Morris: Really?

Huff: Yes. I was campaign manager for his first two campaigns, and I was one of two people that talked him into running the first time.

Morris: For the assembly or the senate?

Huff: The assembly, back in '58. Nick was a bright young attorney, a first generation Greek. We first got acquainted shortly after I moved into the fifteenth assembly district in 1949. We were starry eyed idealists (and still are, believe it or not!--even with decades of real life political experience under our belts). The young turks in the fifteenth assembly district had run a number of candidates against the incumbent Republican (Luther 'Abe' Lincoln). We recruited the best candidates we could find, but they were no match for an entrenched Republican. To this day I don't know why Lincoln decided to step down, but we knew we really had a shot at the seat and that we needed the best candidate around. Nick was clearly the one, but he was a very reluctant candidate. We had to literally drag him into the race. I remember taking him down to get a campaign photo before he had actually filed his papers. The photographer blew a fuse and all the lights went out. Nick's reaction was that that was an omen that he shouldn't run. Well he did. The combination of his high caliber as a candidate and the Knight-Knowland 'switcheroo' gave the Democratic Party the victory that eluded it for the four prior elections. In 1966, Nick moved up to the Senate. Nick now shares the deanship of the legislature with Senator Walter Stiern of Bakersfield. Their actual time in the legislature is identical, but Stiern has the edge because all of his has been in the upper house. With his retirement this year, Nick becomes the dean.

There's an intriguing aspect to Nick's batting average on legislation that he has authored. Most of his campaigns have not been very tough, but a few years back he did have a tough one. We researched his legislative record and it didn't have as many big name bills as we would have liked. We began asking why and soon turned up the answer. The first thing one needs to understand about the legislative process is that a new idea or new solution to an old problem almost never gets enacted in the session at which it is first introduced. As a matter of fact, it may take 4-5 times or more 'around the track' before the idea even gets taken seriously. What we found was that in Nick's case, he was far ahead of his time and colleagues in identifying problems and

developing solutions, but he had difficulty in getting anyone to pay any attention to them until the problem suddenly became so acute it demanded attention. About the only 'flaw' I can think of in Nick's character (if it can be called that) is that he is so selfless that he would rather see one of his proposed solutions enacted into law than to get the credit. We discovered that time after time he had passed major legislation on to someone else for any of a number of reasons (his evaluation would be that the other author had a better chance of getting it passed or a colleague 'needed' his name attached to that legislation in order to get himself re-elected).

A good example that comes to mind is the legislation that created the Bay Area Conservation Commission. Nick conceived that proposed solution and lugged it around the track a number of times, then turned it over to Senator [Eugene] McAteer at the critical time because Gene thought it would help him in his planned campaign to run for Mayor of San Francisco.

A different kind of example is the auto emission legislation that was finally enacted by the Congress. Nick gets the major credit for introducing the basic concept when no one was listening. He also made a historical record that may never be repeated when he managed to get the identical bill introduced in six state legislatures at the same time!

Here is an informal shot--this is after Pat was governor. It doesn't have a date on it, but it was after '66.

Morris: Now who's that leading the band?

Huff: That is Frank Mesplé, he's a tradition in himself.

Morris: Really nice guy, yes.

Huff: His last act, practically, was to appear before a class of mine at Sac State [California State University, Sacramento] as a guest lecturer. He had his own class at Davis [UC], and classes were just starting. He had not been teaching for a while and was using mine as a warm-up--this was on a Thursday, and his class was to start on Monday. He was a lobbyist for Sacramento County. At the Franchise Tax Board, I occasionally hired him to come and expose my bureaucrats to what lobbying in the legislature and in the governor's office was all about. We'd actually enter into a contract with him.

So I picked him up and brought him out to the campus. Just walking from the parking lot to the class he had to stop and rest--he was having heart problems--then he had a whole personal life--

Morris: That's what we were told.

Huff: Disaster with his wife, and that's a whole sad story in itself. And his children and everything. Well, I delivered him home after class. He never showed to his Monday class. Finally a friend went to check, and he had died in his apartment sometime between Thursday night and Monday morning.

Morris: That's a shame.

Huff: And this is the classic one [photo] of Cyr [Copertini]. It's the best picture I've ever seen of her. So, if you want to use that--

Morris: Yes, please. What a lot of energy, and good humor. And freckles!

Huff: Oh, yes. Those who didn't know her, but were asked to describe her would refer to her as that little Italian girl if they knew her name. The problem is her maiden name is Mullens, and she's as Irish as Paddy's pig! And, of course, she goes back to Bill Malone. She was Malone's secretary. That's the big continuity. In her cranium rests the

institutional memory of the Democratic party in California for about five decades!

Morris: I wondered if either of you would know about when Malone was leader of the Democratic party.

Huff: She was a teen age kid when she went to work for him. And, of course, in her later years she said, "If I'd only known, and understood--had the background..." to fully appreciate what was going on around her.

Huff: This is the 1958 Alameda County endorsing convention, and that's my older son in the front row. He's now an attorney in a law firm in Chicago, and a full commander in the Coast Guard Reserve.

This is the same deal, with Pat coming into the meeting as the gubernatorial candidate.

Anga Bjornson, George Rice, and John Holmdahl. Holmdahl had been Bjornson's student in high school--she had run for state senate several times before and lost back in the old days. She thought she 'owned' the slot, but these were new times and one had to go through the endorsing process. All three were therefore in bitter, locked, head-on contest for the endorsement. Holmdahl won the endorsement, the primary and then went on to win the election. George Rice had cancer and died within a year or so, but his supporters never forgave that victory. Nor did Bjornson and her supporters ever forgive Holmdahl for turning his back on his former teacher. (Holmdahl later resigned as state senator for personal reasons, subsequently ran again and was elected and then was appointed to the District Court of Appeals by Jerry Brown where he still serves.)

Morris: Does that kind of emotional split at the local level, carry over into a gubernatorial race, or a--?

Huff: No, well, it affected everything just because there were relationships involved.

Morris: Within the East Bay?

Huff: The East Bay and especially up in the legislature. Bob Crown [state assemblyman] was an ardent Rice supporter--and he never forgave Holmdahl. The one anomaly of all that was Nick. Nobody ever gets mad at Nick Petris--exasperated, yes, but never mad. He was Crown's close friend, and he was Holmdahl's close friend. But I was Holmdahl's treasurer, and Crown never forgave me for that.

Holmdahl was his own worst enemy. Personality-wise he left a lot to be desired. That was one of those rough-tough deals.

The Kennedy Campaign: Oakland 1959

Morris: Let's talk about Kennedy.

Huff: It was '59. I was treasurer of the party (north), and I was auditor-controller of Oakland.

You know, in '59 Kennedy started his presidential effort in Alameda County. This was basically, before he was an announced candidate. Because I was auditor-controller, I was in a position to put together the necessary security with the police department and get the phones installed for the press. Once there is an announced campaign, the committee makes these arrangements. These days once the candidate becomes the nominee of the party, the Secret Service steps in and takes over security. (In the old days, when an election was close, the Secret Service was the outfit to watch. When they suddenly appeared like

apparitions around the presidential candidate, you could be pretty sure you had a winner!)

We provided Kennedy a motor cycle escort (I can still remember being squeezed between JFK and the driver [Osborne A. Pearson, assistant postmaster-general and later acting secretary of the Navy in the last six weeks of the Truman administration; and, a Holmdahl aide in later years] in the front seat of a borrowed Continental), set him up out at Mills College with a speaking engagement before the student body and faculty with photo opportunities for Life and other media, but the luncheon I emceed was a disaster that Kennedy never forgot, because this state was locked in pre-convention political maneuvering, and at that point the powers that be didn't want to touch him or have him touched, so there was a boycott by some of the local leadership. We really had a respectable turnout, especially considering the circumstances, but it wasn't a jam, and Kennedy didn't like that.

Morris: Why were the Brown people boycotting Kennedy?

Huff: Well, nobody had made their decision on a presidential candidate in '59. This was way premature. From this perspective it's hard to remember that he was not really a heavy duty national figure at the time. We were just suiting up and everyone wanted to keep their options open, especially if it was decided that the governor should be the favorite son.

Morris: Right, but didn't you want to take a look at him, and see whether you might want to?

Huff: There was a lot of jockeying going on. I can't remember all the details. I know Larry O'Brien came out--you know who Larry O'Brien is?

Morris: He was party chairman at that point.

Huff: Well, he wasn't at that time, this was before then. At the time he was just a Kennedy staffer, but later became his campaign manager. I remember going to dinner with him, just the two of us, in San Francisco, and his whole goal was to pump me in terms of where everybody was vis-a-vis Kennedy. I spent the entire evening giving him the San Francisco tour which I had developed for people. Every time he asked a pointed question, I would point up to the Coit Tower, or some other landmark. I spent the whole night not giving him any satisfaction at all without out-and-out stiffing him.

Morris: Was Jesse Unruh [former speaker of the assembly; currently California state treasurer] at that point ready to throw in with Kennedy?

Huff: No, that was preliminary, this was before all that. Nobody really knew what they wanted to do, and, of course Brown--that was, I think, the thing--the question whether Brown wanted to be--or should be--a favorite son, which he had been before ['52]. They hadn't made that judgment, and, of course, people were having trouble, were agonizing over whether they wanted to support Kennedy or not because of the religious issue. There was a lot of mental anguish going on. Then there was a slew of candidates, you know.

Morris: Right. [Estes] Kefauver was still around, and [Hubert] Humphrey.

Huff: Yes, and [Stuart] Symington, and, of course, [Lyndon] Johnson. Everybody and his brother. That convention's delegate slate for California was deliberately put together in a balanced manner so that everybody felt they were fairly represented, all the various presidential leading contenders that is, so they wouldn't come in to

the California and make a bloody primary out of it. It was to keep everybody out. And that's what weakened the delegation. It was a brilliant move, but Brown always carried the onus that he had a delegation that he couldn't control. Well, it was designed that way. I was one of the Kennedy delegates. (I'm a member of a select group from the 1956 convention who were Humphrey supporters for vice president but couldn't stomach another round of Kefauver when HHH [Humphrey] folded, so voted for Kennedy for the vice presidential nomination.)

Morris: So that when they got to the convention they could vote proportionately, according to candidate strength?

Huff: No. The purpose was to keep the contenders out of California in the primaries, because they felt that would do a lot of damage to everything else they were trying to do. That was the main goal, but then, by the time we got down to Los Angeles, the convention was chaos. You know, Adlai Stevenson was there as another unknown factor.

Morris: That's right.

Huff: You had all the old Stevenson loyalists, of which I was one. My personal view of Stevenson was that he contributed more to the nation by losing in '52 and '56 than Eisenhower ever did as a sitting president, despite the current revisionism underway on Ike's behalf.

Morris: In terms of getting people involved, and participation--?

Huff: Involved and motivated and inspired, plus identifying the problems of the times, as well as articulating proposed solutions. In '56 I was following Stevenson around in the Bay Area in various capacities, including chauffeuring him from the San Francisco Airport to the Fairmont in an open car. I saw him revising his speeches. He kept staff up all night, and a speech was never set. It drove the press crazy, it drove the staff crazy. At six o'clock one morning, he was still doing revisions, and in those days they still had to cut stencils and run them off.

Morris: In order to get the text to the press?

Huff: Yes, the practicalities. Of course, presidential candidates typically give the same canned speech and just drive everybody crazy the other way with the media and campaign staff listening to the same tired, old speech. (Reagan is still delivering The Speech!) The 'working' press is basically lazy. That's why Hubert Humphrey was always in trouble too, because he wouldn't follow his text.

Morris: So he'd say something, and the press would be quoting something else?

Huff: Yes, and they hated that. A final footnote on Stevenson. I believe he still holds the all time record for being the only presidential candidate in the history of the country who ever said anything during his campaigns that was worth preserving.

Oh, here's Judge O'Gara. That must be a name you've run across.

Morris: San Francisco.

Huff: Yes, Gerald O'Gara [(D) 14th S.D., 47-55]. He was always my favorite state senator back in the good old days before he became a judge.

Morris: Now, why was he your favorite senator?

Huff: I don't know, just because of his style. He was always a gentleman, and he was never pushy, never had an exaggerated sense of who he was, and always remembered my name--to this day (or at least within the last year or so). For ego stroking purposes, the latter is a pretty good reason all by itself!

And I have my Joe Knowland story - my personal story [Jos. R. Knowland, Publisher, the Oakland (California) Tribune and father of former Senator William F. Knowland - both deceased].

I was the first person appointed to the Alameda County Institutions Commission after the County Board of Supervisors changed their policy and decreed that one person could only serve two terms. So somebody died, or their eligibility to continue to serve ended under the new rule, and here I was, this young, not-dry-behind-the-ears-guy (in terms of knowledge and experience in the public health field) in his late thirties.

Morris: Are you auditor yet, or are you still a private citizen?

Huff: The appointment preceded by several months my being city auditor-controller, but my actual service was primarily in that capacity. These guys had been on the commission since the year I was born (literally), including Joe Knowland. So I was the new guy on the block. I attended several meetings - they were monthly luncheon meetings at Highland Hospital, the old county hospital.

I had noticed that Joe came in his chauffeured limousine. The poor chauffeur sat out in the car for two hours waiting for him. City hall was just a few blocks from the Tribune Tower, so one day I said to Joe, "Why don't I pick you up and deliver you, rather than having the car wait?"

He agreed, so I did. I never was really sure he knew who I was, until one day we were driving down eleventh street, which is one-way, and stopping at Broadway--you have to go around the block to drive in front of the Tribune Tower--and he nodded, and pointed down toward Jack London Square. My predecessor twice-removed [as auditor-controller] had been a coalyard operator, and his coalyard had been located at the foot of Broadway. That was the first time, I was really sure that he knew who I was.

One time--this ties in with Houlihan [John Charles Houlihan, first a councilman, then mayor of Oakland, later sent to jail for embezzling his attorney's trust fund]--the Tribune had decided to endorse Houlihan for mayor, and Knowland told me that, driving back from Highland. This was a major slip in the newspaper game. By the time I got back to City Hall, parked my car and was in my office, Knowland's secretary was on the line, and she said, Mr. Knowland revealed a confidence which he should never have done, and asked me to keep that confidence. (It was still about three days away before they were going to publish the endorsement.) He might die, or whatever. So I said, sure. I never broke that confidence.

Joe was pretty old in those days. He would sit at the meetings, and would doze off, but if anything came up of interest to him as matters droned along--it was all done by rote; the administrator ran everything, and everything was confirmed unanimously. There had never been a 'no' vote cast in the history of the commission, as I later determined. If Joe was interested in an item, his eyes would pop open, and the minute he showed any interest, everything else would stop, so he could have his say.

The first really interesting thing that came up was the first go-round when the proposed budget was presented by this administrator, who was an old bureaucrat. He's got this document in front of him. We don't have copies of it. He's presenting it and asking the commission to approve the budget.

Morris: Of course.

Huff: I'm sitting there, and, you know, how am I going to cope with this? I voted "no"--the first 'no' in the history of the commission, I was later told--I don't know if that's literally true. And I explained my vote. I said, "I can't vote for something that I haven't seen. In good conscience I can't do that."

There was a stunned silence. The administrator, who had jowls, and he literally--

Morris: Would that be Dr. Whitecotton?

Huff: Whitecotton, that's the one. His jowls went--like a turkey--he went purple, red, white. I thought he was going to have apoplexy and die right on the spot. Well, what they did was unprecedented. They created an executive committee of the commission, made me chairman of the executive committee, and handed me the budget.

Morris: Good heavens!

Huff: So I took this document away--I didn't have anybody to work with--and I went through that thing, and I really had trouble making heads or tails of it.

Morris: And you're about to be city auditor?

Huff: I was the city auditor-controller by that time. But I just had real trouble understanding it. I finally went to Earl Strathman [county administrative officer], and told him, "I just spent umpteen hours trying to analyze this thing, and it just doesn't look right, but I don't have the staff to analyze it in depth." He took that budget and literally threw it in the wastebasket. His staff prepared the budget that year for the county institutions!

Morris: That's what you call zero-base budgeting!

Huff: [laughs] That's my whole story on Joe Knowland.

Morris: Well, he too is a kind of the-end-of-the-era figure.

Huff: I had a theory there. You know, they used to talk about the 'Knowland machine', and there really wasn't a Knowland machine at all. These cats that were on the city council were really incompetent, they were just terrible people. The joke used to be, you know, any time they voted they had to look over at the Tribune Tower and see whether the shade was pulled up or down. I finally concluded that they were second-guessing--they had no direct orders or knowledge--what they thought Old Man Joe wanted. In his later years--he was a vicious son-of-a-gun earlier--but in his later years he was very mellow. He was writing his memoirs, and all that kind of business.

And just, from the little exposure that I had, I was convinced that his philosophy and views on issues weren't anywhere near as harsh, or conservative, or reactionary, as the people that were executing policy--they thought--in his name.

Morris: They were interpreting what they thought he wanted without bothering to ask him?

Huff: Right, or anybody. It's kind of an interesting thing, and it happens often. It happens in state government all the time. Everybody's always second-guessing what they think the governor's position is, and they'll extrapolate from some other issue.

Morris: They take what they think the governor's position is, and go forth and say, I am doing this because the governor wants me to?

Huff: Oh, yes. That's a great game.

Morris: Let's go back now, and--

Huff: We've wandered all over the place.

Morris: Well, it's fascinating, and gives me some marvelous insight into what was going on.

II. A PERSONAL POLITICAL HISTORY

The Early Years

Morris: I'd like to go back to the beginning and ask, how you happened to pick the Bay Area when you got out of the service and had a new wife, and if you came with an interest in--?

Huff: No--my wife [Anne M. Huff] had never been west of Chicago. We were engaged twice. She was a little Quaker girl from a suburb of Newark [New Jersey]. I met her in the fall of 1940 at Antioch [College, Yellow Springs, Ohio]. She was a transfer student from Earlham College, a small Quaker college near the Indiana-Ohio border. The first time I mentioned going to California, she just about froze mentally at the very thought. When she went to Earlham from high school, her picture of Indiana was of buffaloes, cowboys, and Indians. And, of course, in her mind, if one went further west, it would just be worse!

I don't know what it was. I'd lived in California three times, intermittently--

Morris: As a youngster growing up?

Huff: Yes, and that was where I wanted to be. The specific thing that brought me here was, I had, after the war started--let's see everything reminds me of something else. I was in the maritime service. I joined in September of '41. I went in the Naval reserve in November of '41, just a month before the war broke out. So we were on this training ship, the war came along, and they had us take our ship down to St. Petersburg [FLA]--no guns, white ship, the whole Atlantic coast lit up, you know. They [German subs] were sinking tankers. They were very selective--they didn't sink empty tankers, they waited for loaded ones, coming the other way. We actually sighted a periscope. A sub stuck its nose up and decided that we weren't worth the torpedo.

Well, I had quit college, which is a whole story in terms of how I was motivated to finish college after the war. My accounting professor--he was my adviser--did everything to try to persuade me not to quit at the end of my first year of college. He said, "You know the odds against you ever going back and finishing college after one year are extremely high. Stick it out for two years, and then leave. Your chances are better."

Well, it was a money question--Antioch was very expensive--and I was going--well, that was another question. I'd won some money, and that helped quite a bit on this. I had won a car at the New York World's Fair [1940], and sold it. Never drove it. But anyway, I just wanted out, and I wanted to go to sea. My dad had wanted me to go to the Naval Academy. I didn't want to go the Naval Academy. My joining the Naval reserve was kind of a sop to him.

But I really attribute that fact that I went back to college and got a degree to that challenge by Professor Magruder. I had to prove that he was wrong. It's kind of an interesting thing. I had applied for, and was admitted to King's Point, the Merchant Marine Academy, so rather than coming up through the deck, you go to the academy, and in umpteen months you're a licensed officer. Well, I got there, and after about four months, I had a 4.0 average, but the place was in total chaos, and here I am nineteen years old, and I just

couldn't tolerate sitting there in that academic environment with the war going on.

So I resigned. There were two ways you could get a [merchant marine] license: sailing two years on deck gave you the required experience to sit for a third mate's license; or going through what I considered the sterile classroom way. So I quit [school], much against the advice of all the wise-heads there who tried to tell me to be patient. So that, again, became a challenge, because I did sail on deck, and that's what got me to California. I came out to California in '44 on my honeymoon to apply for, and got admitted to, the officer candidates' school in Alameda, and got my third mate's license there. That was in the spring of '45.

Morris: Did you at that time think that the university was near Alameda, and you would pick up the other courses--?

Huff: Well, I actually took some correspondence courses at sea. Let's see, how did that work? I made a trip before I applied to OCS. Yes, that's it. I came out in June of '44, middle of June, and sailed within ten days. Came out with a brand new wife. We arrived about a month after Libby [Gatov] and her then husband [Fred Smith]. We stayed at a hotel down on Geary, one block from the theaters, at the Fielding Hotel. Stayed there three days--that was the wartime imposed limit--then found a place over in Oakland, an old Victorian that had belonged to a vice president of the Bank of America [Frank Belgrano, 1132 7th Avenue, since demolished]. It had been remodeled into wartime housing apartments.

I made one trip to the South Pacific, came back, applied for school, and had several weeks to wait. It was in those weeks that I worked at a shipyard [Kaiser, Richmond]. That's when I belonged to the electrical workers [union], wiring as an electrician's assistant, or whatever they called them in those days. But on that trip I signed up and took an economics course, from university extension [UC, Berkeley]. You know, just trying to keep my hand in. We had a lot of time at sea.

And that was my game plan. I had decided that to be in politics, I had to have some kind of bread and butter ticket, and I decided accounting was it.

Morris: You didn't plan to stay in the merchant marine, ever?

Huff: I can't say that, but Anne didn't want me to.

Morris: I see.

Huff: I had to make that judgment. I was a second mate shortly after the war was over.

Morris: You mentioned that your wife was the first one to have an official Democratic party position. Did the two of you take up politics together?

Huff: Basically, except that she was here, and I was away. I was only here intermittently, and when she hit here in June of '44 she was disenfranchised--no absentee vote in New Jersey, and she had to have a year residence in California in those days. She wanted to make up for it, so she was going to gather every vote she could to make up for the lack of her own vote. So she became quite the political activist. She was the first one to hold a party position. She worked for an assembly candidate who won the nomination over in the City of Alameda. Our little piece of Oakland was in that district. Because of her work and where he lived, she was appointed to the state central committee. It was by virtue of that, in '48, that she sat on the platform when Truman came to Lakeside Park. He came to the park because nobody had any money

to rent a hall. There was a transit strike underway, which should have discouraged anybody from coming; a lot of people still didn't have automobiles. Some 25,000 people managed to get to that park to hear Harry Truman. That was the first overt sign we had that his candidacy had something going for it.

Morris: That there were Democrats out there looking for something to be involved in.

Huff: Despite--you know, everything you read in the paper, why, he didn't have a prayer. He was having trouble getting enough money to get his train out of the station.

Democratic Party Activist

Morris: Did you then continue working for Truman, in the campaign?

Huff: Oh, yes, sure. Well, those were the days of the Independent Progressive Party [IPP], too, the third party movement with Henry Wallace, and all that kind of business. And there was a big split off. We were the Trumanites, and they were the rebels. I still remember being in a meeting in somebody's home, before the IPP was formed, and it was part of the chemistry of the dialogue that was going on. Somebody bad-mouthed Eleanor Roosevelt, and that did it for me. I got up, and I said, I don't want any part of this. [laughs]

Morris: So after the election you just stayed involved in party activities?

Huff: Yes. Well, there wasn't much going on between elections, because there was no on-going structure, anything like that. It just sort of all came together at election time. In 1946, Will Rogers, Jr. had run for the US Senate. We were active in that campaign. The state chairman was an Oakland type - Osborne A. Pearson. He was kind of a pompous character. As previously referenced, he was later assistant postmaster general under Truman, and in the last six weeks of the Truman administration, was acting secretary of the Navy.

As the Rogers for US Senate chairman, he threw Ronald Reagan off the committee for being a commie! [laughs] Years later, as governor, Ronald Reagan appointed him to the World Trade Commission. Pearson wound up being Holmdahl's field man. Pearson was one of those guys who could tell stories, and had political scenerios that would make your hair stand on end.

Morris: Roger Kent says he became aware of you and--who was your cohort--Martin Rothenberg, when you came and volunteered to tidy up, or improve the state--

Huff: Yes, I don't remember how all that came about. It just sort of happened, I guess.

Morris: Tell me about Martin Rothenberg. Did you and he spend time together thinking of--

Huff: Well, he was a congressional district co-chairman in Contra Costa, and I was in Alameda County, and we were about the same age. He later became a superior court judge. I think he's probably retired by now, or thinking of it, if he hasn't. He was [state committee] secretary at the time I became auditor-controller. In the year following my appointment I would have to stand for election, so I stepped down as party treasurer and he took my place.

Appointment as Oakland Auditor-Controller, 1958

Huff: I was appointed--that's a whole story, in itself, of a political operation. But I had a period there where I thought I'd better be super non-partisan until I was elected. So I got off as treasurer of the northern committee and Rothenberg succeeded me. I then succeeded him, after he, kind of, took the interregnum for me.

My appointment [as auditor-controller] was a classic political maneuver--the incumbent had died in office. This was in May of 1958, and we were busy. We had [Nicholas] Petris running for assembly, and Pat Brown running for governor, and all that going. And I had been planning to run for auditor-controller--that was my political ambition at the time. He would be up in the next odd year--'59--and that was going to be my fledgling run for political office. So he died, and I threw my hat in the ring. The city charter gave the council the authority to make the appointment to fill the unexpired term.

Well, this is almost a story-book thing. Petris, and Holmdahl, and several others and I all went to this fellow's funeral [David Rosen]. After the funeral, we stood in the alley outside the funeral home and plotted how I could get the appointment. Holmdahl was a city councilman at that time [and running for the Democratic nomination for state senator]. Petris was significant, too. He was running for the Democratic assembly nomination in our district, and I was his campaign manager--the primary election was only a few days away. Petris was connected with a fellow Greek on the city council--Pete Tripp. Pete had control of a couple of votes. Well, the inside candidate was one of their fellow councilman, who was an accountant. But these councilman hadn't read the city charter. It said--flat out--that no one could be appointed to a city position within two years of service on the council.

They didn't know that, we did. And on the strength of that, we put together a second string commitment: that if the vote failed for their favorite candidate, I would get their votes. This meant on paper we had it locked in. One of the councilman who should have voted for me didn't--Anne had worked on his campaign--because he didn't believe it could happen.

My senior partner in our CPA firm--an old, reactionary Republican-- was getting ready to go to lunch when I sat down to explain to him what was going on; that the council was about to meet in executive session to determine who was going to get the appointment. I told him it was a long shot, but that he ought to know that if I was appointed, I was going to accept.

The other thing that worked in my favor was that Mayor [Clifford] Rishell had to leave town to go back east to a conference, and the city payroll was due. There was nobody to sign the payroll. So they were right up against it, and I think it was the Friday before the primaries, something like that. So it was by written secret ballot, after the city attorney in executive session read the charter to them, to their astonishment, there they were with their candidate down the tubes. And, of course, we didn't know--this was a case of whether their political word was worth anything, because these were Republicans, you know.

It held. I got six votes. Rishell voted for somebody else, the guy who should have voted for me abstained [Bob Osborne], and the ninth person voted for somebody else. So I got six of the nine votes. Our CPA

office was right there, at 14th and Broadway--so our watcher just walked across the little park there, and came over and got me--I was sitting in my office without lunch. I walked across the street, was sworn in, and when my partner came back from lunch, I was already the auditor-controller, and he'd lost a partner. (A footnote: the 'watcher' who came for me, also had managed to purloin the ballot papers and gave them to me. I kept them for years as a memento, but finally threw them out.)

My chief deputy had been in city service longer than I'd been alive, and that was kind of traumatic.

Morris: Were there some new ideas in accounting that you thought could be applied to public administration and politics, or was it the other way around?

Huff: I don't know that I'd call them new ideas, except that the city was behind the times, let's put it that way. Under my leadership, we were awarded the certificate of conformance from the Municipal Finance Officers' Association of the United States and Canada. You had to meet certain standards for the annual report. The city had never even tried, as a matter of fact, and after I left they lost the certificate because they didn't get the report out on time.

It was a question of meeting national accounting standards set for municipalities, and also the timeliness of the report, the formatting of it, and a lot of different things. I learned a lot at the city. I only had a staff of about forty-five. Everybody had been in their slots since the year one. All divisions were small, and the division chiefs each had their little fiefdoms--it was pretty tough to break it. I worked on it the soft way for a long time, and then one day I just announced that I was going to rotate division chiefs. I thought the City Hall was going to crack right open. One of my great experiences--a few months after that-- a division chief was in explaining a problem and giving his perspective as to the solution. Suddenly there was this silence, he was looking down at the rug, and he finally looked up at me, and he had a kind of haunted look in his eyes. He said, "You know, if I were still in the other position, I would have given a totally different recommendation!" He suddenly understood what it was all about in terms of a change in perspective.

Morris: What was it that you hoped to accomplish when you took on being treasurer of the state Democratic committee?

Huff: It really wasn't any lofty thing. The position had always been held by a finance type of person, you know, moneybags, so it had always been kind of a titular thing. And there were very poor reports, or none. So one objective was that I thought that the committee members were entitled to a formal, written report on the financial condition--that was one innovation.

The other sort of just evolved. We had the pledges from the various counties to try to contribute each month toward the overhead, the rent, and minimum staff. This was in lieu of relying on one or two heavy angels--big time business types--which gave the operation much more stability and continuity, and made it less subject to special interests. By prudent management we did something--I hadn't thought of it as a deliberate goal at the time--we developed a credit rating. We had credit--

Morris: [laughs]

Huff: Well, that's just like having working capital.

Morris: That means you can go to the bank and get a loan?

Huff: Not so much a loan at the bank, but with printers, and we could actually order work without paying for it up front. Well, the old game before and since has always been cash on the barrelhead, because political organizations don't pay their bills.

Morris: I thought it was the rule in politics.

Huff: It is the rule. That's the only exception I know. We actually, because of a long period of paying our bills, gradually developed a credit status--which was destroyed [later] in a matter of months. Because nobody else ever really cared, and they just manipulated things by not paying bills. It's a very fragile plant [credit] that has to be nourished all the time.

Morris: How regular were the county organizations in paying their pledges?

Huff: Irregular, well, some of them were regular. But there were enough of them, and the allotment in gross was more than we needed, so that if a third, or forty percent of them came through, we could squeak by. And enough would come through erratically. You know, you'd hear from some place up in the boonies that you hadn't heard from for a while--[they] would come in with some money.

Morris: Would they make up past payments, or would they just send whatever they had in the--

Huff: No, they'd just send whatever they could. Some might make it up, but a small--

Morris: Nobody took it as a commitment, that every month we have to send--

Huff: A few did. They were the exceptions. But there were some real active, eager-beavers. Of course, that might last for a while, and that would burn out when the people changed. That's the price of volunteerism.

State Party Organization, North and South

Morris: How about southern California? Roger [Kent] seems to have been worried about--

Huff: That was a different ball game down there. Different brand of politics, different ambience, everything. Northern California sort of belonged to itself, and southern California was--we always considered it a political jungle. And I think the difference was that the Libby Gatons, the Kents, the Dempseys, and everybody--they weren't out for anything. They weren't seeking something for themselves. They didn't want power, or ambition, or position, they were just workers in the vineyards. Down south everyone was maneuvering for power and position. It was just the name of the game.

I can still remember Jesse Unruh when he was speaker of the Assembly attending an executive committee meeting of the state central committee and fighting as hard a battle for votes as to where the next meeting was going to be as he did for major bills in the Assembly. He just had to win everything. Winning was the name of the game, at any price.

Morris: Well, he was the most visible person from the legislature at that point. How about southern California party chairmen?

Huff: It would depend on who it was, and of course--well, let's see. Bill Munnell had it once, and he was a legislator. Legislators made poor party officials: they didn't have the time, their scenarios were

different, and they had entanglements and commitments that got in the way. They just were not the right people. Liz Snyder, to this day, I have always thought she was one of our better chairmen--and of course she went back to the early days, back before the party really had developed any strength. But she was kind of an exception. I always thought those southern people were a motley sort.

Morris: Was there an equivalent to the 212 gang in southern California?

Huff: No, there was never the same operation. They didn't have that continuity. There was the whole cross-filing problem, and that goes back to Hiram Johnson [governor, 1911-17], that practically insured that there would be no strong party system. It just was subversive to that. One of the real strengths for northern California was the fact that we had--pre-one man, one vote--had all these senators up in the boonies. You know the State Constitution said that in dividing up the forty senators each must represent a county, but in the case of the smaller counties a senator could represent up to three counties, regardless of population. So as you divided all these boony counties up, we in northern California had senators coming out our ears, while Los Angeles had but one senator.

It wasn't right, but the politics of it was that, through the special election process, whenever some opening came along, you threw all your workers and all your money in there. Gradually, one by one, we would win these seats in the assembly and in the senate, but the key was the senate. Pretty soon you had it. You could hold it, and they were not beholden the same way.

You know, the Stan Arnolds, the Joe Rattigans, the Virgil O'Sullivan, the George Miller, Jr., and the Steve Teales. They were kind of the key five; they had their own way of playing the game. I remember AB 80--

Morris: They were the result of your special election work?--or were they--

Huff: Some of them were. George Miller [father of the present Contra Costa Congressman] preceeded it, but Stan Arnold was one of the products of it. Arnold was head of the alphabet, when you called the roll. So all Arnold had to do was know how to vote, and all anybody else had to do was watch Arnold, and they knew where to go.

Working with the Legislature

Morris: This was in a state committee meeting?

Huff: No, the state legislature, we're in the legislature now, down to real productive--

Morris: Down to productive--

Huff: That's right. I ran into that buzz saw on AB 80 [property tax assessment reform], trying to sell a bill on behalf of Pat Brown [governor, 1959-67]. These five guys would sit around and decide who had the least interest in the bill, and that was the one that would be assigned to be their spokesperson. It made it very difficult to get at them, because any time we wanted to talk about AB 80 we always ended up talking to O'Sullivan. He didn't know two-bits about the bill, he didn't care anything about it, and anything you said was just like talking to the wall. They were just tough to crack when they played that game. It was great when it was for you, but it was tough when it

was against you.

Morris: Particularly if you'd worked with them on both sides.

Huff: Right.

Morris: So once you'd worked out the strategy, and started picking up Democrats in the special elections, then those duly elected senators would become the basis for a local organization?

Huff: Yes and no. It varied, depending on the district. Again, whenever you won, things tended to become more personal than organizational, which is just part of the price you pay. Suddenly it isn't just the organization per se, it's that guy's organization. We ran up against it in George P. Miller [U.S.Rep.(D) 8th C.D.--no relation to State Senator George Miller, Jr. or current Congressman George Miller, III], who got into Congress on Roosevelt's coattails in '44--had to go out and buy a new suit in order to run; he was a pretty darn good liberal. By the time he retired in his 80s he was a crotchety old character, but powerful. He had the space committee, and had all the wrong positions [hawk] on the Viet Nam War--this type of thing. My wife and he had an exchange of letters that was red hot. He was just as virulent as she was.

Morris: The fact that you had been workers for him since his first campaigns didn't cut any ice?

Huff: Not by then. Well, because--that's the other thing that happened--especially with a congressman, from the day you got elected you started to get more and more removed from your constituency. I remember a Republican, Johnny Allen, coming back after being defeated. He was just scared to walk down the street, because he'd been in communication with all these people all these years, but didn't know anybody. Theoretically he knew everybody, but he really didn't know anybody. I remember him verbalizing that concern about coming home. And, of course, a lot of them never come home. They stay in Washington and become lobbyists--this type of thing.

Morris: Did the group of you working with Roger [Kent] do any work on who ought to be the candidate in the special elections?

Huff: Sure. That's again, part of what Van [Dempsey] would be doing out there. He always had people in his hip pocket ready to pop up. That's what he loved to do, and the judgment factor in picking those people, I think, was as important as anything else.

Morris: Were they necessarily already active in Democratic party politics in their districts?

Huff: Not necessarily. Of course [Richard] Graves, on a statewide basis, was the spectacular example--he had to change registration in order to run for governor on the Democratic ticket [1954]. He had no political background, because he was the executive director of the League of California Cities. You know, he had his own brand of politics, but he'd never been involved in partisan politics. In hindsight, I'm not sure he was a good selection, for a lot of reasons.

Unwinnable Elections

Morris: Graves said that it was the greatest thing that ever happened in the world, in terms of his personal life, it was time to get out of what he was doing.

Huff: Right.

Morris: What better way than to lose a political campaign?

Huff: But he didn't have any real grounding, in terms of partisan politics.

Morris: He's wondered whether or not he was talked into running because Pat Brown decided that the election was not winnable that year.

Huff: I think that was a major consideration, sure.

Morris: So would there be times when the people in the deciding group would say, we're not going to work very hard for this. We're going to, you know--

Huff: I assure you there was almost every condition in terms of the local races. But one of the basic rules that you learn--they're learning in Illinois now, and down in Orange County--is, always have a viable candidate. Never be caught off base. This whole LaRouche thing is just crazy. Even if you're fighting a lost cause, you should be running the best candidates you can find, and talk into going.

It's the 'dripping water on the stone' principle, and the 'moss doesn't grow on a rolling stone' principle. You know, we worked in the 15th assembly district. We ran some candidates that weren't the greatest, but they were the best we could find. They broke their picks. It wasn't until Petris came along that we won-- and that was a combination of a good candidate plus incumbent Luther Lincoln not running--

Morris: There had been reapportionment, redistricting, there at that point?

Huff: Fifty--no, reapportionment had been back in '52 [controlled by the Republicans], this was '58. But we'd been beating at him, and I guess he'd just decided he'd had enough. So it all went together. The [Goodwin] Knight-[William] Knowland switch lined everything up. No one fully realized it at the time, because you can't put all that together overnight.

Morris: That seems to be kind of the message that you were trying to develop, and Roger [Kent] was trying to develop, that you've got to have some continuity.

Huff: Continuity. You've got to have a door open, and a presence, and stability, and resources that you can tap, and bring in shock troops on a fast basis. It works.

Morris: How much time did this take? Here you were with a responsible job in Oakland, and you're still active in district politics, and at the state committee level.

Huff: It was worse than that. When I stood in that graduating field [Edwards] in Berkeley in '49, I was working full time, 40 to 50 hours a week, going to school full time, and active in politics, and had two kids. I was pretty close to the ragged edge. I don't think I could have tolerated another day.

Family Issues

Huff: Well, my adult children will tell you that they were neglected by their father. It's true, you know, they didn't get the same kind of attention. In retrospect, I think I'd have been a different kind of father.

Morris: I see in some of those pictures some--look like--ten year old little boys, at some of the ceremonial meetings.

Huff: The older one, the one that you saw the picture of, he's the closest to being any kind of political activist. He [son Roger] and his

wife [Kathy] contributed to the [Harold] Washington for Mayor campaign in Chicago, and also when he ran for congress in Hyde Park. Roger's first 'hands-on' political experience was on an Antioch [College] co-op job [co-operative work program: part time spent on campus, part time spent on a job in one's field] working for Sen. Petris in one of his campaigns.

Morris: So he went to Antioch, like his father?

Huff: Yes, he's an Antioch graduate, and so is his wife, Kathy. He got his law degree at the University of Chicago. I think his work for Petris had some influence on his becoming a lawyer. He had originally planned to be an actuary. A New York co-op job got him out of that. He didn't like the ethics of the actuarial profession.

Morris: That's interesting.

Huff: He had this job in New York, and also the advantage of knowing a friend of the family who was with another actuarial firm in New York, and was able to compare the two, and came to the conclusion that it wasn't for him.

Morris: Does this mean that you were in the office in San Francisco once a month, once a week?

Huff: It would depend on the season. A lot of the time it was weekends. Sometimes it was at night, during the week, depending on the Dollars for Democrats campaign going on, why you'd scratch over there as soon as you could. Sometimes it was late hours.

III. PARTY POLITICS RISE AND FALL

The Kennedy Election

Huff: I always forget that we have to take ourselves back to before the time Kennedy was a national figure. From this perspective it's hard to remember. But at that time he was a young senator with no legislative record to speak of, a father with a dubious Democratic political past, to say the least--he'd attained his wealth from bootleg liquor, and all that.

Senator Kennedy had been out here after the '56 convention at a major fund raiser, and his speech was an absolute flop. He was not prepared, it didn't go over, and everybody was muttering about it. So there was all that, plus the fact that there--let's see, it had to be at least Symington, Humphrey, Johnson, Kennedy, Stevenson and a couple of other miscellaneous--

Morris: Was Kefauver still in the picture?

Huff: He may have been talked about, but he wasn't viable. At that point there wasn't any front runner, there wasn't anybody who really jumped out as a recognizable national candidate. Plus the Catholic issue--

Morris: Was that particularly strong in San Francisco?

Huff: I don't know whether it was strong as far as the merits of the problem. I think it was a concern because of just trying to noodle the politics of it. Is this going to become a political liability that you can't override? That really wasn't resolved until the Texas ministers confrontation by Kennedy, well into the campaign.

Morris: So what you're saying, is that in '59, from California's point of view, he didn't really look yet like a seasoned, national candidate.

Huff: Right. Plus we had our own internal political problems, and the question as to whether we wanted to have a "favorite son" candidate hadn't been resolved--which would have been Pat Brown, of course. Then, as the thing emerged, what really happened--in those days, delegations were selected on a very controlled basis, and normally they were selected to support whoever the candidate--. As a matter of fact, Brown was our "favorite son", and normally it would have been 100% Brown supporters. But this delegation was very carefully selected and balanced, so that every candidate that had any potential of coming into the state had a fair representation, and wouldn't come into the state. The whole purpose was to keep all the candidates out, and to prevent a blood bath that would tear the party up.

Morris: In the primary.

Huff: Yes, and as a result you had a delegation you couldn't control. But it was selected purposely to do that.

Morris: To not be able to control it?

Huff: Yes.

Morris: Now that doesn't sound logical. I thought the idea was to control the delegation.

Huff: I know. Normally it is. I don't know of any precedent for this kind of an operation. And Brown got a bum rap because he couldn't control a delegation that his people had selected purposely to accomplish a specific objective.

Morris: It was Pat Brown's idea, rather than Roger Kent's, or Don Bradley's?

Huff: No, no, not Pat Brown's idea, he was just a figurehead. No it was Roger, Don, Libby and the other leadership people. That was a strategic move, and very important to the political well being of the party in California.

Morris: So that at that point the concern was more party internal tensions, rather than backing a winner in the national--

Huff: Right, because nobody knew who the winner was going to be, and nobody was really prepared for that. That was the whole approach. But going in, when we finally got to Los Angeles [site of the '60 convention], of course all the Brown people were for Kennedy. Oh, Stevenson was in the act too, I forgot about that. I still remember Eleanor [Roosevelt] standing up there with her--as a UN ambassador, she was somewhat constrained, and was supposed to be non-partisan--big Stevenson button, as she spoke before the convention [laughs].

Morris: How was the delegation put together? Was that put together by the state central committee?

Huff: No, no, there's a tight little organizing committee, approved by the candidate, that puts it together. In fact, I don't even remember who was involved.

Morris: Regardless of the local district caucuses, and things like that?

Huff: Well, see that all--I'm trying to go back to '60 now. It's emerged a lot differently in later years. At that time, I think it was split. I think there were some that were locally selected, and then some that were selected by the committee. I think it was a two-way deal. I just don't remember the specifics of the mechanics. They keep playing around with it every four years, and it's hard to keep track. I'm not sure they've ever improved the system.

Morris: Later on I'd like to ask you about the "McGovern reforms," and whether you could see them coming, or whether they came as a big

surprise, the move for--

Huff: I wasn't deeply involved then, so I wasn't in any inside--I'd just say, in retrospect, they haven't proven to be the great breakthrough that they were touted to be at the time.

Morris: Back in 1960, were the people that were making the recommendations for who should be delegates concerned about minor 'ies, and women, and ethnics, and--

Huff: Oh, yes, there's always been an attempt to provide that kind of balance. That's been going on for almost as long as I can remember. Of course you had what I call the phoney balancing of the women in the law, where the state central committee had to be fifty-fifty. That goes way back. That was more pro forma, because a lot of times the regular member would be a female spouse, and the alternate would be the husband, and the husband would be the real political power. It was always put together to comply with the law, not the spirit of it.

Morris: Didn't women protest that?

Huff: Well, as it emerged over time, they became a little more assertive, but this goes way back before there was such a thing as a woman's issue. We're going back into the '40s, it was before that.

Morris: That's interesting that you say it that way, because what you told me last time we talked was that your wife was the one that first got interested.

Huff: Yes, but that's an individual situation, that wasn't the pattern of this thing. Yes, she was the bona fide member, because of her own activities. And there was a lot of that, but there was also the pro forma type. So it was a mix. That's how Liz Snyder emerged, because she was a bona fide political operator, and the mechanism permitted that. But it was a mixed bag, it had both.

Morris: And a surprise when a woman turned out to have competence, and ideas on her own?

Huff: Well, I don't know that it was a surprise, but she just floated to the top on her own merits.

Morris: In spite of the fact that she had some murky connections.

Huff: Yes. I can't remember what they were. It was always her husband, I think.

Morris: Her husband [Nate], and whether or not he had close ties with [William] Bonelli [member, State Board of Equalization], just at the point when he was leaving the state under indictment [fled to Mexico and died there].

Adlai Stevenson and the California Democratic Party

Morris: Since we started with '59, and Kennedy, could we go back a little bit, and talk about how you got involved in the California Democratic Council [CDC]? You said you were at Asilomar [the conference center at Pacific Grove where the CDC founding convention was held in early 1953]--

Huff: I was a scribe. That's about the lowest form of honor--you took notes, was what it amounted to. I guess the real generative factor was the total shock of losing in '52. The thing that sticks in my mind after the shock was in December of '52, not too long before Christmas. On a very foggy night people made a pilgrimage, an actual pilgrimage, out to Diablo Junior College [Contra Costa County]--it wasn't easy to get there, it was a narrow road with bad visibility--to hear Wayne

Morris [U. S. Senator, Oregon (Independent)]. People just showed up from everywhere. It turned into a political wake. It was a very emotional experience for everyone there.

At that time, it was the Democratic party under George Miller, Jr. [state senator]--unrelated to George P., but the father of the present congressman--and Alan Cranston. George, Jr. and Don had always been close--that goes way back. They were the prime movers to try to establish some kind of grassroots base operation. There had been a precedent of sorts on the Republican side. They called it the California Republican Assembly, and it was an endorsing mechanism to get around the law about the parties supposedly, not endorsing in the primary.

Of course the Hiram Johnson reforms, back in 1910-12, all really destroyed any party strength in California, with cross-filing and all that. So this was a way to try to get around the defects in the law. Plus that defeat was the real push--everybody felt guilty that they didn't do enough, the whole works.

Morris: There sounds like a crusading element. What was it that motivated all of you to put in that much time?

Huff: Stevenson was a very inspiring person in terms of where he was coming from and how he--see, he brought political campaigning to a level that--my personal conviction is--no other candidate for president had ever done. I'd block out Kennedy, Roosevelt, everybody. I'm not sure that Stevenson would have made a good president, but he inspired people.

Morris: In terms of his view of government, or in terms of how you organize a political--

Huff: He didn't really relate to political organizations, particularly. No, he inspired people in terms of what the public interest was all about, and politics was all about, and it's primacy in our whole society. Just brought it to a level that I don't think anybody else has ever done.

My view of Stevenson is that he contributed more to the country running for president twice, than Eisenhower did serving eight years.

Morris: And those ideas contributed to your spending your lifetime in political--

Huff: Yes, it's helped, it was a driving force. Because it was a sense of idealism that you just don't see very often. Politics gets to be pretty humdrum, workaday--

Morris: It's a lot of hard work, the day-to-day--

Huff: Yes, a lot of pick-and-shovel type stuff, and you need the inspiration.

Morris: But it took six years to get the organizing conference put together?

Huff: No, '53, January '53, it happened--well, let's see, early '53 anyway. It may not have been January--that sounds a little fast for Asilomar. I don't recall--I'm not very good on the dates--the first real endorsing convention was in time for the '54 election, and I'm not quite sure what the timing was.

Morris: Okay, I just got the dates wrong. Some people said that Cranston helped organize CDC so that in turn they would endorse him for statewide office. Is there legitimacy to that?

Huff: I'm not sure what the accurate answer is. I don't really know. I can just give you my impression. I'm sure his motives included his

own desires. His focus has always been foreign policy, so his ultimate ambition was to be a U. S. senator. The fact that he ended up running for controller was really kind of a fluke. I guess it was the only thing around and available--this type of thing--because he certainly wasn't qualified to be controller.

Morris: I remember thinking at the time that it was odd that somebody that I knew of as having foreign policy ideas--

Huff: It was a joke at the time that he campaigned--he's a very poor speaker, you know, and his style is stilted. He's improved over the years, but in those days he was not what I would call a good speaker. And when he went out to make a campaign speech for controller, the first couple of sentences dealt with being controller, and before you knew it, he was talking foreign policy!

Morris: That's interesting, because in the '50s you don't think of people having the kind of career path plans that you read about now in the daily papers--that everybody must have a career plan.

The CDC took a lot of time discussing and putting out positions on foreign policy matters too, didn't it?

Huff: Oh, yes. Both national and foreign. We always used to laugh about the different types of people: the Nancy Slosses [212 gang member, Pat Brown appointments secretary, now a documentary film producer based in Washington, DC], and people like that, always described themselves as "issues oriented"; and then there were others of us who, although we were interested in the issues, we weren't fanatics on the subject, and we were more "nuts and bolts" type people. My role was very mundane, I was a trustee of the council. There were two trustees, or three trustees. Dick Nevins [member, State Board of Equalization]--no, he wasn't a trustee--we were both credentials committee chairmen [Dick south, myself north], that's where our paths crossed. But my service as trustee was kind of a ministerial job that oversaw the financing end of it, and the job was not what I would call burdensome.

Morris: Less burdensome than being treasurer of the state committee?

Huff: Oh, yes. Trustee was sort of an oversight position, and treasurer was--the way I functioned--it was a working position. The traditional way the treasurer functioned was as an oversight person, a fund raising type of person.

Morris: Would you say that the CDC spent more time on issues than the state central committee, and things like that?

Huff: Yes, it's whole focus was on issues and endorsing candidates. Of course this created stress and strain with incumbents. They never really liked or appreciated the CDC. Some did. Incumbents always had control of the state committee through the appointment process, so that was another reason it was not a very effective group. How you maintain the right balance of tension between incumbent office-holders and party people, I think, is a good question--how that's brought about.

Morris: The whole idea of the Democratic party is a little nebulous. There is the state Democratic central committee, and it has an office and a legal existence, but the state central committee does not include all the registered voters, who may or may not turn out to work on a campaign or send money, is that right?

Huff: Well, the state central committee members are appointed by the office holders, plus the county committee chairmen, but then the executive committee is what really calls the shots, and of course the leadership sets the agenda and steers the executive committee. The

executive committee is a large committee.

Of course it involves both state legislators, constitutional officers, as well as, congressional incumbents. So you've got that, another kind of tension. And it includes nominees, not all office holders, and back in the cross-filing days, a lot of times, there wasn't even a nominee.

Morris: Because it would be a Republican?

Huff: A Republican could have it. So then there was a mechanism to designate who would fill that slot. A lot of mixed games went on with that, too.

Morris: I can believe it. The nominees are members because it's to them that the campaign are related?

Huff: Yes, but that's the way it's structured in the law. I can remember 1946, in Alameda County, in our congressional district, on the November ballot, George P. Miller--the congressman who had been first elected on FDR's coattails in '44--was the only Democrat we got to vote for in the general election.

Morris: That's right, because Warren had won on both tickets in the June primary.

Huff: That's right.

Morris: So there just wasn't anybody in the governor's slot.

Huff: The thing was wiped out, that's right.

Morris: That must have been a very strange sensation.

Huff: A sense of outrage, that the system just wasn't right. And that kind of situation was a motivating force. The whole battle for eliminating cross-filing sustained the--that was an issue that crossed all intra-party lines. Everybody could agree on something like that. That was the cement that held everything together.

It's only after the party began to be successful that it started to fall apart. Of course before that, it didn't have anything to hold together--it's kind of an evolutionary process. You build strength and then it starts to erode on itself.

Morris: This was the question I wanted to deal with next. I was really startled with this letter that Stephen Reinhardt [chair, Democratic state central committee] wrote to Pat Brown in November of '64. I think I sent you a copy of it. Although it's dated '64, and you were up in Sacramento by then, he's talking about concerns going back two or three years, and he's talking about tensions within the party, and what looked to him like efforts of some personal power building, and some people who didn't like volunteers in the party.

The reference points were Kennedy's loss in California in 1960, and then the struggle over Clair Engle's senate seat in 1964.

Huff: That [the Engle struggle] actually destroyed the party over time. That was the beginning of the end. Nothing was ever right after that. It created a dissension and a division that never really healed. That's my personal view.

Morris: Were there committee meetings at the subcommittee level?

Huff: Yes, most of this was maneuvering behind the scenes. The whole problem of dealing with Clair and his wife was such a tough deal.

Morris: There were those who thought he would recover from the brain tumor, am I right?

Huff: Well, most of those people had their own agenda, or reason for wanting that to happen. You know, there's always--the coterie around the incumbent. And with a US senator that's a fairly large following. I heard recently that one of the Democratic candidates for the Board of

Equalization has a fairly large legislative staff that he wants to take care of if he gets elected, and doesn't understand that the number of exempt appointments is limited to one per Board member. So I think he's in for a rude shock if he wins. I think that's--if I can remember who it is, there are so many candidates--I think it's somebody like McAlister, or somebody like that. [It was state senator Paul B. Carpenter who was elected in November 1986, and whose senate seat may be lost to the Republicans in a special election still to be called to fill the upcoming vacancy; assemblyman Alister McAlister was a candidate for state controller who lost in the June 1986 Democratic primary to assemblyman Gray Davis.]

Morris: Somebody who's now in the legislature?

Huff: Yes, one of the current legislators.

You've got the problem of the north-south relationship, and I think I mentioned before that I felt that the real contribution that, Kent et al made, and why things were different up north, was that there were fewer people who were self-seeking. Roger didn't want anything, he wasn't looking for any appointments, or elected office, or anything like that. There are always people--and I don't think there's anything wrong with it, I think that's what keeps it going--but in the south it just seemed like everybody was out to cut everybody else's throat for their own personal ends, rather than the broader look, and healthier for the party.

Thoughts on Political Career Building

Huff: Somehow or other you've got to get your perspective in line, and I've seen more people end up politically unsuccessful because in the position they're in--which could be a non-elected office, it may be only an appointed office--rather than make the best judgment they can on the basis of the role they have, and do that job the best way they know how, they constantly make decisions based on how they think it'll affect their ability to get into the next job. And that's contra-productive. It just doesn't work, because you don't have the perspective to know how to deal with it until you get there. People destroy themselves doing that.

Morris: Would this be people like Carmen Warshaw, and Jesse Unruh, around whom a lot of controversy seemd to develop?

Huff: I don't think Carmen ever had any aspiration for office.

Morris: No, but she wanted to be party chair.

Huff: Yes, she wanted to be a political maker and shaker. She was known in party circles as "The Dragon Lady". I never really understood what drove her--she was a very driven person, and played political hardball, cutthroat.

Unruh didn't have the ability to distinguish between what was important and what was unimportant. To him winning was important, and power was important, not the gradation of issues, and the fact that to exercise power most effectively you have to be very discriminating in doing it. If you're twisting somebody's arm on every issue, you're going to break his arm, or it's going to get so sore he can't function. You've got to let up on it once in a while, so that when you put the twist on, it has a lot more impact. He didn't have the ability to do that.

I mentioned before, I saw him fight as hard over the issue in

executive committee of the state central committee as to where the next meeting was going to be, as over a major political issue on the floor of the assembly. It didn't make any sense.

Morris: When did he begin to put a lot of effort into the legislature itself raising money, and did that then have a bearing on how easily the party could raise money, in terms of the state central committee?

Huff: The state central committee was never good at raising money, and he was in a natural position to raise money. The money he raised, though--the sources were totally different than those that would normally flow to the party. He was dealing primarily with lobbyists and those who had a specific interest in the outcome of legislation. So it was kind of a different world.

And of course, in those days, campaigns weren't that expensive, and a few dollars went a long way. It wasn't that difficult to put it all together. But he used to state that it didn't matter who contributed what, didn't affect his vote. He used to ridicule people that would assert that, and I think he's a phoney on that subject. People who contribute get attention, and they get access, and they have the opportunity to present their side of the case, and their facts. That's influence anyway you cut it. And it works.

Morris: Did you, and Roger, and Don, and other members of the '212 gang' have any discussions about what the implication was going to be of the legislative caucus developing from campaign funds and activities?

Huff: I don't know that we had focused strategy meetings on what to do about it, but I think there was a lot of grumbling about how helpless we were in the face of that kind of activity. Northern political activists, other than legislators and their immediate supporters, I think, were not typically in tune with the Unruh type approach to politics, and his general goals and ends. Unruh never came through as anybody with any great standards, or high ethics, or anything very inspiring--as far as I was concerned.

Morris: You mentioned that in 1960 Pat Brown's "favorite son" delegation, or Pat Brown himself, worked for Kennedy's nomination. Unruh was also involved in--

Huff: On a personal basis. He had his own connection through Bobby [Kennedy]--I think it was primarily through Bobby--to Jack Kennedy himself. But that wasn't a party thing. He was paddling his own canoe.

Morris: In terms of the Kennedy campaign in California, or was it other parts of the country?

Huff: I can't say definitively. I think just in terms of his own perception as a power broker, basically.

Morris: What about [Steve] Reinhardt's concern about Kennedy losing in California? If Unruh and Brown, the two major power sources, were both for him--

Huff: But they weren't for each other. [laughs] Well, I don't think the Kennedy loss in '60--those things generally emerge as bigger than the pushing and shoving of the party workers. The party effort is marginal at best, you know, and it may shove it a little bit one way or the other--. This was Nixon's state, he was a home grown character for better or for worse, and I don't know what kind of impact that had.

There were so many variables. You've got the valley, which we call the 'Bible Belt', because of all the migration from Oklahoma and other parts of the mid-west and from the south, and I'm sure that area was a hotbed of anti-Kennedyism because he was a Catholic. I don't know

that anyone ever analyzed it definitively, but that was one variable. The economic situation is always a piece of it. There's just a lot of intangibles that drive people that are sometimes very easy to see after the fact, but you can't see when you're in the middle of it.

Morris: Could you explain a little more what you said about the party effort as marginal at best?

Huff: Well, I think that's kind of axiomatic; that the number of people who are politically active compared to the number of voters is relatively small. There isn't that much impact. In the first place, there isn't that much actual action, and then the action is--as far as effectiveness--diminished in terms of how many people are turned around as to how they will vote. It's just like a newspaper endorsement. I think a newspaper endorsement used to be a big deal, but these days it's only a marginal factor, also. I don't think there are that many people that are swayed to change their votes because of a newspaper endorsement. If they follow the endorsement, they were already inclined to follow whatever position that paper took.

Morris: They were already inclined in that direction.

Huff: Yes. Then there's the whole question of getting out the vote. It's not good enough that everybody's sitting at home ready to do the right thing. If they don't get to the polling place--we don't have patronage in this state--that's the glue that normally makes for good precinct operations. There's somebody out there doing it that has a direct financial interest in the outcome.

Ray Sullivan, from City Hall [San Francisco]--he used to be up here, I think we mentioned Ray [former member of the Legislative Analyst's staff and former Ways and Means staffer when Willie Brown was chair]. He was back in Chicago on a public works project--this is within the last couple of years--and he's going around with this big shot from Chicago public works, on various objectives in terms of his trip. He actually was there and saw city workers collecting their paychecks at precinct headquarters--that's where they went to get their checks, their city checks!

Morris: That sounds like the old Tammany Hall days.

Huff: This is in our time, you know. We can't even relate to that out here. Something like that is--

Morris: In a situation like that the bookkeeping turns out a check--

Huff: I don't know how it happens, except that I understand the way the general set up is, that most party functionaries--precinct captains, and this type of thing--also hold city jobs. So there's that linkage, and somehow or other they manage to remind everybody when they pick up their check where that job's coming from.

Morris: Well, every now and then you run into somebody who says that it's an honor and a privilege to be able to put money into so-and-so's party campaign, because that's how democracy works. Does that motivate many people?

Huff: I don't think so, no.

Morris: Were there some special "get out the vote" strategies that worked?

Huff: Oh, yes. Somebody usually had a grand scheme, and it always looked good on paper, but you didn't have enough money to make it work usually, and something that's dependent totally on volunteer effort is sporadic at best. It's no stronger than the volunteer who fails to follow through, or doesn't call the people to get other volunteers, or whatever. And those people are no better than the ones who say they're

going to do something and then don't do it.

Morris: But one would think, that by the time somebody arrives at the level of being on the state central committee, or county chairman, that they knew this is what it took to get--

Huff: Doesn't work that way. They get there through a lot of different routes, not necessarily through working in the party. When we lived down in Oakland where we first moved to when we came to California, my wife had that precinct locked up, nailed tight. She knew everybody in the precinct that was a Democrat, and she went out and hustled them to the polls on election day, and the whole thing. But that was not typical. And later when we moved we never got the new precinct as organized as well as the first time, but she was especially motivated the first time, and by golly she did it.

Morris: Had she learned this on the job, as it were, or had she been in--

Huff: She'd never really been politically active before.

Party Divisions Begin, 1964

Morris: So when did the volunteers begin--you know, the sense I get is that you came in on a wave of volunteers with inspiration and dedication that carried the CDC and the Democratic party along freely and strongly.

Huff: For quite a while, and then it all started to fall apart. I think the real beginning of the end was the Clair Engle problem. If you really looked back, and tried to track it and analyze it, everything that had been held together, and a fairly unified approach to everything up 'til then--it became divisive after that.

Engle was a special breed of cat all his own. He was a free wheeling, kind of inspiring individual. Colorful language, oh God.

Morris: He had been part of this party building effort, hadn't he? And he had shared office space with the party, and with the Democratic council?

Huff: Right. And he was a classic case of somebody coming from the 'boonies' to win a statewide office for the U.S. Senate. That was just an incredible thing.

Morris: He was the one--he and his wife used to fly their own plane around campaigning.

Huff: Right. As a matter of fact, I got brought back from the '60 convention in LA to Oakland. Clair flew Van Dempsey and me back, and I remember he just putted down, and only cut one engine, and we piled out, and he took off again. There were just three of us, I don't know where his wife was at that point.

Morris: Had he been a flyer during World War II?

Huff: I don't know. I suppose he was.

Morris: I don't either. Did Roger have a personal friendship with--

Huff: Yes, there was a very close personal bond there.

Morris: I've heard a lot about--Unruh's said this, and Pat Brown said it--about Engle's illness. I don't know that anybody has commented, and I don't think Roger did in his oral history, as to what he thought was the thing to do when Engle became so ill.

Huff: I don't know anything definitive. I know there was a lot of agonizing going on.

Morris: But isn't it the kind of thing that the state central

committee, or at least its executive committee, if they see a situation developing would say, these are some of the things you should take a look at?

Huff: An issue like that never really gets on the table. It's back-room kind of business. It's very difficult to bring that one up. That was the real problem, because there was always the doubt--who had the definitive medical knowledge as to whether this was recoverable, or not? If it was recoverable, why nobody in the world wanted to jeopardize the situation.

Morris: There was a brief recorded message from Engle that was broadcast at a CDC convention.

Huff: That wasn't good.

Morris: I don't know that I've heard the tape, but I've seen the transcript of it.

Huff: Wasn't very coherent.

Morris: It was really heart-breaking, even if you didn't know Engle.

Huff: Well, I think that was kind of the beginning of the end, because up until that time there'd been a pretty good cover-up.

Morris: Well, I guess that's in the area of speculation, but it's really striking that a situation like that can leave difficulties that continue.

Huff: Real scars.

Morris: Would it have been different if Pierre Salinger had not come upon the scene and decided to run?

Huff: I doubt it, but I think he detracted and helped embitter the situation. Because at that point he was an outlander, pure and simple, and politically that's the way he ended up as being seen. The problem was, I think, Don's judgment in this thing--I think Don was the driving force. I don't know that, but that's just my guess. They were very close, and he saw this as an opportunity to move in with somebody that he had direct, close rapport with. I just don't think that he was in a position to make the best political judgment on that.

Morris: Don?

Huff: Don, yes. You see Don and Cranston never got along too well. They were kind of oil and water. I don't think Roger and Alan got along that well, either. I think all of the niceties were observed. I don't think there was anything overt that was negative, but Cranston just wasn't Roger's type. Roger was a very loose, open person, and Alan always had his own agenda and, in my view, has always been first and foremost, a self-seeker, and always played his cards fairly close to his vest. He's a very frustrating person to deal with. You know, he has this reputation of being a great vote-counter, which he is, in the senate. He goes around and tallies up the votes. But you try to find out where he is on something, and he's just all over the place. He's very evasive--you can't pin him down. He's the last person to allow his vote to be tallied. A strange kind of situation. I can't help but wonder if the motivating force behind his vote tallying efforts is to determine which way the wind is blowing in order to determine his own vote. I don't mean to imply that this is the case on every issue, because he does have well staked-out positions on some issues. It's just a thought, and my own private opinion.

Morris: How did that work when he was a candidate himself? Would his campaign mesh with what the central committee was doing, when it was a statewide thing?

Huff: When you say, 'mesh,' that assumes the state central committee

had a well-organized, definitive campaign as an entity itself. That just didn't really occur. This is my personal view, and I'm thinking out loud now. As a statutory structure, it was sort of a holding mechanism rather than a power or force, and it kept things going. When the elections were in the offing, candidates got their own campaigns going, and people would peel off and work the campaigns of their choice. And a lot of times they'd be the same people, but they weren't working, per se, in the official capacity of a state committee person. They were doing their thing for a candidate. Co-ordination among campaigns was a sometime thing, largely dependent on the personalities of the candidates and their managers.

Of course, if it's a gubernatorial campaign, the main focus would be on the gubernatorial candidate, and most of the other constitutional offices would just be along for the ride. The use of the slate mailer was a device to give the indicia of party unity, although the prime candidate carried the main part of the cost. Other candidates often contributed only token amounts, or even in some cases nothing at all.

Morris: In terms of the central committee's planning?

Huff: Well, just in terms of campaigning. They're raising money--you know, it's very difficult for the lesser candidates to raise significant amounts of money. It didn't really matter too much what they did, but you could never tell them that! Van tried to tell somebody that one time--it was Bert Betts [1958 Democratic nominee for state treasurer, swept in on the Pat Brown tide]. Van said to Bert, "Hey, go to Hawaii, or do whatever you want. It doesn't matter, you're along for the ride, just put up a pro forma front." Well, you know, Betts was insulted, because he felt that he was important, and that everything he did was vital to his getting elected. [Betts served two undistinguished terms as state treasurer; his main claim to 'fame' (?) is the court case he won on his pension rights that introduced the escalator factor for retired elected officials that is now an unmitigated scandal.]

All candidates are susceptible to the 'self-importance' disease. They may enter a race on a fluke, or just to keep a base covered, or for some other less than substantial reason. But sooner or later, the bug bites them, and they start taking themselves seriously.

Morris: I can see that, but I would also think that, even if you think being controller is terribly important, you would think that the candidate would realize that being governor is on a different order than being controller.

Huff: Well, I think they do intellectually, but not emotionally, because their focus is on themselves. The political realities are, that the way the top of the ticket goes is the main thrust. There may be minor factors that affect the situation, but that's all they are.

Let's see, [Frank] Jordan was the only [incumbent] survivor--Secretary of State in '58--and I'm trying to remember the Democrat who ran against him. That was the most ignominious of all, to have a sweep, and then be the one that didn't make it. It doesn't matter.

What I was thinking of was an article I just read the other day about some professor in the mid-west who's been running a test for a number of years with his political science classes. He holds a little election, and he has a whole list of candidates, and he asks the students to vote for them in their order of preference. The candidates

include actual elected officials that have odd-ball names, foreign sounding names, this type of thing. Then it includes some non-elected types that have very apple-pie, 'American' sounding names, like Gus Hall, and--the whole list of the communists. And, by golly, the students were uninitiated, and didn't know any of these people. And all the communists would win in these class-held elections. The professor has been carrying it on class after class, to prove that the name has something to do with it, and the feel of whether it's foreign or familiar. That's what I was trying to reach for; Jordan is a very plain, ordinary name, and the ticket in that year was fairly well-balanced, ethnically, and the whole works. I'm sure that whoever the candidate was, he was disadvantaged by his name.

Morris: Even though the population includes a number of people whose names are Polaski, and Greenberg, and names like that? They still vote for Smith and Jones.

Huff: I don't know whether they do, but there's a tendency anyway. But that again, is a marginal kind of thing. How these things all add up I don't think anybody really knows scientifically.

Morris: Did the party make much use of consultants, or polls?

Huff: Back in those days? Very limited. It was just an emerging factor in terms of the tools. It's mandatory now, but pre-'60 it was pretty limited. And when they were taken, they were few and far between. The Gallup poll, when did it start? Not only the Gallup poll, but the California [Field] poll. I think it only goes back into the '50s for California focussed polls. Gallup nationally goes back farther. An Antioch classmate of mine had a co-op job as a Gallup polltaker right about the beginning of World War II.

Of course, that existed before 'private' polling, where the candidate actually hires his own pollster. That hasn't been going on for much more than 20 years, or so.

Morris: Well, 1966, Reagan's first campaign for governor. They had a private polling outfit.

Huff: I think that was part of the basis of putting all that together.

Morris: Yes, they did a lot of research during the period when Reagan, and the people who eventually became his backers, were deciding whether or not to go for governor. Then, I have talked to people who have said that they were already then using some form of the--not necessarily overnight poll--but they were going out and spot-polling, and found some things that did affect how they then developed the campaign.

Huff: Of course, it's become so fast and so sophisticated, that issues are changed in the middle of the campaign, or in mid-week, for that matter. Back in those days that was unheard of. The first polling that I recall, before I was even in California, goes back to my college days, when one of my classmates was working for--I think it was--Gallup. This would be back in the early 40's. Some of the stories he told of how the polls were conducted didn't give me a lot of confidence in the result. [laughs]

Morris: You still hear about that. The alternative is--your description of Van Dempsey, who knew people in every county, and could do his own instinctive rendering of what was going on there. That reminds me of Roger Kent talking about, you know, they would target districts--also sounds like on the basis of accumulated information of

the people involved.

Huff: Yes, it wasn't that scientific. It was based on registration figures, and the fact that everybody knew that you had to have at least a five or ten percent edge to be equal with a Republican [candidate]. Because the Republicans had a better voter turnout record, and things like that. And the Democrats had a lower level of party loyalty.

Morris: How did you put volunteers to work during a campaign?

Huff: The tough part was getting a reliable person to be in charge of the volunteers. Another frustrating thing was that the availability of volunteers didn't always match the time when they were needed. Sometimes there was a real problem keeping them busy.

Morris: What did you do in those situations?

Huff: Better ask Cyr [Copertini, veteran professional campaign worker with over forty years experience in California Democratic politics]--I don't know whether she'll admit it or not--how many times she took a box of three by five cards out in the back room, dumped it upside-down, and then brought it back for a volunteer to alphabetize, to give them something to do.

Morris: She did indeed. She didn't tell me that she dumped it out, I thought it was just sort of an endless task.

Huff: That was an old technique. They [the volunteers] had to feel like they were doing something, and making a contribution. Or, how many times you went out and spent some money to have what we called 'snipes' [small posters] put up. For a few hundred bucks you could snipe a bunch of fences. And the only reason you put them up--it wasn't because they had any great political effect--but your own workers had to feel that something was happening. So you had to do something visible. A lot of times the source of problems and dissensions were from your own people, not lack of work.

If you look at the '58 election, that was the peak of [Democratic] political effectiveness in California, and all that work surely contributed--marginally. But the real reason we won was because Knowland and Knight switched slots, and as a consequence we had two wide-open places [on the ballot]. All the work in the world added to the margin, but it didn't make the win.

Morris: But you would think that the same thing would work in the other direction. There are times--like the troubles over Engle's seat led to the election of George Murphy. That's sort of a given in politics, isn't it? That there's always something unexpected.

Huff: Well the negatives. Like this 1986 election. This election is Deukmejian's to lose, not Bradley's to win. Bradley can't win this election. Deukmejian could do something that would make him lose it, is what it amounts to.

So the negatives work against you, sure. And Murphy, again, name [identification], the movie business--which seems to be the way we're going to create all our political candidates, now. We've had Murphy and Reagan, and now Clint Eastwood. I guess that's the way to go. What a sad day.

Morris: That argues against the idea of--I don't know whether it does, necessarily--the Republicans say, is there any reason why an actor can't have political concerns.

Huff: Theoretically, not. But I think it's a sad commentary, that name identification overrides any kind of substance. Nobody can claim that Ronald Reagan brought any substance to anything, you know.

Morris: Well, the ideas were already there. They were looking for a

spokesman.

Huff: Yes, well, I'm not sure how many real ideas there were.

Morris: Like so many things that happened in California Democratic politics because of Stevenson, the theory is that Reagan is the result of the Goldwater campaign [1964]. Behind Goldwater there had been--

Huff: Yes, I guess a case can be made for that.

Single Issue Politics

Morris: The other thing, from the political science point of view, is that in the '60s, and more so coming into the '70s, there becomes an increasing number of single-issue organizations.

Huff: That's going to be the end of us, I think--single-issue problems.

Morris: Were they beginning to pop up--

Huff: I don't think the single-issue really became a problem until--kind of Vietnamish, is the way I would put it. The whole concept that everything would rise or fall on one issue. I can remember trying to calm my wife down one time, because--and that was over Vietnam--she had written a hot letter to George P. Miller [Congressman], and got a hot letter back. He was chairman of the Space Committee at the time, and I think served on the Armed Forces Committee, but am not sure. After I peeled her of the ceiling I said, you know, the world doesn't stand or fall on that one issue. You've got to look at the full picture. Here's a senior congressman (and ours to boot), who's made contributions all over the place during the past twenty--so odd years, and here you're trying to shoot him [down] because of this one issue. That's the first, in my own recollection, that I really started to see the destructiveness of judging somebody just on one issue--stand or fall.

Then this whole business, abortion, capital punishment, you name it. These people are crazy people, you know. They froth at the mouth over their one issue, and it blocks everything else out.

Morris: How does the single issue, as developed in the last 15 years, how did that emerge from the old business of building a coalition of people to go to the legislature because you wanted, you know, more money for the schools, or--

Huff: There was, I guess, a lot more give and take, a lot more tolerance of where other people came from on issues. You didn't feel that somebody had to go right down the line and be 100% on every issue.

Morris: In '65 there were serious differences between the CDC [California Democratic Council] and the central committee, because the CDC was much more active in opposing the war in Vietnam, even though the party platform had a plank saying that the war in Vietnam was not very productive.

Huff: My theory on the Democratic party, nationally, is that the real strength has been the diversity. If you talk about radicals of the right or left, typically the Democratic Party has had kookier ones on the right than the Republicans. And if you go down south, the worst of the worst has been within the Democratic Party, and the worst radicals of the left have been in the Democratic Party, plus everybody in between. In the national convention process what emerges is that the battle is really fought there trying to arrive at some kind of consensus that these disparate groups can [agree upon]--nobody's

satisfied but everybody decides, well, we can live with it.

Professor Harris once put it as well as anybody. He said, the Democratic Party is like a bunch of alleycats. They're always scratching, and biting, and fighting. But you'll notice that when they get through, there are always more cats.

Morris: [laughs] This is Joe Harris, down at--[UC, Santa Cruz]

Huff: Yes.

Morris: That's wonderful. And this is done at the conventions, or is it done in--

Huff: Well, at the national level the only focus is the national convention. That's the only time we have any semblance of a national party, really. When it works, it works, and when people take a walk, it's very difficult. The IPP [Independent Progressive Party] in '48--they were all theoretically Democrats. [When] the South takes a walk--it's pretty hard to win under those conditions.

Morris: Did you begin to get discouraged with some of these realities of politics? Is that why you decided to take a job in the state government?

Huff: No, it didn't go like that. One of the mysteries to myself, is, I've never really lost my idealism, under conditions which I would think I would have. And I've examined that, and I think the reason is--at least my rationalization is--that somehow or another I've always been able to separate the theory and the system from the people [involved in running it]. I can go before a committee [of the legislature] and see somebody whom I have no respect for, or who I think is a crook, or whatever, and I don't nail the system with the fact that we [the voters] put the wrong person in there.

Also, I feel that what we get, basically, is what we deserve. That it's pretty much a mirror of what we are. And if we're sending a poor caliber of legislator to Sacramento, or congressman to Washington, we get just about what we deserve.

Morris: How about the corollary that in spite of its imperfections, and the lack of people paying attention, and taking part, that the people in the long run usually make a sound decision?

Huff: Well, I'll put it a little differently and I'm not sure how sound a judgment it is. The system tends, or has tended, to kind of bungle its way along, and we have survived. In California, my concern is that in the last--let's see if I can put a time on it--at least in the last 15 years, maybe 20 years, the legislature has ceased to face up to, and resolve, the major issues in this state. As a result, there's been greater, and heavier reliance on the initiative, and that is destructive of the system, because it's a poor way to solve a problem. For all its defects, the legislative process does expose a proposal to critical examination, does expose it to the give and take, the compromise process. Both party to party, house to house, various interests and contra-interests, and all that abrasiveness. Although the solution may get watered down in the process, there is progress, even if it only inches a long, a little bit [at a time].

When the thing gets so stalemated, that the process can't seem to make any kind of decision--it walks up to it, then walks away--the system's not working.

Morris: Do you recall when initiatives began to be introduced by legislators?

Huff: Well, they've always done it from time to time, but I think it's become more prevalent in, probably, the last decade. I couldn't

put a precise time on it.

You know, Proposition 13 [Jarvis-Gann property tax limitation initiative, 1978] was sort of a watershed deal. There was a mechanism in the state constitution--I helped draft the amendment. I didn't really like it, but I think it was a classical example of a compromise that I thought was distasteful--but something had to be done. It was called the homeowners' property tax exemption, and it was a dollar amount that was built in to take the heat out of the inflationary forces on the property tax. That was a legislative initiative.

Morris: Prop. 13 was a legislative initiative?

Huff: No, no, wait a minute. I'm talking about the homeowners' exemption. We had to amend the constitution to do that. I want to make a distinction. When you talk about legislators promoting initiatives, what went through my mind was a Ross Johnson [state assemblyman] going out---although he's a legislator--and starting an initiative circulation campaign on his own.

Morris: Right. That's what I mean, as opposed to the measures by the constitution that have to go on the ballot.

Huff: Yes, there's legislative initiatives all the time, and that's historically where most of them have come from. The number of grassroots initiatives that are successful in getting on the ballot is fairly small. And it's only in the recent decade or so, really with Prop. 13, that the computer and the sophistication of the signature gathering process has become a cottage industry. If you've got the right size nest egg, you can almost guarantee getting something on the ballot. So that's a different deal.

But my point on the homeowners' exemption was, there was this mechanism in the constitution, and the legislature, instead of staying with it and updating the dollar figure of the exemption to match inflation, they just ignored it. It was put in there, and just allowed to stay static. If they had kept it current, property taxes would not have become a major political issue. [The constitutional mechanism provided for updating the exemption figure by statute.] What happened was, that there got to be a big brou-ha-ha about the renter, and the political forces representing the renter were insisting on something for them, and wouldn't allow the other to be updated, and the plain fact is, there is no logical, sure, measurable way to give relief to the renter. It can't be done. And that's where the whole thing kind of blew up. But if they'd kept that homeowners' exemption viable, there would never have been a Prop. 13. Simple as that.

IV. AN INSIDER'S VIEW OF STATE GOVERNMENT: 1963-79

Mr. Huff Goes to Sacramento

Morris: How did you happen to come up to Sacramento and become executive officer of the California State Franchise Tax Board?

Huff: Because I got a phone call from Alan Cranston in the middle of a meeting, asked me if I wanted to be the executive officer, and I said, yes.

I was an elected city official in Oakland. I was the auditor-controller, and I was in some kind of meeting. My secretary

pulled me out, and Alan was on the other end of the line. He was chairman of the Franchise Tax Board, as controller. It's a three-man board, and the incumbent executive officer who'd been there 13 years was a Republican and was retiring [John J. Campbell].

I think I had thrown my name in the pot for executive secretary, State Board of Equalization. But I hadn't really pursued it very much. That probably surfaced my name, but I actually hadn't put in for the FTB. In fact, I'm not sure I even knew there was going to be a vacancy. I don't know, I was just ready. That's all I can say. When he asked me--you know, I needed to ask my wife! Move my whole family, my kids, and everything.

Of course, it didn't happen for--that was in May, or sometime--and it didn't take place until the end of August. I know, because our family was all going on a big trip back east, and I had to bail out of that. I went up to Idaho, and floated down the middle fork of the Salmon River on a raft (SF attorney and politico Bill Coblentz was my tentmate on the trip), while my family went back east to visit relatives, and all that kind of business. So it was sort of a fluke, I guess. It wasn't anything I had planned, but mentally, and every other way, I was ready to do it.

Morris: So Alan would have talked to the other people on that three man board, and said, this person--

Huff: Oh, yes, he'd run it--the director of finance was Hale Champion. I'm not sure they talked to the third member. That was John Lynch--at the moment he was chairman of the Board of Equalization [BoFE]. The FTB consists of the director of finance, the controller, and whoever happens to be chairman of the Board of Equalization, which rotates annually. He [Lynch] was not very swift, politically or technically. He was sort of along for the ride. So I'm sure they mentioned it to him, but as an accomplished fact.

Morris: And he was in the minority as one Republican.

Huff: No, he was a Democrat. All three were Democrats at the time. No, he was elected, he was part of the '58 sweep. He and Nevins all came in in '58.

Morris: What were the things that interested you about the FTB, and were there some specific tasks--?

Huff: Well, I was a CPA, and, you know, administration of the state income tax came under the FTB. I was more interested as an administrator than anything else. I don't know how to explain it.

Morris: Neither the Franchise Tax Board and the Board of Equalization are well known, and its members even less so.

Huff: John Lynch was a valley man, basically. Not about to go down in the annals as a contributor of very much of anything. He was a go-alonger, basically. A nice guy, and perfect gentlemen, very nice guy. No great politico, however.

Morris: George Reilly was still in his heyday, at that point.

Huff: Well, when you say "heyday", I don't know what you mean.

Morris: That he'd been there when--

Huff: He was there a long time.

Morris: Right, and when you read about it in the press--which was usually the San Francisco press, in my experience--he seemed to feel that he was having a significant effect on fiscal affairs in California.

Huff: About that--[gestures]

Morris: Not much?

Huff: Zero. In fact, if a constituent from San Francisco had a case before the BofE, the poor constituent would leave feeling that, by golly, George Reilly was really in his corner, and George said all the right things. When they [BofE board members] signed off on a case, more often than not, he signed the other way [opposite to the constituent's position]. It was all show.

He survived the Bonelli [William G.] scandals, and up until that time he didn't even know what was going on. He told me this personally one time. It was just kind of luck that he survived. And he just went with the flow, and he didn't know who was doing what to anybody. Then after that [the scandals], he decided he was going to put on a show. He was just an actor in a scene, and it didn't mean a thing.

Morris: I see. That's too bad.

Huff: I would say that he contributed virtually nothing in his forty-odd years on the Board of Equalization. I suppose I shouldn't be so hard on him because he was generally a strong supporter of mine, but my style is to call them as straight as I know how, friend or foe.

Morris: From where you sat on the Franchise Tax Board, did you feel that the Board of Equalization was a necessary part of state government?

Huff: In terms of function, or in terms of theory?

Morris: In terms of needing an elected body--

Huff: I don't think that it should be an elected body at all. It's totally inappropriate. But it serves as an administrative appeals board to my [former] department. Not to the FTB as a board, but to my [former] department. And that role can be handled without a constitutional elected body. In fact the administrative remedy for the taxpayer should be provided by an independent board appointed by the governor. That's the way it should be handled.

What we have, grew like Topsy. It started out with--this is a whole subject, but--. You know, in the late '20s, the Board of Equalization was a handful of people, staff. All it did was equalize the property tax rolls between counties--and they didn't do much of a job on that--and actually assess the public utility roll. That was a fairly small function.

When the sales tax came along, that's what expanded the department. The same [legislative] package that had the sales tax had the income tax. This was in the depth of the depression, and there was divisiveness between rural and labor [political] forces, and the income tax did not pass that time. If it had, it undoubtedly would have been--because the package was put together by Riley [Ray L.], the controller, and Stewart [Fred E.], the chairman of the Board of Equalization--the income tax would have been administered by the Board of Equalization, today.

They [the legislature] doubled back. A couple of years later they managed to get the income tax enacted--personal income tax. There was already a corporate tax. By that time the political climate was such that they did not want to attach the income tax to the Board of Equalization. There was the Franchise Tax Commissioner [Charles J. McColgan]--it was not a board then--and so they threw it to him.

Now also in the depression, when they enacted the amendment to the constitution that created the [state] civil service, when they did it, through an error in draftmanship, they forget about the Franchise Tax Commissioner [it was a very low profile position]. Since the civil service amendment was silent with respect to the position of

Franchise Tax Commissioner, there was no way to remove the incumbent! He had been appointed by a committee, and the committee--when the act was passed, back in '29,--consisted of the state controller, the chairman of the Board of Equalization, and the director of finance.

McColgan was the commissioner from about '31 through the end of '49. He was 16 years at that--no, he was longer than that. He was 19 years. [Caspar] Weinberger [currently Secretary of Defense and a distant cousin of Huff's daughter-in-law, Kathy Huff] was a state assemblyman at the time. He led an investigative committee, and there were some other powers and forces at work. What had happened, is that McColgan had become a recluse--some say he was an alcoholic--I don't know. The evidence is that he was at least a recluse. He would go into his office in San Francisco--he never came to Sacramento. The operation up here was run by a deputy [William M. Walsh]. He [McColgan] would go into his office there [San Francisco], and his own employees never knew him at work. He would shut the door, and that was it.

At some time during all this, he was forced to come to Sacramento and testify before the committee on the operation of his department, and he didn't know beans. He didn't know his own budget, he didn't know anything. It was a scandal, it was an absolute scandal. Not a scandal of conscious wrong-doing, just a scandal of inaction, so to speak, non-direction. His department was stodgy, but reasonably well run, thanks to the civil servants, but not to him.

That's when they found out they had no way of removing him. So what they did, is they abolished his position, and created the Franchise Tax Board, which was the appointing committee. [The legislature] turned all the powers of the commissioner over to the board, and it then turned around and delegated all those powers back to the executive officer--except the appointment of the executive officer, the adoption of regulations, and the setting of the bank tax rate, all Mickey Mouse kind of business, other than appointing the executive officer.

A Question of Style

Morris: Were there some things that Alan thought ought to be done, or that Pat Brown thought ought to be done, or was it purely that they wanted a competent person?

Huff: That's it, and the interesting charge that I got from Champion and Cranston was, we don't really want to know anything--keep us out of trouble. Go run the show, that's what it amounted to. And, of course, the concept was to make it independent of politics, and that's the way I approached it--to a lot of people's dissatisfaction, but that's the way I thought it had to be.

Morris: Was there considerable pressure to administer--

Huff: Not under me there wasn't. Nobody had the guts to try. I learned that down at City Hall, that if you set the environment right you save yourself a lot of trouble, because people aren't going to ask you [to do] inappropriate things, because they know it won't work. So you just have got to watch the line [as to what is ethical, moral and legal]. If you [are tempted to] cross the line, and you don't know where the next line is, you better hadn't cross the first line, because you will find yourself in a 'no man's land' where there are no ethical bearings for guidance.

Morris: What kind of observations do you have about Roger's [Kent] resignation? There are various theories; one, that he'd been tired of it for a while, and the other, that there was some sort of maneuvering about Pat's re-election campaign.

Huff: Oh, I think he got tired of it. Well, let's put it this way. In '66, for Pat Brown's third term, I think there was a general burnout. There was burnout within the administration, and there was a degree of burnout in the party, too. It's hard to sustain carrying the load and the responsibility on critical issues where there was little or no chance of winning--to fight a lot of battles, and keep fighting them, when you knew you were going to lose.

I told Pat Brown this once, and it just shocked the pants off of him. I told him he really wasn't a politician. It kind of hurt, you know. He's got a pretty high ego. The fact is the he evolved and developed as a consummate bureaucrat in a special class. Not really my kind of bureaucrat, but he was interested in the system, he had his own standards and ideals, and his own principles, and he was a good delegator. He involved staff in the decision-making process--something Ronald Reagan didn't do. When I say that, I mean he involved the knowledgeable professionals. He would actually pull them in, and he would get the word direct--he didn't have it screened through all kinds of political operators.

Morris: There were times when he would call you in?

Huff: I've gotten involved in sessions with him. Of course, I was involved in one with Ronald Reagan I might tell you about, too. That was hilarious.

But with him [Brown]--the way I characterized it: if it was a purely political question, and political issue, you almost had to back him to the wall, holding him to it, and say, Pat, this is a political issue. You're going to have to make a political judgment, a political decision, and we're going to hold you there until it's over. Because if you took the pressure off, he'd never to form. My best example of it was pitting Democrat against Democrat. George Miller, Jr., as chairman of the Senate finance committee was unalterably opposed to any kind of enforcement on the highways.

Morris: Speed limits?

Huff: Well anything. Radar, you name it. And here we were losing four thousand people a year on the highways, which doesn't take very long to add up to the Vietnam fatalities. Pat, as governor, felt very strongly about this issue, and he would go in with the program--as part of his program in a given year--with the whole safety package, and he'd emerge at the end of the year bloody. Miller would just play with him, toying with him like a dog with a rat, or something. And the staff, one year, said, hey, give us a break. He wouldn't do it. He felt so strongly about it, he said, even if we lose, there's four thousand lives out there at stake, we have to go fight the battle. To me, that was great stuff, I really liked that.

Morris: That's the old attorney general at work.

Huff: That's right. And on judicial appointments, when he had to make a lousy political appointment to the bench, he would turn around and balance the scales by making some spectacular appointments. In his own mind, that tended to--

Morris: Consciously.

Huff: Yes.

Morris: Would you care to explain who those were.

Huff: Well, it would be putting my judgment in his place, and some of whom I considered to be duds, he might consider good ones. There were some appointments in Alameda County that I did not consider spectacular. They were just old political hacks.

Morris: Who had to be.

Huff: They were party workers, and they were old style. They were pre-CDC, pre-Stevenson. Leonard Dieden was one whom I considered a hack of the worst order, but he was a good fund raiser. And the guy who looked like Carmen DiSappio, and functioned about the same. He was another politico we called the Silver Fox (like Sen. Collier).

Morris: Purchio.

Huff: Purchio. John J. Purchio, that's right. To me they were just political hacks of the lowest order.

Morris: Well, but you know, that's the same charge that's being made in this current campaign. That some of the people on the State Supreme Court were political appointees of the other Governor Brown.

Huff: Jerry Brown.

Morris: Yes.

Huff: Well, I think Jerry Brown made some terrible political judgments. He was Justice Tobriner's law clerk. Justice Tobriner was a fine justice, and if anybody deserved to be elevated to chief justice on merit, he did. If anybody deserved to get it on political merit, he did. But Jerry wanted to be the first one to appoint a woman chief justice. If he had elevated Tobriner to chief justice, appointed Rose [Bind] to justice--Tobriner was right on the edge of retirement, anyway--he'd have served a couple of years with distinction, Rose would have had a chance to assimilate in a non-threatening situation, and could have been elevated, no fuss or muss, or, at least, a minimum.

It was just a lousy political decision, all because of his own ego.

Morris: A matter of timing, rather than inherent qualifications.

Huff: Yes, that's right.

Morris: Well, once Roger did resign, were there others who provided the same kind of continuity, linkage and tradition?

Huff: Never the same. There'll never be another Roger Kent, probably. You know, it's something special.

Morris: He's very special to those who worked with him. How did the people in southern California feel about him? Did the things that made him special to--

Huff: It was different, because he was a northerner. But he still represented the continuity, and the leadership, and, basically, selflessness, that was a major plus for the party.

Morris: The people who've succeeded him--we've done a brief interview with Charles Warren, and Roger Boas--they both described being party chair as painful. Both the contending with the factions, and, I guess, by then the deficits were larger than they had been?

Huff: We didn't have any deficits. Well, not when I was there, we didn't. They came after me.

Morris: Did you not have deficits while you were treasurer because you were treasurer, and said, there shall be no deficits?

Huff: Well, I can't claim full credit for it. Part of it. But it was because of Roger, and the whole milieu, and what everybody was doing. And I was a hard-liner.

Morris: It was part of it.

Huff: Yes.

Morris: It's a policy thing, that we will overspend, or we won't overspend.

Huff: That's right. We managed to live within our means, and we managed to somehow or other, have the means match at least minimum needs. A lot of the time it was kind of a 'by-guess and by-gosh' thing, but there was enough going on out there, that money would float in. Some congressional district that hadn't contributed in a long time would have scraped up some money, and sent some in right when we were wondering if we were going to pay the rent. This type of thing.

As I think I told you before, we actually built a credit record. We had a credit rating, with printers, and--it's like money in the bank. Nobody ever heard of a political party doing that. But you see Warren, he was a legislator, the worst person you can put in as a party leader, in any position, is a legislator.

Morris: Why is that?

Huff: Number one, they're coming from a different place; number two, they don't have the time; three, their perspective is too narrow--in terms of the district, and issues, and everything. It's just the wrong caliber person. It's no reflection on any particular individual. And they don't have the stomach to deal with factions--they can't handle that kind of problem. That's a cold bath for them.

Roger was able to--I don't know, there's some way--

Morris: But factions are inherent in the legislative process.

Huff: That's different, that's a club. That's a closed, tight club. And those people--you might think they're bitter enemies by what they said on the floor, in a committee--you'd go out and find them eating together afterwards, the closest of buddies.

Morris: Yes, but there are also some of the battles over the speakership, and things of that sort. You know, when Unruh steps down as speaker. Willie Brown lost the first round, and it was ten years before he could work up enough--

Huff: Well, he had to sell his soul to become speaker, classic case.

Morris: To the Republicans?

Huff: Yes. Don't give me a speaker who had to sell his soul to the opposition. They're useless. Really, they're no good.

Morris: But that's dealing with factions. You may have to--

Huff: But that's inter-party factions, and not intra-party factions. At least intra-party, supposedly, you're all going in the same general direction. You're not going in opposite--the other factionalism, that's straight wheeling and dealing, buying and selling, as far as I'm concerned. You're promised a committee chairmanship for your vote.

Political Philosophy and Personalities

Morris: The same year you had Roger resign, you had Pat Brown and everybody else, except March Fong [Eu]. Was that the year? Anyway, you lost a lot of campaigns in '66.

Huff: Well, let's see. March Fong wasn't there in '66. She came in--

Morris: No. I guess she was still in the legislature. She came in with Jerry [Brown], several years later.

Huff: Yes. She came in with Jerry, Unruh, and Cory. That bunch.

Morris: Were there some conferences, or efforts to pick up the pieces, and make some long-range plans for the party.

Huff: I was out of it at that point.

Morris: Nobody came and wept on your shoulder, and said, what are we going to do?

Huff: No, they didn't need my advice.

Morris: Thinking along the business as a boy scout model--

Huff: What do you call a "boy scout"?

Morris: Well, the boy scout troop, literally. You know, in organizations like that there's an effort to develop some leadership for next year. Were there any efforts along those lines? You know, Roger must have had some thought for the future. He didn't want to be there forever, and Don might have thought that he didn't want to be there forever.

Huff: Don expected to be there forever.

Morris: Did he?

Huff: Well, that's a throwaway remark. But yes, as long as he was around, he expected to be one of the shakers and movers. And I think, rightly so. But he was a pro, and Roger was an amateur--in the sense that one was paid, and the other wasn't paid. Roger was a pro in his own right, in his own sense, by virtue of knowledge, expertise, and time spent.

I really can't respond to the thinking of party-leadership building. There was kind of a continual 'by-guess and by-gosh' basis back in my days. I want to say 'by-guess and by-gosh' because I don't want to give it any patina of being very scientific. It was opportunistic in terms of who emerged, and I think one of Roger's unique contributions was recognizing, and giving the opportunity for people to emerge as leaders. He was never insecure. He never felt that he had to be 'it', and that he had to have it all. That was the real secret to it. A Jesse Unruh cannot tolerate the emergence of any other leadership. So the people around him are all toadies, they're all just yes-men. They have to do what he says, and he decides. Anybody who emerges is a threat. That's a difference in style of leadership.

You know, I've seen it in the executive branch, also. My theory of management was, I ought to be able to walk away, and the place runs. It couldn't, shouldn't, and wasn't dependent on my being there. At the same time, I had to provide the standards, and the ideals, and the tone--is really what you do. (I've seen various comments vis-a-vis Reagan and the Iran/contra affair, but nowhere have I seen the assertion that he should be held responsible because of the standard of expectancy that he set that made it possible for underlings to feel that they were taking a course of action consistent with the President's policies and standards.) As a bureaucrat, you don't have access to a pencil, or a person, or an office, without another department yea-ing or nay-ing your request. You really have no control over anything. You are given a license to sell ideas somewhere else [outside the department], and have people buy them [the ideas] in order to accomplish the department's mission. I never really realized it, in terms of career objectives, that most of life involves selling in one form or another. I had always disliked the concept of selling. In fact, when I was a kid, trying to sell door to door, I always vowed, that no matter what I did, I didn't want to be a salesman. Then I found out that, no matter what you did in life, you had to be a salesman. If you weren't selling commodities, you were selling ideas, or whatever.

Morris: The picture that emerges, is, here's a political party, whose reason for being is to elect people to office. Yet once elected to office, those people who are elected to office are not only ungrateful, but not very supportive of the party that elected them.

Huff: Yes.

Morris: That's fascinating.

Huff: It's a self-destructive process, basically. The minute you win, you start to lose. For one thing, you--

Morris: Candidate or party, or both?

Huff: Both. The winner, the governor, reaches out, and he starts putting people on the bench that were all party workers and putting them into his administration, and this type of thing, and you're destroying the fabric of the thing that put you there. And you destroy it faster than it can regenerate--basically, I think is what happens.

Morris: Is that inherent in the system, or is there something that could be fixed?

Huff: I'm not sure it can be fixed. I think it's basically inherent. Just the nature of the beast. Of course, you have the 'Chicago solution', where administrative appointees continue to hold party positions, but that's certainly not the right answer to the problem.

Well, Wendell Willkie [1944 Republican presidential nominee] characterized it in a different way, in terms of the presidency. When you're elected, you have this reservoir of good will--and let's apply it to Deukmejian--and if you're going to accomplish anything, you have to dip into that reservoir of good will and use it, and when you do, you're depleting the reservoir, because it doesn't regenerate itself. So you're sowing the seeds of your own destruction by accomplishing legitimate objectives, and weakening the whole system.

Deukmejian's strength today lies in the fact that he has barely dipped in--in three years--into that reservoir and done anything. So he's fairly intact. Other than making a big crusade about the court, what's he ever come out very strongly for, and can anybody really identify him as a crusader, or a pusher, or doer of anything, in terms of the public welfare?

Morris: Is it a parallel?: Reagan came in as governor when he was going to cut back on government, and get--

Huff: Passed the largest tax bill--carried by then State Senator George Deukmejian, incidentally--of any governor in the history of California. Went to Washington, has incurred a greater debt than all his predecessors combined.

Morris: But you would think that he would have used up that reservoir fairly quickly, and yet what did he do--he went on to Washington.

Huff: I don't think he used the reservoir. Not very often. From my limited perspective, I only saw him have to really make a choice, where he just couldn't go with his doctrine, a couple of times in eight years as governor. One time was on withholding, which was the rock on which he stood when he came in. And [Caspar] Weinberger, as director of finance, didn't have the guts to tell him the facts of life. It was only when Verne Orr [currently secretary of the Air Force] came in as Weinberger's successor, and in a matter of days saw where the state was heading, and walked in, and laid it all out for the governor. Reagan left that meeting white as a sheet, and that's when he said: "The sound you hear is the cement cracking around my feet." That's what that was all about.

Morris: You have a piece of that concrete?

Huff: I have a piece of it, yes.

Morris: Oh, that's wonderful.

Huff: That was a joke really.

Morris: No, Ken Hall--?

Huff: He was a deputy, or assistant cabinet secretary, and he was going over to Finance at the time. When they had his going away party all the department directors were invited. He said, "I don't want a gift"--in fact I used that, when I retired, I used that gimmick in a different way. But he reached down and put a carton up by the rostrum, and said: "I was cleaning out my desk." And he had something for every department director, with both a little humor in it, and some significance.

Morris: This he did as assistant cabinet secretary.

Huff: Yes--as assistant agency secretary. We had the agencies. He was the number two guy in the Agriculture and Services Agency.

Mr. Huff Meets Governor Reagan

Huff: I didn't tell you about the meeting of the Reagan cabinet session.

Morris: That was my next question, I didn't want to lose that.

Huff: Okay. There was an issue. It was a technical issue involving income averaging, and the fact that if the law wasn't changed promptly, the constitutional change in the legislative salaries was such--this was when they went up significantly to a new pay-base--that they could all have taken advantage of the income averaging provisions unless it was statutorily negated.

And there was a bill, and it was a question of timing--we were up against April 15 [the tax filing deadline], and the bill had to be in and chaptered [filed, logged and numbered by the secretary of state after being signed by the governor] before the tax deadline for it to apply to the prior tax year. So I got a call from somebody in the governor's office, that said, you know, in twenty minutes we're going to have a meeting of the legislative leadership over this bill, and could I come over and attend the meeting? I said, fine. To me, legislative leadership meant both houses, both parties, the whole bit.

So I go over there. In the old days, when Pat [Brown] was there, we all had easy access into the governor's office. You could roam in, and they didn't have all this security. Under Reagan everything was very tight security, and the big office that Pat used was turned into kind of a board room, with this huge table, and high-backed chairs all around it. And the small private office that Pat used to use--it had sort of a way you could duck back there--which would comfortably hold a half dozen people, became Reagan's office. Pat used to use it when he had a meeting going in the large office, and somebody was in and he had to conduct a second meeting--why, he'd do that.

Anyway, I headed over to the governor's office. I go in, and this fellow Smith was director of finance--a small short, sawed-off guy--

Morris: Gordon Paul Smith?

Huff: Gordon Paul Smith.

Morris: Oh, great. I've never heard a physical description of him.

Huff: Small, sawed off runt, with an ego a mile high--you're going

to get a description like you've never heard before. Our paths converged, and I said, "Are we going to the same meeting?" So we go in, we get cleared through into the big room and then into the small back room.

And the governor was sitting there. Nobody told me I was going to a meeting with the governor. This is fairly early on [in his administration]. Bill Clark [former justice, California Supreme Court; former White House aide; currently secretary of the Interior] was the governor's executive secretary. He was the second to hold that position under Reagan. The governor is sitting there with his feet up on the desk, and the jelly bean jar was on the table behind him. It's very important where the jelly bean jar was. It turned out "legislative leadership" was only Republican leadership.

Morris: Let's see, Bob Monagan?

Huff: It was, let's see McCarthy [John]--maybe Monagan was there. I know the guy from Piedmont, who became protocol officer--[Don Mulford]

Morris: The redhead with the bad temper.

Huff: Yes, from Piedmont. He was there, and quite a bit of staff--Bill Clark. And something was going on upstairs [on the floor of the two houses of the legislature], and it was taking a while for everybody to assemble. So on a couch--let me describe this. The room was like maybe this big [fifteen feet square], the couch over here [against the east window], Reagan's desk is here [toward the center as you enter, but on the west side of the room], table behind it with the jelly beans, some chairs spotted around.

When we finally got everybody in, there were seventeen people in the room, but this was before they all arrived. So I'm sitting over here [northeasterly, against the wall] and Dave Doerr, who was chief consultant to the Assembly Revenue and Taxation Committee, and a Democrat--he and I ended up being the only Democrats in the room. And some staffer came in by the side [west] door, this side door, over here, sort of behind the governor, and he reaches into the jelly bean jar, and takes a jelly bean. And Gordon Paul Smith is sitting over here, on the couch [against the east window], and he gets up, and he gets sort of in a position like this [knees bent, head cocked up], with his big jaw out, and he says, "Toss me one."

So this guy is tossing a jelly bean over the governor's head, and Smith is trying to catch it with his mouth. Well, he did that about three times before he made the catch. And I'm sitting there saying (to myself), "This is how this administration is being run?" Because it was my first insight, the first time I'd ever sat in on one of his [Reagan's] meetings.

Well, finally everybody got there. Bill Clark, big tall guy, arms folded, standing against the wall--he opened the meeting.

Morris: There's no more room to sit down, so he's standing against the wall?

Huff: Yes, I think that was it--well, he was standing, anyway. But there's seventeen people packed in this place. He opens the meeting by saying, "Okay, Martin, you tell us what the problem is." [laughs]

Nobody told me I was going to be thrown the ball, briefing the governor and the whole business! So I did, you know, and explained why the issue was critical, and the whole business. And then we got into a terrible kind of situation. In the state constitution there's a provision that emergency legislation requires a two-thirds vote of both houses on an 'urgency clause' that states why the legislation must go

into effect immediately. The kicker was that the Personal Income Tax was exempted from this rule.

Senator McCarthy from Marin, a veteran Republican leader in the upper house, was sitting there, and timing was critical--or rather, the urgency question, because it involved the Democrats, and how many votes were needed, and whether you're going to get two thirds, and all this kind of business.

I don't recall how it all came about, but I started to make the point that it didn't require an urgency clause. McCarthy didn't know the rules, he didn't know the constitution, so, in effect, he was calling me a liar. And I couldn't dispute a leader of the Republican party in front of the governor, and all that. I didn't feel that was the seemly thing to do. But Dave Doerr jumped in as an independent source, and he confirmed that I was correct.

But this is where--to me--it was interesting. Always before, under Pat Brown, when we got into one of these situations, we were right there through the decision. We reached a point in that meeting --Doerr and I were sent packing--and then they stayed back and made the decision. And there wasn't anybody in the room that knew very much about what they were doing. That told me something about how that administration functioned.

Establishing Income Tax Withholding

Huff: On withholding, I could write a whole book. Someday I'll write the book on withholding [of state income tax], because that was the most spectacular example of how the bureaucracy can function when it has to, and with the right leadership--which was me. But the key to that was--in the first place, withholding had failed by one vote the previous year. Now Reagan had thrown in the sponge. But politically he was in a very difficult position to do anything very overt. From an administrative point of view, I was in a real bind. We had a computer that couldn't handle withholding--

Morris: This is after withholding has passed?

Huff: No, no. Withholding hadn't passed at all. We had a computer that couldn't handle it, we had a physical facility that couldn't handle it. Two biggies. And actually, to make the conversion on the computer we had to go from what was called "DOS" to "Big OS", which is computer jargon. We could get some equipment temporarily to get us over into that mode, but we were still going to have to have six months lead time to get the equipment we actually needed. So that was two computer equipment changes, and a new facility.

Politically, they [the administration] were not in any position to budget for any of this. We did it all with mirrors, but the reason I was able to do it with mirrors is, I got a private audience with His Nibs, Ronald Reagan. I laid out the problems, got General Services and Finance and all the powers that be to understand where the governor was coming from. But there were no fingerprints, and nothing in writing. I was in effect told, go do it.

Morris: That's interesting that, once having made the decision, he didn't balk at what needed to be done to implement it.

Huff: Well, as a bureaucrat, I could have sat on my duff, and said, until there's a law, we can't do a thing. Of course, I would have been the goat when the law was enacted, and I couldn't put it into effect

instantly.

We had to order paper eight months in advance--neck out on that. We did the computer thing. We went through two generations of computers--unplug, plug, tw. le. Very gutsy business. We got the rental of a suitable facility out at Aerojet [in suburban Sacramento]. They were hurting at the time, nationally, on defense contracts, and we negotiated the cheapest lease the state had negotiated in 20 years, and hasn't repeated since then. But it had to be a military secret. For one, because of the political problems, and the other, because it was the only standing facility in Sacramento that could handle the job. If Aerojet knew that we were in that kind of position, they'd have jacked the price way up.

We actually had a better proposition, which is a whole other story, which was to put it out at the old fairgrounds. I don't know if you know about that. The state had the property, it was an ideal location because it was in a low income area, and we were the largest user of temporary help in Sacramento. We could not get the city of Sacramento to go along with the required zoning change, because, they said, it would be 'piecemeal' development; it was a concept they weren't used to. So we got nailed on that. This left us with the Aerojet thing. We negotiated that.

Morris: You negotiated that and--

Huff: Literally, in the middle of the night. Aerojet and General Services. It took all three of us, and I was over at General Services with the Aerojet representative who was authorized to sign off on behalf of the company. We started in the afternoon. At five o'clock, the General Services attorney working on the contract disappeared on us. We discovered that he had gone home! We made him come back because we'd reached agreement, and everybody that had authority to sign was there. Then it was a case of getting it all in writing. And I said no one leaves until this thing is signed off, we are in agreement, and everyone can do it. If we come back tomorrow, somebody will come up with another wrinkle. And I had people standing by at my shop to run the press, to turn out a notice to our people the next morning--which we did. They ran at eleven o'clock at night, and we had a piece of paper on everyone's desk the next morning telling them that, in six weeks, we would be moving. This was a major shock, and we didn't want the employees to hear about it first either by rumor or through the media.

We dismantled a small hospital out at Aerojet, because that's where we had to put the computer, and did all the remodeling and everything (except the executive area--and that's another story), and moved in five or six weeks from the day we signed that contract.

Morris: This was before the concrete had cracked around Reagan's feet?

Huff: Oh, no. The concrete already cracked, but the [legislative] bill was still working its way. This was in May. The bill was signed December 7th or 8th. Right around Pearl Harbor Day. In the middle of the Christmas rush we had to notify--this is the spectacular part of the story. There were some four hundred thousand employers in California. Every one of them had to get a forty-eight page booklet with tables, and instructions, and everything, on how to do all this. That was part of ordering the paper. This thing has a lot of facets to it. We worked very closely with the state printer on it every step of the way. In fact, we took it out of the Department of Employment's

hands, because they had a piece of the action, and theoretically the booklet was coming out of their shop, but that's a whole other story. But they couldn't fight their way out of a paper bag, and--

Morris: Employment has its own print shop that does jobs?

Huff: No, I mean, they had a piece of the law, in terms of the way payroll deductions were handled. It was all reported through them. So, theoretically, the booklet was theirs, but it was, basically, our law, so we just took it out of their hands. They were really bent out of shape.

We got hold of the post office, the regional office, and we got them to put in the postal bulletin that comes out every month, I guess, saying, that sometime down the road, we don't know when, there will be this mass mailing, bulk mailing. You are to treat it as 'yellow-tag' mail (the equivalent of first class mail handling) whenever you get it. We had no idea that it was going to hit in the middle of the Christmas card rush, but we had laid that foundation.

The feds--you can't mandate withholding to the feds, you have to negotiate a contract with them to withhold state taxes from the federal employees in California. I had to fly an attorney back to Washington, and negotiate this contract, so we'd be ready for that. If we had had any idea this thing was going to run down this close--. The state was on the verge of going belly-up cash-flow-wise. What had happened in '58: when Pat Brown came in, they had started a lot of tax reform proposals, and a lot of them dealt with accelerating cash flow. But the personal income tax revenues, you got on April 15th and thereabouts plus two prior installments from high income people who normally had to estimate for the feds. Politically the Brown administration had made a judgment not to push for withholding in '59. It was a wrong political judgment; if they had gotten it in, it wouldn't have been a problem. But it became a major political issue from '59, all the way through enactment in '70.

Cash-flow-wise, that was one of the main problems. The budget was in balance, but the timing of the receiving of the money was not good, and they'd done everything else possible. Withholding was the last thing, and it was a major piece of cash. The controller was getting ready to register warrants--he was actually getting the mechanism ready to go, it was that close. [Registering warrants is a borrowing procedure whereby the banks are asked to honor the warrants, i.e. checks, issued by the state when it is short of cash. The warrants are backed up by the state's promise to redeem them at a later date and with interest. This is a device used only in dire circumstances, and carries with it a lot of negative political mileage for the administration forced to do so. In addition, the state's credit rating would certainly be lowered, thereby raising the cost of borrowing. California had not registered warrants since the depths of The Great Depression in the thirties.]

We identified 34 entities that accounted for a third of the covered employees in the state, including the Bank of America computer service center that handled the payroll for about ten thousand different employers around the state. We identified the person in each one of those entities that was personally responsible for implementing withholding if it was enacted. And we assigned one person in our department to each one of those persons--on a one to one basis--and we kept those people informed as the bill went through. We sent them everything we could, and whenever something happened, we'd get on the

horn and tell them, hey, this is what's going.

At the last minute, in the last week, on Monday, they added a tax bracket--changed all the tables. It would have taken us three normal working days to implement that change. We learned about it at four o'clock and we stayed up all night re-jiggering the tables so that they would be ready to go to print the next day. The next day, the committee dropped back to the original brackets. We'd stayed up all night for nothing. The other side of the coin was that if we hadn't stayed up and the additional bracket had been left in, we'd been in the soup getting the booklets printed.

Morris: Oh, dear. I hope you hadn't thrown out the earlier worksheets.

Huff: No, it was all in 'camera-ready' form, so there was no problem. The basic problem was that we were running out of time. It was already December and if enacted, all employers in the state would be mandated to implement withholding on their employees as of January 1, and it was our job to get the information to them as quickly as possible so that: 1. they could implement in as timely fashion as possible; 2. the state would start benefiting from the much needed cash-flow; and, 3. so that the FTB and I wouldn't be the 'goat'. On Wednesday night we reached the point of no return. We had everything ready, but the bill still had not passed. We had it all ready, and it was actually sitting on the presses--the presses were ready to roll. And if we waited any longer, in terms of these booklets, we couldn't get them out in time. Time had run out.

I went to the nearest pay phone, put a dime in the machine, took a deep breath, and dialed the printing plant, and said, "Turn on the presses and let them roll." (The deep breath was because if anything went wrong, if the bill didn't pass, I could be held personally liable!) The next morning the assembly passed the bill, and they sent it over to the senate just before lunch. The senate had just recessed. The president pro tem had just announced that the legislators could go to lunch. (They had been waiting around all morning for the bill to come over from the assembly.) As soon as he got the word the bill was on its way, the pro tem sent the sergeant-at-arms out to pull everyone back. I called my shop--I have to stop here.

We had these booklets coming off the press. The first bundles we had hand delivered by car to all of our district offices in the state--about 13 district offices. But everybody who delivered was also a trainer. So we sent these trainers out to the district offices, and then as they worked their way back to Sacramento they stopped and trained the district staffs in the new procedures. The booklets and the whole operation was under embargo until the bill was actually passed by the legislature. We also shipped an embargoed bundle of the booklets back to Washington so they could get a head start on implementation.

Okay, we're back to the senate. I called, and I said, don't anybody go to lunch. The 34 'entity messengers' were on alert--stand-by. I sat up in the gallery, and they had gotten all the senators back, and they called the roll. And when the clerk started ripping the tally sheet off, and turned around--he had to face up to the pro tem, who was on a higher level--and he announced the vote in a sotto voice to the pro tem, so that the pro tem could then announce it to the body, I took off like a shot because that was it! I scooted up out of the gallery to Alan Post's office [legislative analyst] which was just down the hall. Previously, I'd gone down and told his

secretary that at some point I may want to come in and use the phone, and not ask permission on anything. And I did, I just went chunking in there, and I made my phone-call, and I said, "Go!".

This was just before lunch. By one o'clock everyone of those thirty-four people responsible for implementing withholding for their employers had a copy of the booklet in their hands. The private sector--by one o'clock. By that afternoon the booklets were going into the mail, by the next morning, Thursday morning, all of them were in the mail - over four hundred thousand 48 page booklets. The bill hadn't even been signed. It was a complex bill--

Morris: Who in the governor's office were you coordinating--

Huff: That's a whole story too. I'm working with the governor's staff; the bill had to go through engrossing, enrolling [a proofing process] and all that kind of business. The governor wasn't even in the state! He was in New York receiving a sports award.

The 'federales' would not officially do anything until they had a copy of the chaptered bill. They would settle for a facsimile sent over the telephone lines. This was in the early days of the machines that you could transmit [telecopiers]--there weren't very many of them around, but they had one in the governor's Washington office. It was a small machine [about 9"x14"x4"]. We, also, had the three hour time difference to deal with.

Morris: The person in Washington.

Huff: In Washington. In Sacramento, we then arranged with the governor's office for us to have access to their machine, so we could transmit from our end.

Morris: In the middle of the night?

Huff: After hours. Okay. We arranged to meet the governor in Los Angeles at the airport to sign the bill. He walked off the breezeway, and we had tables set up, press, and everything, and he signed the bill.

Morris: Are you there?

Huff: I'm there. I made an inadvertent mistake--I didn't realize what I was doing. There's an LA Times newspaper photo with me right behind the governor. The authors of the bill, Gonzales, and everybody surrounded--. When they printed the picture the legislators got cropped out, and I was still there. [laughs] That was bad. I didn't realize what was going on.

But it's not law when the governor signs it. Not very many people understand that the governor's signing does not enact a bill into law. It has to be 'chaptered'. Chaptering is done by the secretary of state. The secretary of state is geared--when alerted properly--to chapter a bill any day of the week, twenty-four hours a day. They have somebody assigned to open up the office, enter the bill, and assign it the next sequential number, called a chapter--and that's what makes it law, that act. (The chapter number and the legislative session in which it was passed represent the permanent source reference to that law, even after it is incorporated into one of the codes.)

All right, a little aside. The treasurer was this gal [Ivy Baker Priest, then treasurer of California and formerly treasurer of the U.S. under Eisenhower], who was making a big fuss--here we'd done all this, you know, we'd moved the whole establishment, gone through two computer upgrades, printed all this stuff, all without any written authorization, and she was making a big fuss about spending nine hundred dollars for ads in the New York papers for some bonds in

connection with the whole business (for cash management). And she wouldn't do it, because it wasn't law yet.

To this day--I think she may have died--she still--

Morris: This is the California treasurer, or the US--

Huff: Yes, treasurer of California. To this day, she doesn't understand that she was snookered, because she actually authorized the ads after the governor signed it, but before it was chaptered. It still wasn't law. [laughs] So that's just a vignette.

Morris: That's a marvelous tale.

Huff: We got it chaptered at six o'clock at night--we had to fly back here and get it chaptered. Then we transmitted a copy of the chaptered bill, in the middle of the night, to the governor's staffer in Washington at his home. (The staffer had carried the machine home so that he wouldn't have to hang around the office for an indeterminate time.) At nine o'clock the next day, the staffer walked it over to US Treasury, and delivered it. But those people really had already started, because we'd been back, negotiated the agreement, and shipped them the booklets in advance. They were really rolling, but they couldn't officially do it until they received the copy of the chaptered bill.

Actually those booklets were in everybody's hands before it was law. We got some complaints on how they got the booklet so fast. But other than that, everybody just took it all for granted. It just happened.

V. CONCLUSION

The Legacies of Roger Kent and Don Bradley

Morris: Why don't we end up with a little piece about what the legacies have been of Don Bradley and Roger Kent. What of their ideas are still useful, and might be helpful to people now thinking of becoming active in politics, either as pro or volunteer?

Huff: Don's greatest contribution, actually, was finding people and developing them, in terms of the pick-and-shovel staff type people. The list is legion of people that he brought on and trained. That process isn't happening, as far as I know.

Morris: Is there still an executive director of the central committee?

Huff: I couldn't even tell you.

Morris: There was one letter I came across, by a man named Jack Tomlinson. Is he one of Don's proteges?

Huff: He's one of them, sure. He was, also, very close to Don on a personal basis. Jack is an attorney, and handled legal matters for both Don and Roger.

Another one of them is the chairman of the Political Science Department at UC Davis.

Morris: Costantini?

Huff: Ed Costantini.

Morris: He was a staff-person?

Huff: He was one of the bright young boys.

Dick Day, became a judge [Sonoma County Municipal Judge], and

now he's back to practising law. Jerry Brown appointed him and then he lost the election.

Bernard Teitelbaum is now a high-paid lobbyist. A gun for hire. I'm sure he operates by his own set of standards, but as an outside observer, I find it hard to see what principles he goes by. From a remark he made, I gather his wife [Rita Gordon] acts as a break on the acceptance of some clients. Unfortunately, I tend to divide the lobbyists into the 'black hats' and the 'white hats'. This is not completely fair. A lot of them wear 'grey hats'! Specifically, in fairness to Bernard, he does have a soft heart. He was the top contributor in helping Don's grandson [John B. G. Bradley, age 10, a member of the San Francisco Boys Chorus] attend the Great Woods music camp this summer in Massachusetts with the Pittsburgh Symphony. I can safely say, that young John wouldn't have made it to camp without Bernard's help.

Jim Keene was the public relations flack and media man. He was a key staffer for Don during campaign times.

Chuck Bosley was a staffer that wound up in Washington and has served as an aide to a number of Congressmen.

Louise Ringwalt was Roger's secretary for years. Her version of Roger's signature was accepted as authentic. When Roger actually signed a letter himself, everyone thought it was forged! Louise ended up in Washington for a number of years, retiring to San Clemente from Alan Cranston's staff.

Of course, Van Dempsey was unique. He represented the continuity. The others came as young guys, right out of graduate school. Whatever attracted them was more transitory, and then they would move on to something else.

Morris: Did they walk in the door, and say, hey, I'd like to work on this year's gubernatorial campaign?

Huff: They'd come anyway you could think about. Sometimes they'd just be working somewhere on a campaign, and somebody would find them, you know. That was part of it, was being able to recognize, and pick somebody up, and put them to work. But Van was part of the on-going continuity.

Morris: Older than Don?

Huff: No, he wasn't older, he was younger than Don. He was my vintage.

Morris: You mentioned last time that Van came out of the labor unions.

Huff: Yes, UAW [United Auto Workers].

Morris: Were other people who came in, were working contacts--

Huff: Well, from time to time, but Van was unique. And part of his uniqueness, of course, was that he had his own independent income, which few knew, but he wasn't dependent during the hard, hungry times. He didn't have to scurry off someplace, and earn some bread.

That was Don's--to me--that, plus his political sagacity, and ability to put campaigns together, and the whole thing.

Morris: Did he and Roger usually think alike on an issue, or did they--

Huff: They were like that [fingers held together]. They could disagree, and they could argue, but they didn't clash. I can't even think of a specific major disagreement. I'm sure there were, but that just wasn't one of my problems. It's just a strange kind of team situation, with invisible bonds, and things just kind of went together.

Hard to explain it. It was kind of a unique phenomenon.

Morris: Well, it sounds like it was very productive, and very satisfying, while it was going on.

Huff: Yes. Roger--I think we've pretty well covered what his contribution was--but he was a unique leader. Everybody loved him, I think, literally loved the man. He had a lot of strange personal characteristics, which partly made him lovable too, I guess. We called him the Glorious Leader, G.L. Have you heard that one?

Morris: No I haven't. That's lovely.

Huff: G.L. And he named me G.T., I was the Glorious Treasurer. We were the only two Gs, G.L. and G.T. But he was Glorious Leader to everybody--I was just G.T. to him. That wasn't a general thing, that was just private between the two of us. Altho I have never smoked (except the second-hand stuff from 'smoke-filled rooms'!!) somewhere I have a cigarette lighter given to me by Roger inscribed with the initials G.T.

I was one of those who spoke at Roger's memorial service. Those remarks sum up how I feel about Roger and his contribution to the democratic process. [copy of remarks attached].

Closing Thoughts

Huff: Another little incident: I sort of got a reputation of being a resource person, I guess, is the best way to describe it. Somehow or other, whenever they needed something, I was able to come up with the appropriate document--in the trunk of the car, or something. I don't know how it all happened, but I would have the bill, or a copy of the Constitution, or the code, or whatever was needed. Have you heard of Bill Orrick?

Morris: Yes.

Huff: Okay. William H. Orrick--W.H.O. Another side story there, was with--are you familiar with Marbury v Madison? Back in--

Morris: I recognize it as one of the landmark decisions. I can't tell you what it says.

Huff: Okay. That had to do, basically, with the outgoing President [John Adams] and the Secretary of State [James Madison], and nominations, and whether the nomination of an outgoing president--I can't give it to you in great precision--it got into a dispute as to whether this guy--. Madison was Secretary of State, and Marbury was the nominee, and Madison refused to deliver the commission, but Adams was already, technically, no longer president. Something like that.

William H. Orrick's nomination [to federal district court] was, I believe, Nixon's last official act. Orrick was a Democrat. How would Richard Nixon be appointing a Democrat as a judge? There was an unwritten rule in California, because we had two Democratic senators--Cranston and Tunney. This meant that you had to have an arrangement, or things wouldn't run too smoothly. So the arrangement, with the Nixon White House, was that every third judge in California was suggested for nomination by Alan Cranston.

Morris: Not Cranston together with Tunney?

Huff: Well, theoretically with Tunney, but Cranston was the senior senator. At that point in time, Orrick was it. And Orrick's name had been processed, he had been nominated by Nixon, and he took the oath in the middle of the night, because the nomination was made the day of

Nixon's resignation.

So they swore him in in the middle of the night to avoid the Marbury v Madison situation. And then--few really knew about the actual swearing-in--but a week later they had a public, pro forma swearing-in ceremony.

Morris: How did we get over onto that?

Huff: Oh, because of this--this goes back to the '60 campaign. Orrick was one of the big advisers, and he always used to call me--he has a very funny voice, and very loud, and a sound sense of humor--and he always used to call me a "student of the Election Code", something like that. Right in the middle of the campaign, and I'm sure Stevenson had no notion of any of this, one of his people showed up with an attache case full of cash, from labor. And he was bringing it out here to be 'laundered', and he wanted to carry it back [as being from California]. [laughs]

Morris: How does Orrick fit in to it?

Huff: Orrick had a lot to say about this particular incident, as did I, since I was the treasurer. He was one of those in on the decision as to how to respond. It was an agonizing thing, to see all that cash. Because the offer was, we were to get a piece of the action, in--

Morris: For your doing the laundry?

Huff: Yes, just a "handling charge", and this kind of business.

Well, this rather high level messenger, who shall remain nameless, is carrying all this cash in his attache case. Stevenson is in town, and there was a big rally down at Washington Square on Columbus Avenue--you know, where the big Catholic Church is located.

Morris: Right.

Huff: The plaza was just jammed with thousands and thousands of people. We'd already refused the request and sent the messenger packing. We thought he went to the airport, and back to Chicago. We left 212 Sutter, and went down to see Stevenson, and here's this guy wandering around with the attache case full of cold cash, in this crowd, you know.

Morris: I remember going to that rally. It was a very sizable--.

Huff: That's the closest I ever came to seeing anything of an unsavory nature in my political career.

Morris: Really. With all the reports one hears how unethical...

Huff: Yes.

Morris: They kept them away from you, or you think they're not as common as advertised?

Huff: A little of both. I had to deal with a few bums, but that was just the usual, a big political pressure operation. The small minority papers that insisted on our placing large ads in their 'rags'. But it was nothing illegal, or anything like that.

Morris: Fascinating. Well, thank you very much. I've absorbed as much as I can today. I think we--

Huff: I'm glad I got to tell my withholding story. I don't tell it very coherently because it's got so many facets to it, and I didn't tell the whole story. But it was a very exciting thing.

Morris: I can believe it. It's a really major operation, to create it and carry it out.

Huff: It was a 'military operation', it really was. I didn't get to talk about the time we did Nixon's taxes. That was another one. I only held two press conferences in sixteen years: one on Nixon's taxes, and

one when I announced my prospective resignation after Governor Jerry Brown allowed AB 939 to become law without his signature [fall 1979]. [laughs] But on Nixon's taxes we literally met--there were only four of us [FTBers] who knew what was going on, because there were all kinds of leaks back in Washington with the IRS, and I was determined we weren't going to have any leaks in our case. We met at airports--Sacramento, LA and Oakland--with Nixon's tax attorney negotiating for him. And we had to get a waiver, signed by Richard and Pat Nixon, to make all of this public when the assessment notices were finally issued, because of the law on confidentiality and the desire of both parties to have everything on top of the table. I still remember sitting in the LA airport looking at the signed waiver, and they hadn't included all the years that they wanted covered for public release.

This attorney was not a political type at all. He was a tax attorney, and it was very difficult for him to 'climb the mountain' into the White House to get the right people to get anything done. When we said, "Hey, the waiver doesn't cover it all," he was just shattered, because he knew what he had to do. So he went back, and he had to get those two signatures, again, to do it right. And he did, but when we met again, he said, "I've got a story to tell you." He said, "You won't believe it, but when I tried to call my contact at the White House, I didn't get through to him. Then he called back, and I wasn't there, and the two secretaries were talking to each other. My secretary was explaining to that counsel's secretary, in the White House, what the problem was. And the secretary back there said, when it got down to the date, 'Do we date this back to the other date?'" [laughs] [One of the Watergate 'incidents' involved the backdating of a document with Nixon's signature that was duly notarized by a California notary public. The then Secretary of State Jerry Brown used that event to 'shoehorn' himself into the Watergate affair in order to develop some publicity for himself.]

Other vignettes missed include:

-My sitting in for Roger Kent on Cap Weinberger's public tv panel and debating the 1960 Democratic reapportionment act with a Republican assemblyman and the Republican national committeeman from California;

-My appearance before the House [U.S. House of Representatives] judiciary sub-committee on the Willis multistate taxation bill;

-The Hale Champion [Governor Pat Brown's Director of Finance] kidnapping and my relation to it;

-An early meeting on the concept of revenue sharing where I sat in Governor Pat Brown's place in a Chicago session with Michigan Governor Romney and Missouri Governor Hearns;

-My George Wallace [Governor of Alabama] incident at the 1966 Conference of Governors;

-My participation on the floor of the State Assembly in the first committee of the whole meeting since adoption of the State Water Plan (subject: income tax withholding; time: early in the first Reagan term);

-My luncheon in Washington, DC with Murray Chotiner, Nixon's 'evil genius'.

-The U.S.-U.K. treaty battle in the U. S. Senate where the FTB ultimately defeated the efforts of the British House of Commons, three presidents (Nixon, Ford and Carter), the U. S. State Department,

the U. S. Treasury Department, both California U. S. Senators, and Governor Jerry Brown;

-The interview in my office with a British Member of Parliament and the chairman of the UK Board of Inland Revenue;

-The 'ghost voting' scandal with respect to AB 939 (1979 General Session) and Governor Jerry Brown allowing the bill to become law without his signature, resulting in my calling a press conference to resign as executive officer;

-My interesting consulting assignments: with the government of Mexico; in opposition to the State of Montana; for the New York State Legislature; and, as an expert witness in court on behalf of the State of Texas; and,

-My four year role in supporting Chief Justice Rose Elizabeth Bird, including two and a half years as treasurer of her campaign committee.

I wouldn't trade my political and governmental experiences for anything, but in the years I have remaining, my hope is to be involved in new and different types of activities. If my first seven years in 'retirement' are any indication, that hope will be fulfilled.

TAPE GUIDE -- Martin Huff

Date of Interview: April 2, 1986

tape 1, side A	1
tape 1, side B	7
tape 2, side A	15
tape 2, side B	20

Date of Interview: April 23, 1986

tape 3, side A	27
tape 3, side B	34
tape 4, side A	40
tape 4, side B	47
tape 5, side A	53
tape 6, side B	59

HE WHO AUDITS CAMPAIGNS RISKS HIS JOB . . .

Tax collector Huff — -- politicians' enemy No. 1

By CAROLYN STREET

If you took a poll of legislators these days, the executive officer of the state Franchise Tax Board, Martin Huff, would win the title of "politicians' enemy number one" hands down. No one has ever questioned Huff's honesty, integrity, efficiency or administrative ability. Yet, the Legislature came extremely close to putting him out of a job at the end of this year's session, and he is under fire from Governor Brown and State Controller Ken Cory, among others.

Ever since Cory assumed office as state controller, he has been maneuvering to remove Huff, and the reasons are not entirely clear. The Franchise Tax Board, which administers the personal and corporate income taxes, consists of the controller, the state director of finance and the head of the state's other major tax-collection agency, the Board of Equalization. Technically, the three-member board establishes policies for Huff to follow, but in reality Huff has made almost all the decisions on how tax returns should be handled since he took office 14 years ago.

Huff, then the elected auditor-controller for the city of Oakland, was appointed to his present job in 1963 by former Governor Edmund G. (Pat) Brown. Huff was virtually given the job for life because the law states that he can be removed only by a two-thirds vote of the state Senate. The purpose of that law is simple — to keep the collection of the income taxes out of politics.

The causes of conflict

For many years, the members of the Franchise Tax Board met annually for a quick, formal meeting as required by law and left things in Huff's hands the rest of the time. But there are some major new factors that have ended the era of non-involvement, and one of them is the presence on the board of two men who don't like to delegate power: Cory and William M. Bennett, chairman of the Board of Equalization. Other reasons:

- The income tax. For many years, the personal income tax was a relatively small element of the state revenue system. But inflation and the progressive nature of the levy have boosted it to the point where one of these days it will surpass the sales tax as the state's top revenue producer. In the current fiscal year, it is estimated that the income tax take will be \$4.3 billion.

- Huff's bureaucratic personality and go-by-the-book attitude. Over the years, Huff has not made it a point to curry favor among legislators. He has remained aloof from politics, although he had been active in the Democratic Party prior to his appointment. As a tax collector, he doesn't bend the rules. "I've been accused of being rigid," he says.

Carolyn Street wrote about the unitary tax in the September issue of the Journal.

"I feel I'm flexible within the law, but I don't bend the law. People don't like that. They want you to be flexible, and that means look-the-other-way if the law infringes on them . . . When it comes to business, I don't have any friends." Huff has also been scrupulous about keeping tax records confidential. (Despite this, there was a leak from his agency several years ago that resulted in newspaper stories revealing that Ronald Reagan had not paid any income tax in one year.)

- Political reform. Under the Political Reform Act of 1974, Huff has the responsibility for auditing campaign contribution reports. He has taken the job seriously and has attempted to audit every filing. This has angered legislators, who feel he is overzealous and anxious to embarrass them. This factor, perhaps more than any other, is responsible for the legislative campaign to remove him. And since Cory has many friends in the Legislature, it is probably also gratifying to him.

- Expense accounts. Legislators receive \$35 a day in expense money during sessions. Huff has called for audits to

This cartoon is credited with turning the Brown Administration around on the advisability of removing Martin Huff from office.

Dennis Ranauff — Sacramento Bee



'Really, Mr. Huff, we're not going to chop off your head; maybe your arm or a hand.'

'What I resent is being treated like any other California taxpayer!'



determine how much of this per-diem income should be taxed by the state. The Legislature passed a bill this year making clear that these funds cannot be taxed.

- **The unitary tax.** Huff is a prime advocate of the so-called unitary system of taxation (See "Brown's quick switch" in last month's *Journal*) and was responsible for the Governor opposing a United States-Great Britain treaty eliminating that form of corporate taxation. That was before Brown went to Japan seeking industrial development. Upon his return, Brown did a turnabout on the unitary tax and accused Huff of supplying him with "flaky data." Late last month, Brown retracted his prior stand before Congress and said the cost of the treaty to California would be far less than the \$125 million estimated by Huff.

- **The Nixon case.** Bennett became upset with Huff because the executive officer refused to engage in a wide-open investigation of possible state income tax violations by Richard Nixon during the Watergate scandal.

Strong enemies, few friends

In short, by merely doing his job and scrupulously trying to maximize state tax collections, Huff has made powerful enemies and few friends. About his only major public defender has been state Senator Nicholas C. Petris of Oakland, a tax specialist and an old friend from Oakland. Petris claims he has never heard anyone charge Huff with anything significant. He says there are forces in the Legislature who want to drop Huff "because of his stand on the per diem problem." Cory, Petris adds, has been "plotting and planning to get rid of Martin Huff for some time."

Petris, among others, is convinced that Cory obtained a commitment at one point from the Governor to go along with a plan that would have the effect of firing Huff. Under this scheme, the Franchise Tax Board would send Huff on a slow boat to China or almost anywhere else he wanted to go out-

side of California to study tax collection. Meanwhile his job would be filled by a temporary executive officer beholden to Bennett, Cory and the Governor. (Brown has a vote on the board through the Director of Finance, who serves at the will of the Governor.) Bennett claims this plan fell apart when the *Sacramento Bee* published a cartoon by Dennis Renault showing the politicians (Brown and Cory) clobbering the honest public servant (Huff) because he wasn't doing their bidding. Brown may have decided at that point that dumping Huff wouldn't be such a wise move after all.

Petris has been telling anyone who would listen that it would be stupid politics to fire Huff because the media would make Huff the hero and make legislators look like sleazy, money-grubbing politicians. Bennett said the firing of Huff would be comparable to Nixon's firing of Archibald Cox as Watergate special prosecutor, but Bennett is given to dramatization.

One reason why the Huff puzzle is difficult to unravel is that those who want him fired often agree with him on specific issues. Cory, for example, has been one of Huff's allies on the unitary-tax question. Bennett wanted the board to take more power and blasted Huff on the Nixon issue but he has defended him to the hilt when others have tried to fire him. The Governor, who turned sour on Huff's unitary-tax stand, is one of the few politicians who supports his audits of campaign reports.

It is probably the campaign-contribution audits that have produced the most difficulty for Huff. The Legislature went so far as to put in this year's state budget a provision limiting the amount of audits the Franchise Tax Board could undertake. Brown vetoed that language from the budget, and Legislative Counsel Bion Gregory offered an opinion that Brown's act was unconstitutional because the Governor is restricted to reducing or eliminating appropriations. In a bizarre legal step, Cory on September 27th voted as a member of the Franchise Tax Board to institute action against himself as controller, so that the conflict between Brown and the Legislature on this point could be adjudicated.

Cory, as controller, had been asked by the Legislature to withhold funds for the full audits. During the dispute, Senate Democratic leader David Roberti charged that Huff's political-reform division had become "a political police force, for which Huff should be censured." Huff subsequently raised the issue of expense-account taxation. That, Huff said, "was like pouring gasoline on a fire."

Where the power lies

Cory has made it clear that he wants Huff's power taken back by the board. "At the heart of what's going on here," Cory told Huff, "is that it's your function to serve the board, not ours to serve you." Huff responds that he realizes his power is delegated. "We're trying to do our job . . . What authority they delegate, I have. And that's what I have problems with. A group of people cannot manage anything, they can only set broad policy. There's no battle here; it's a one-way attack. All we do is serve the board, and they send out confused, conflicting messages."

One of the problems is that the board has delegated so much authority for so long that it is a practical impossibility to take it back. Furthermore, the law requires that all meetings with Huff on personnel matters must be held in public. And that has turned out to be an important weapon for Huff.

When Cory goes on the attack, Huff asks for specific complaints. Cory has thus far complained primarily of relatively minor matters. At one meeting, Cory accused Huff of chilling a study of Franchise Tax Board operations by the auditor general, a study requested by Assemblyman Willie Brown, head of the Lower House revenue and taxation

committee. The controller said Huff's staff was making it difficult for the auditor general's staff to get information, but by that time Huff said he had solved all the problems. Huff said later that "the charges seemed like small things blown way out of proportion, as if he were looking for something . . . He should have complained in a timely manner, instead of storing them up like a little kid." He added that it was difficult to get feedback "in an atmosphere of pure hostility."

The man who often gets put in the middle is the deputy director of finance, Sid McCausland, who usually represents Finance Director Roy Bell (and thus the Governor) on the panel. McCausland claims Huff rarely asks the board for "advice and consent" on agency activities. Huff won't give board members information on tax returns without written justification, and overall security at the agency is very tight, according to McCausland. Assemblyman Brown said he requested the audit because he couldn't get information he wanted on corporate taxation. Governor Brown accused Huff of having unitary-tax information locked up in a "black box."

Last February, Bennett joined with Cory to chip away at Huff's authority — over the opposition of Bell and McCausland. The board reclaimed the right to appoint top staff members and to examine tax returns, but McCausland claims this has united staff members behind Huff. "They know their boss is a tyrant," says McCausland, "but they also know he's consistent and won't pull the rug out from under any one of them."

The Brown Administration went over to the other side when Brown started a heavy love affair with the business community. Huff has been at war with corporate America

for many years, fighting for every tax dollar he can possibly corral. He established field offices in Chicago and New York to go after lost taxes from the *Fortune* magazine top-500 businesses. The auditor general has estimated that the state has collected \$17.50 in taxes for every dollar spent on these field offices. (Huff says the figure is conservative.) Huff is recognized as the national leader in the advocacy of the unitary tax, which the Governor now opposes and multinational corporations have long detested.

Cory's ill-fated attack

Brown's disaffection with Huff on the unitary tax gave Huff's other enemies the courage to act. Cory tried to engineer the "get-Huff" move on the board and was surprised when it failed. He appealed to Huff's harshest critic up to that time, Bennett, and came up empty-handed. Bennett, as a consumer advocate, has been at war with the business community even longer than Huff. "Brown is going to give your head to Cory on a platter," Bennett recalls he told Huff, "but I'm going to try to save you." Huff says of Bennett: "I understand where Bennett's coming from. He likes publicity. That's how he functions . . . But when it comes down to the nitty-gritty, he's in the right corner."

Failing with Bennett, Cory expected a vote from Brown's finance director. According to McCausland, Cory thought he had the Administration's backing for a plan to send Huff on a long-term trip. Cory later gave McCausland "strong vibes that he thought he had a commitment from the Administration, a commitment he thought had been broken." Was there a commitment, and if so was it broken because of the Renault cartoon? In any event, Bennett and McCausland left Cory out on a limb. And Huff's job was secure — at least for another few days.

Legislators then became involved in a variety of moves designed to curb Huff's authority or remove him. Willie Brown was a key figure. He claims Huff plays too large an "adversarial role" in government, and he feels Huff is uncooperative in providing the Legislature with unbiased figures on bills when Huff's position differs from Brown's. The anti-Huff proposal at one point was inserted into a measure providing an exemption from unitary taxation for the Arabian-American Oil Company. Primarily through Petris' efforts, Huff was saved again.

During the debate, it became clear that legislators were primarily upset about the detailed auditing done by Huff's crew on campaign reports. Ironically, Huff had tried to resist the placement of the auditing function in his agency, because he knew it would cause him a great deal of trouble. But it was given to the Franchise Tax Board anyhow. Petris feels that anyone given that function would have been a loser, "because he has to deal with 120 prima donnas, not counting all the other prima donnas out there who want to replace us."

The chance of survival

Can Huff survive, and, if so, for how long? Huff says he would have left a year ago if he had seen the series of political tornadoes coming. Huff claims he doesn't worry about what's happening. "I can look at it as a detached observer and wonder at all this foolishness. I do the best I can. I sleep well at night."

The fight over Martin Huff is far from over. The Legislature obtained a new weapon on the last day of the session when Assemblyman Dan Boatwright received an opinion from the legislative counsel that the two-thirds Senate vote required to remove Huff may not be constitutional. Stripped of that special protection, how long can a tax collector hold out against the might of the state's political establishment?

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THOMAS R. HOEBER, Publisher



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IMPROVING THE CALIFORNIA PERSONAL INCOME TAX

Martin Huff

California's Personal Income Tax Law is confusing, difficult to administer, and unfair.

In part, this results from the state's policy of selective, but substantial, conformity to the U.S. Internal Revenue Code. Like the federal code, state law has become a patchwork of exclusions, deductions, exemptions, credits, and special rates.

What can we do to reform our state law? Ideally, we should forsake the federal model, scrap our present law and design a new one. Realistically, we are limited to working within the framework of existing law, to make it simpler and more equitable.

The first step is to outline the key features of a sound law.

- It should be understandable in concept and operation.
- It should be as simple as economic realities will permit.
- Revisions should be measured against overall fairness, taxpayer understanding, and relative ease of administration.
- Where there is a conflict between fairness to a particular sector and overall fairness, the latter should prevail.

The second step is to set forth some fundamental tenets.

Editor's Note: This is the seventh in a series of 15 articles exploring California tax issues. In this article, Martin Huff, executive officer of the California State Franchise Tax Board, lists features of a sound personal income tax law, uses them to evaluate California's present system, and suggests specific improvements. This series is co-sponsored by Courses by Newspaper, a project of University Extension, University of California, San Diego, and the California Tax Reform Association Foundation. It is funded by the California Council for the Humanities in Public Policy.

- There is a need for progressivity, i.e., a scale of increasing marginal tax rates as income increases ("ability to pay").
- Income is income. This statement of the obvious strikes at one of the most critical defects in the present system, i.e., the notion that some kinds of income should be excluded from the tax base.
- Those advocating loopholes (preferences) should be required to support their case with objective factual information.

The third step is to dispel two myths. One myth is that blind conformity to federal exclusions, deductions, and exemptions is desirable. In reality, conformity can mean inequity. The dollar benefits of special tax breaks are distributed unevenly among taxpayers. The result is that a disproportionate share of the tax burden is shifted to middle-income taxpayers.

Furthermore, conformity usually means complexity. The greater the number of special provisions, the more difficult it becomes for taxpayers to understand and comply with the law and for administrators to interpret and enforce it.

The second myth is that state tax law can be used to bolster the economy or change society. It is true that federal tax law, with its high rates, may affect taxpayers' economic decisions. But California's personal income tax rates of 1 to 11 percent are too low to induce taxpayers to alter their choices. When taxpayers' actions are motivated by federal law, similar state provisions reward those actions with windfall gains.

Taking these factors into consideration, there are six reforms that would make the present law both simpler and more equitable.

First, eliminate preferential treatment of capital gains. The capital gains provisions contribute the most to the complexity of our tax laws. They are also unfair: they favor investment over labor. The person with investment income can exclude

as much as 50 per cent of the gain from tax. The person with only salary income, however, is taxed on every dollar earned. The amount of tax should be a function of ability to pay, which is based on the amount of income, not its source.

Second, include transfer payments in taxable income, excluding that portion previously taxed to the recipient. The "ability to pay" of a person with a \$20,000 income, part of which is from unemployment insurance, welfare or social security, is the same as that of a person with \$20,000 income entirely from wages.

Third, eliminate deductions and credits for homeownership, rental, and other normal personal expenditures. Activities subsidized through special deductions and credits range from homeownership to the purchase of solar energy devices. All may be desirable from an economic or social standpoint, but state personal income tax law is not a good tool for economic or social engineering. Its purpose should be to generate revenue for needed services. Taxable income should be reduced only by the cost of producing income or the costs of uncontrollable, catastrophic events which drastically reduce ability to pay.

Fourth, substitute tax credits for deductions. Deductions favor high income taxpayers, whereas credits benefit taxpayers equally.

Fifth, liberalize the income averaging provisions. We extract a higher tax from persons whose income fluctuates greatly from year to year. This inequity should be minimized.

And finally, increase the breadth and number of tax brackets. If special tax breaks are eliminated, needed revenues can be generated at lower rates. Taxpayers would not move so rapidly into higher tax rates.

Adoption of the above suggestions would result in a more understandable and more equitable California Personal Income Tax Law.

The views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the members of the Board to which Mr. Huff reports.

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Next Week: Perry Shapiro discusses the effects of inflation on California's three major taxes: property, sales, and income.

ROGER KENT

6 June 1906 - 16 May 1980

Memorial Service

Kentfield, California

Roger Kent had class - in a very special way, but he was as comfortable as an old shoe. His class was marked by his style, his courage, and his leadership. The old shoe mark was evidenced by many things - by the bulging, dog-eared wallet he carried while a pile of new ones languished in the bureau at home; by the old Plymouth he loved to bounce around in; by the outdated Tux with the crumpled top hat that he wore gloriously to Pat Brown's first Inaugural Ball; and the most constant symbol of all - that battered old satchel that went with him whenever he traveled.

The first time I met that satchel was almost the last time. We were all scrambling out of the airport upon arrival at the Coronado Hotel for a Democratic State Central Executive Committee meeting. I was traveling light with one small bag, so offered to help Roger with his gear. I found later that he seldom let anyone else carry that particular piece of luggage and I soon discovered why. When we reached the hotel desk, in juggling bags, the satchel slipped and hit the floor with a clinky thud. The drop was only a few inches, but Roger was on top of it in an instant with a look of total consternation on his face. I apologized, but was a little bewildered by all the fuss. I'll tell you this. If his precious bottled goods had been smashed, I wouldn't be standing here today.

When I was considerably younger, my standard for 'old age' was measured by those who continually talked of the 'good old days'. Well I guess I know how to classify myself, now, because the fifties and early sixties in Northern California Democratic politics were indeed the GOOD OLD DAYS - or as Libby so eloquently put it in her article on Roger - the Golden Age of Democratic Politics in California.

The Roger Kent style and motivation can all be summed up in a simple, but very hard hitting six word statement that was put into the mouth of an Arabian the other night in the TV drama "Death of a Princess". When queried by the reporter as to why the Princess had broken out of her customs and traditions in the face of a life style that provided every possible creature comfort, he replied, "She wanted 'to be rather than to have". I think that is a very apt characterization of what Roger stood for and his philosophy of life.

Roger and Libby and Don were the nucleus of one of the great political families of all time. There was a special ambience to it all. By some sort of conscious and natural selection, a group of people devoted to making our political system work were brought together. Those who stayed all seemed to share a commonality of interest with respect to the issues of the times. For this reason, very little energy had to be devoted to arguing the issues within the group. Those who stayed were by and large primarily devoted to the political process against a liberal philosophical set. Single issue 'types' didn't survive long in that milieu.

It can all be summed up in one phrase: Our Glorious Leader and the 212 Gang. While the old 212 Headquarters has been long gone, and while Roger is newly gone in body, they are both with us today and will be for all time.

Martin Huff
May 22, 1980

INDEX -- Martin Huff*

- Aerojet General Co., 55
 Agriculture and Services Agency, 7
 Alameda County
 politics in, 11, 13-14, 25-26, 32, 36, 48
 Institutions Commission, 16-17
 Allen, John, 25
 appointments
 exempt, 7-8
 judicial, 13, 47-48, 59, 60-62
 Arnold, Stan, 24
 automobile emission controls,
 legislation, 12

 ballot measures, initiative, 42-43
 Bank of America, 56
 Bay Conservation and Development
 Commission (BCDC), 12
 Betts, Bert, 38
 Bird, Rose, 48, 64
 Bjornson, Anga, 13
 Black, Hugo, 3-4
 Bosley, Chuck, 60
 Bradley, Don, 10, 28, 30, 37, 50, 59-60
 Bradley, John B. G., 60
 Bradley, Tom, 40
 Brown, Edmund G., Jr. (Jerry), 13, 47-48, 60, 63, 64
 Brown, Edmund G., Sr. (Pat), 1, 9, 14-15, 24, 26, 28-29, 34, 46-47, 52, 54

 cabinet, governor's, 7-8, 52-53
 California Democratic Council, 1, 29-31, 36, 41
 California Republican Assembly, 30-31
 campaign finance, 22-23, 27, 34-35, 38, 62-63
 campaign management, 38-39, 41
 Carpenter, Paul B., 33
 Chamber of Commerce, 2
 Champion, Hale, 1, 8-15, 46, 83,
 Christopher, George, 2
 civil service, 45-46
 Clark, William P., 53
 Coke, Earl J., 7-8
 Collier, Randolph, 11
 computers, 55, 56
 Congress, U.S., 12, 25
 constitution, 2, 8, 24, 42-43, 45, 52, 53
 Copertini, Cyr Mullens, 12-13, 40
 Costantini, Ed, 59
 courts, 47-48
 Cranston, Alan, 30, 31, 36, 43-44, 46, 61
 crossfiling, 24, 32
 Crown, Bob, 13

 Day, Dick, 59
 Democratic National Convention, 1960, 41,
 California delegation, 14-15, 28-29
 Democratic party. Democrats, 7, 19, 30, 40-42, 47

*Unless otherwise noted, government entities and locations refer to California.

- Democratic State Central Committee,
 1, 20, 27-29, 31, 36, 47
 endorsements, 13-14
 field work, 6-7, 25
 young turks, 11, 21, 22
 finances, 22-23, 27, 48-49
 southern California, 23-24, 26-27
- Dempsey, Betty, 6
- Dempsey, Van, 6-7, 23, 25, 36, 41, 60
- Deukmejian, George, 40, 51
- Dieden, Leonard, 48
- Dodge plant, San Leandro, 4-5
- Doerr, Dave, 54-55
- elections, special, 7, 24
- elections
 1946, 20, 32
 1948, 19-20, 42
 1952, 29-30
 1954, 25, 30
 1958, 7, 11, 13, 25-26, 38-40
 1960, 13-15, 27-29, 34-35, 62
 1964, 10, 36-37
 1966, 47
 1986, 40
- Employment, Department of, 55-56
- Engle, Clair, 32, 36-37
- Engle, Lu, 32
- environmental protection
 legislation, 12
- Equalization, Board of, 32-33, 44-46
- ethics, 2, 7-9, 35, 46, 62, 64
- Fazio, Vic, 10
- federal government, 56, 57, 59, 61-63
- Fifteenth Assembly District, 11, 26
- Finance, Department of, 8, 54
- Franchise Tax Board, 7-8, 12, 43, 44, 46, 63, 64
 and income tax withholding, 54-59
- Franchise Tax Commissioner, 45-46
- Gatov, Elizabeth, 23, 28
- General Services, Department of, 8, 54-55
- Gonsalves, Joe A., 58
- governor, office of (Edmund G. Brown, Sr.), 1
- governor, office of (Ronald Reagan), 8-9, 58-59, 111
- Governor's Conference, 1966, 1, 9
- Graves, Richard, 25-26
- Hall, Kenneth F., 52
- Harris, Joseph, 42
- highways, 47
- Holmdahl, John, 13-14, 21
- Houlihan, John, 2, 16
- Huff, Anne, 6, 18, 19, 25, 29, 36, 41, 43
- Huff sons, 3, 4, 5, 13, 26-27
- Humphrey, Hubert, 1, 15
- Independent Progressive Party (IPP), 20, 42,
- inflation, 1970s, 43
- initiative measures, 42-43
- Internal Revenue Service, U.S., 63
- Jarvis-Gann tax limitation
 initiative (Prop. 13, 1978), 43
- Johnson, Ross, 43
- judges, appointment of, 13, 48, 59, 61-62
- Keene, Jim, 61
- Kefauver, Estes, 14-15
- Kennedy, John F., 13-15, 28-29, 34
- Kennedy, Robert, 34
- Kent, Roger, 23, 28, 33, 36, 37, 47, 50, 60-61
- Knight Goodwin, 8
- Knowland, Joseph, 16-17
- Knox, John T., 9

- labor unions, 6-7, 19, 20, 60
legislature, legislation, 10-12,
43, 46, 47, 52, 54, 56-57, 63
staff, 10, 35
politics and, 13, 23-24, 33-34
salaries, 52
Life magazine, 1, 4
Lincoln, Luther (Abe), 11, 26
lobbying, lobbyists, 12, 25, 34, 60
loyalty oath, 6
Lynch, John, 44
- Malone, Bill, 12
McAteer, Eugene, 12
McCarthy, John, 53, 54
McColgan, Charles J., 45-46
media, 1, 4, 14-15, 16, 35, 58, 62
merchant marine, 18-19
Mesple, Frank, 12
Miller, George, Jr., 10-11, 24, 30,
47
Miller, George, III, 41
Miller, George P., 25
Morse, Wayne, 29-30
Mulford, Don, 53
Munnell, William, 23
Murphy, George, 40
- Nevins, Dick, 31
Nixon, Pat, 63
Nixon, Richard M., 10, 34, 61, 62,
63
- Oakland
auditor-controller, 13, 16-17, 21-
22, 46
city council, 5, 21-22
mayor, 2, 5, 16, 21
See also Alameda County
O'Brien, Larry, 14
Odegard, Peter, 6
O'Gara, Gerald, 15
one man-one vote, 24
- Orr, Verne, 51
Orrick, William H., 61-62
Osborne, Bob, 21
O'Sullivan, Virgil, 24
- patronage, 35, 43
Pearson, Osborne A., 14, 20
Peterson Tractor Co., 4-5
Petris, Nick, 9-13, 21, 26
polls, political, 39-40
Priest, Ivy Baker, 58-59
public administration, 22
Public Works, Department of, 9
Purchio, John J., 48
- Rattigan, Joe, 24
Reagan, Ronald, 38, 77-78
as governor, 2, 7, 47, 53-54, 58
as president, 50, 51
Reed, Dana, 9
Reilly, George, 45
Reinhardt, Stephen, 32
renters, 43
Republican party, Republicans, 8,
21, 25, 30, 40, 43, 54, 61,
Rice, George, 13
Ringwalt, Louise, 60
Rishell, Clifford, 21
Rogers, Will, Jr., 20
Roosevelt, Eleanor, 28
Rothenberg, Martin, 21
- Sacramento State University, 5-6
Salinger, Pierre, 10, 37
San Francisco, politics in, 12
Secret Service, 13
senate, California, 24-25
secretary of state, office of, 58
single-issue politics, 41-43, 83
Sloss, Nancy, 31
Smith, Gordon Paul, 52-53
Smith, Joe, 5
Snyder, Liz, 24, 29
Stevenson, Adlai, 15, 28, 30, 62,

Stiern, Walter, 11
Strathman, Earl, 17
Sullivan, Ray, 35
supreme court, 48

tax reform, property, 9, 24-25, 43
tax withholding, 51-59, 62, 63
taxation, taxes, 43, 45-46, 51, 54,
56
Teale, Stephen, 24
Teitelbaum, Bernard, 60
Tobriner, Matt, 48
Toll Bridge Authority, 8-9
Tomlinson, Jack, 59
treasurer, office of, 58
Tribune, Oakland, 16
Tripp, Pete, 21
Truman, Harry, 20
Tunney, John, 61

United Auto Workers, 7
University of California, Berkeley,
6, 26
Extension, 19
Unruh, Jesse M., 14, 23, 33-34

volunteers, in politics, 31, 35,
36, 38, 40
voters, voting, 34-35, 39-41

Warren, Charles, 48
Warschaw, Carmen, 33
Weinberger, Caspar, 46, 51
Whitecotton, Dr., 17
Williams, Bob, 8
women, and politics, 29, 36
World War II, experiences during,
18-19

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