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Nicholas C. Petris

DEAN OF THE CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE, 1958-1996

Introductions by
Martin Huff
and
Paul Manolis

Interviews Conducted by
Gabrielle Morris
1993-1994

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State Senator, attorney

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Introductions by Martin Huff, former executive director, California Franchise Tax Board, and Paul Manolis, former executive editor, *Oakland Tribune*.

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APPRECIATION FROM HIS ALMA MATER

I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to take part in this wonderful celebration honoring Senator Nicholas Petris.

Tonight I speak not just for the University of California, Berkeley, but for all of higher education when I say we have never had a better friend in the state capitol.

Nick Petris fought for higher education not just when colleges and universities were at the peak of their popularity, not just when he was sure to win a few votes, not just when he could claim the limelight. No, Senator Petris has been a friend to California's colleges and universities ever since he was elected to the legislature thirty-seven years ago. He has been a friend in the good times and the difficult times.

No lawmaker in California has a deeper understanding of the promise of higher education than Senator Petris. And no one has a better grasp of the challenges ahead of us. Nick Petris realizes that community colleges, state universities, and University of California campuses are preparing the women and men who will lead California in the twenty-first century. Nick Petris also understands that research at the University of California fuels the state economy, improves the world around us, and enriches our lives.

As chairman of the Senate Budget Subcommittee on Education, he has battled tirelessly and courageously for state funding for higher education. He has always believed that qualified students should not be denied higher education at public campuses simply because they cannot afford the fees. I am always inspired by his fight against rising student fees, which is nothing less than heroic.

Tonight, as a humble measure of our great esteem for Senator Petris, I want to present two gifts.

First, I want to present this book, *In Pursuit of Ideas: A Year in the Life of the University of California*. This is not only a book about the University of California. Many of the achievements shown on these pages came about only as a result of the tremendous support from Nick Petris.

Second, I want to present reproductions of ancient jumping weights. Before I present them, I want to give you a little background. Nick Petris has supported our university's excavation at ancient Nemea right from the start. He has helped raise money for the excavation and arranged recognition from the state legislature.

Under the guidance of Professor Stephen Miller, his project now boasts many amazing finds--a race track, a sacred grove of cypress trees, the oldest athletic locker room, to name a few. Next June, women, men and children from around the world will race at the ancient athletic stadium at Nemea in a revival of the Panhellenic Games.

I am going to run there next June; nothing can keep me away from this once-in-a-lifetime event. I hope to see you on the track, Nick.

Let me now read the inscription on these weights, which says: "These lead jumping weights are reproductions of an ancient halter of about 500 B.C. which was discovered in the University of California excavations at Nemea in Greece. They are presented to Nicholas C. Petris in recognition of his many years of service to our community by Chancellor Chang-Lin Tien on December 2, 1995."

That completes the inscription. I want to add just one thing. From the bottom of my heart, thank you, Senator Petris.

Chang-Lin Tien, Chancellor
University of California, Berkeley

Dinner honoring Senator Nicholas C. Petris
Oakland, California
December 2, 1995

INTRODUCTION--Legislative Service: 1959-1996

At a time when the media seems to delight in denigrating government in general and legislators in particular, Nick Petris is a role model for future politicians. Nick Petris is an extraordinary human being. His record is a living example of what is fine about the public service. That record justified Adlai Stevenson's admonition to a mother inquiring about a career for her son. He said, in effect, that there is no higher calling than that of a politician under a democratic form of government.

Nick's immigrant parents instilled in their first-generation, Greek-American son a virtually unequaled passion for the roots of democracy in ancient Greece, coupled with its more advanced exemplar in the United States. That spirit and inspiration has been the guiding light of Nick's political career.

In 1958, Nick was the first American of Greek extraction to be elected to the California legislature. In 1966, he advanced from the state assembly to the state senate. In terms of continuous service, he is now the dean of the California legislature. If anyone had the temerity to forecast in 1958 that he would outlast his seniors and all of his contemporaries to become the dean, that person would have been laughed out of the room. The loudest laughter of all would have come from Nick.

In the early 1950s, Nick and I were among the young Democrats in the then-Fifteenth Assembly District; the party had run a series of unsuccessful campaigns against the incumbent Republican, Luther A. (Abe) Lincoln, who was also speaker of the assembly. Three factors made the Fifteenth Assembly District election different in 1958: (1) Lincoln decided not to run for re-election, (2) the Great Switch occurred when U.S. Senator Bill Knowland decided to run for governor and forced Governor Goodwin Knight to run for the U.S. Senate, and (3) a young East Oakland attorney named Nicholas C. Petris was persuaded to run for the state assembly. In addition to being the best qualified candidate (which isn't always enough!), Nick ran a good campaign, and indirectly benefited from Pat Brown's defeat of Bill Knowland.

The first few re-election campaigns after 1958 were easy runs for Nick--the opposing candidates were weak. When Nick was faced with his first hard-contested election, a few old-timers started to research his legislative record in preparation for a tough campaign. Initial research brought to light no major bills that had been "tombstoned" in Petris's name. (To "tombstone" a bill is to name it after its principal author[s].) Knowing that he had introduced many bills proposing solutions to difficult social problems, this was at first very baffling. The reason soon came to light.

The senator has an uncanny ability to identify a social problem long before his peers are even aware of its existence (let alone thinking about a possible solution). After identifying a problem, doing research on its origin and history, checking what other jurisdictions had or had not done, and mulling over in his mind possible alternatives, Nick would proceed to develop a proposed solution and have it put into legislative bill form. The initial reaction of the "establishment" on both sides of the aisle was to ignore such bills and let them "die" in committee. If he felt strongly about the issue, and knew that he was on the right track as to its solution, Nick was persistent. Despite continued rebuffs and "suggestions" from colleagues to drop the bill, he would continue to introduce it in successive legislative sessions. Eventually the problem he had identified would become generally recognized. At this juncture, being the author of the solution would then loom as a major political asset.

Nick's interest has always been in getting the legislation enacted rather than pride of authorship. Invariably, a peer (usually, but not always, senior in tenure) would express a desire to carry one of his bills in order to get the political credit. If he thought it would enhance the chances of passage, Nick would typically hand the bill to the supplicant without batting an eye. The best example of this was the Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC). The year Nick's many-times-introduced bill came viable, Senator Eugene McAteer was planning to run for mayor of San Francisco and wanted the credit for saving the bay. Nick handed the bill to him on a silver platter.

The 1991 Oakland fire storm was a defining moment for Nick and his wife, Anna. They were at a wedding in New Jersey at the time of the fire. They lost everything except the clothes on their backs and the contents of their suitcases. They were fortunate in one respect--the builder still had the original plans for their house. After many months of apartment living, Nick and Anna are now comfortably ensconced in their fire insurance-covered replacement home. Nick's extensive book collection has been only partially replaced. A good start has been made, thanks to special efforts by friends, supporters, and his fellow legislators.

Many of the Petris treasures that were lost have been replaced. A tragic exception was Nick's six-by-nine inch, three-ring notebooks that he had been creating throughout his political career. They represented an eclectic collection of thoughts, opinions, ideas, magazine articles, newspaper clips, cartoons, poems, photos, and even postage stamps. Their vein ranged from deadly serious to wildly funny. These journals were not a diary in the generally accepted sense, but did reveal much about the man and his philosophy. The notebooks numbered over two dozen at the time of the fire. One was out on loan at the time, and therefore the only one not destroyed. This oral history is an attempt to capture in print, for the benefit of posterity, Nick's role in California history, as well as his philosophy, ideas, opinions, defeats and accomplishments as he might have described them in those notebooks.

Nick was a pioneer pollution fighter. As early as 1969, he introduced a bill (SB 778) outlawing the internal combustion engine as a means of automotive propulsion. To no avail, he doggedly introduced his bill session after session. He made U.S. political history when he caused bills identical to his to be introduced in four state legislatures simultaneously. Nick has a signed and framed blow-up of a political cartoon depicting him as Don Quixote on a horse tilting at the internal combustion engine (shown hanging on the end of his lance). It was an idea whose time had not come. Considering the serious economic and environmental problems that are the direct outcome of the massive use of the internal combustion engine on our highways, the nation would be better off today if that legislation had been successful. It was not all a lost cause, however. Focusing the minds of members of the legislature and the public on the issue of air pollution has resulted in other environmental protection legislation designed to mitigate the pollution problem.

In another crucial area, Nick has established an exemplary record in his passion for defending the Bill of Rights, especially when such a defense was not popular at the time.

In one of his sadder lost causes, Nick campaigned up and down the state in 1986 on behalf of Chief Justice Rose E. Bird in the vicious, but successful campaign to unseat her. The very emotional issue of the death penalty was used to gain a majority of No votes against her. This was seen by many as a smokescreen created by the business establishment in order to achieve their real objective of having a person compliant to their perceived needs sitting in the chief justice's chair. The California Supreme Court's record on business issues since Bird's ouster bears this out.

The public higher-education establishments hold Nick in especially high esteem. Throughout his legislative career, he has been a staunch defender of the state's three great higher education systems. As a Cal Berkeley alumnus, he is especially revered by the administration of that campus.

Raised in West Oakland, this city boy emerged in the legislature as the lead proponent of improving working conditions for farm labor.

Nick is firmly established as the conscience of the California legislature and is its preeminent orator. He is an electrifying speaker. His knowledge of history is legendary. His style, choice of words and phrases, and the manner in which he delivers his messages are all inspiring. When Nick rises on the floor of the senate to speak, side conversations cease. Even his most ardent political opponents stop to listen. Whenever I hear Nick make a public speech, he invariably puts me on the edge of my chair, and I hang on every word.

Because of term limits, in 1996, Nick will step down as state senator on the first Monday in December. He is the living embodiment of why the

term-limit policy is short-sighted, and will do irreparable damage to the body public. His loss will be felt on both sides of the aisle.

Nick was never corrupted by the system--intellectually, morally, or financially. Pomposity and arrogance are foreign to him. He has never lost the common touch. His thirty-eight years of service to the state and the people of California leave a legacy of integrity and dedicated public service that will be difficult to exceed.

Martin Huff,
former executive director,
California Franchise Tax Board

March 14, 1996
Walnut Creek, California

INTRODUCTION--a Greek-American Native Son

My association with Nick goes back to his family in Oakland and my family in Sacramento. Actually, I've known his wife, Anna, even longer than I've known Nick. You can see her in the picture of my christening, in her mother's arms, even though she is a month younger.

As an introduction, in the 1920s and 1930s, there were two major organizations of Greek immigrants in this country: the AHEPA, the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association, and the GAPA, the Greek American Progressive Association. The AHEPA was oriented toward assimilating the Greek immigrants into the American environment, to teaching English, to urging them to participate in American life, and is still the largest Greek American organization. The GAPA, on the other hand, prided itself on being a national religious organization. Its philosophy was the maintenance of Greek language, traditions; it was an organization that put great emphasis on Greekness, for want of a better word.

Both our families were very active in the GAPA. Our mothers were both president of their local women's chapter, and so they became friends. Nick was the president of the junior GAPA chapter here in Oakland, and I was president and very active in the chapter in Sacramento. Even the junior chapters spoke Greek at our meetings. So Nick's affinity with things Greek goes back very early, because he was raised in the GAPA milieu in a family that was very strongly committed to the ideals of this organization and this culture.

While Nick was a student at UC Berkeley, he was one of the founders in 1941-42 of Epsilon Phi Sigma, which is the Hellenic students association at Berkeley. Epsilon Phi Sigma is still an ASUC group on campus. Nick was one of the very first presidents, as was Paul Christopolous, who has Blue and Gold in his veins. Paul was a contemporary of Nick's in college and was the best man at Nick's wedding.

In spite of all Nick's knowledge of Greek language and customs, he was sent by the army to learn Japanese when he enlisted in World War II. When the war ended, instead of being sent to Japan in the occupational forces, he was sent to Greece. Nick took a movie camera with him and took extensive movies of that trip. For many Greek immigrants, it was the first time since the war began that they had seen something live from someone who had been there since they left.

We stayed in touch and when I was in Washington D.C. as an assistant to Senator Bill Knowland, Nick would stay at my apartment when he was in the capitol. After Senator Knowland was defeated in his campaign for governor in 1958, he asked me to stay with him when he returned to the *Oakland Tribune* as editor and publisher; so I stayed and eventually became executive editor of the *Tribune*. Nick and I used to laugh because here I was with the *Tribune*,

which was considered an arch-conservative paper, and he was a very liberal Democrat. People would say to Nick, "How can you be a friend of Manolis's when he is assistant to Knowland?" And Nick would say, "We never discuss politics." And we never did.

Nick tells a story about when I got him and Senator Knowland together the first time: he went into Senator Knowland's office and, he said, "We closed our eyes and we grappled and we realized that neither one of us had horns." So from then on, they both respected each other very much. The senator knew that Nick was my closest friend, and Nick knew how close I was to the senator. And at our house we would have the Petrises and the Knowlands and we got along very well. They had diametrically opposite political views and philosophies, but it was the old saying about "an honest disagreement among gentlemen." It didn't mean you couldn't be courteous, you couldn't like someone.

It was a big shocker for Republicans in 1972 when the *Tribune* for the first time did not endorse their candidate in the Alameda County state senate election. Although they didn't officially support Nick, the paper took no position in the race because of Nick. And, of course, I was accused by all the Republicans of supporting a fellow Greek over being loyal to the party.

During the 1960s, Bill Knowland, in spite of his conservative reputation, and Nick were both part of the community leadership that kept Oakland from going through a major civil disorder such as occurred in Watts, Detroit, and elsewhere. It is very remarkable that Oakland, which probably in those days had a larger percentage of black population than any of the other cities, certainly on the West Coast, did not go through that. I don't ascribe it to one person, but to the combined leadership that worked together, including the black community

Nick and I also are very active in the Greek Orthodox church here in Oakland, Nick from the days when his parents helped organize the church down on Tenth and Brush Street, which was built in 1920. Across the facade in marble is a huge inscription, "You worship God in church" in Greek. When the new church was built about 1960, they sold the old church to a black congregation, which has left that inscription up there all these years.

About twenty years ago, members of the Greek community, led by Mary Mousselinas, wanted to preserve the building because it was one of the first Greek churches on the West Coast. The Grove-Shafter Freeway was about to be built and they wanted to destroy the church. I'm sure Nick played a role in having it declared a national landmark. When the freeway was built, they moved the church parallel to the freeway. Otherwise it would have been demolished.

My father came here in 1898 as a young boy. How did he get here? And how did the Bay Area end up having such a large Greek colony? Like Nick's father and uncles, they got to the midwest however; they got jobs on the railroad gang, and they laid the tracks West. When the tracks ended here, the young Greeks stayed. The Greeks of the West never went through the ghetto experience of the East. In 1900, cities like Oakland and Sacramento needed

all the able-bodied people they could get. Whereas in the industrial cities of the East, they went to work in factories and lived in ghettos. The ones who went to the South were faced with hostile, anti-foreign feeling--the Ku Klux Klan was not just against blacks; they were against all foreigners. But the ones who came West became part of building the West.

In the history of American Hellenism, the maintenance of ancient Greek cultural and political traditions is a strong force. Nick has read deeply in ancient Greek history; he is greatly interested in political science, political theory, and he sees the roots of a great deal of our American institutions in classical Greek institutions--the development of democracy and voting and representation and so forth.

When Nick and I go to Greece, if our wives are with us, our wives go one place and Nick and I are in a bookstore. Nick and I have always been very interested in Greek things, and we each built up great libraries. It was a great blow to him when his library burned in the Oakland Hills fire in 1991. He was away when it happened.

The day they were leaving, Nick said to Anna, "Look, if anything happens to us, I'm leaving my will here on the kitchen counter. And in the will I've left all my books to Paul." Anna had said before, "Nick, I don't know what I'm going to do with all these books." And he said, "Don't worry. Paul's going to take care of them." The will burned, and the books burned.

I had in my attic so many books. Most of my books, like Nick's, were concerned with Greece. After the fire, I gave them to Nick to start his library again. I also had a lot of political books that Senator Knowland had left to me. Many of them are now in Nick's library.

I haven't followed Nick's legislative career to a great extent, although I'm sure he has been a statesmanlike influence. Ours has been more a friendship based on our shared Greek culture. We pick up the phone once a week and call each other to chat. For example, Nick is very active here in the Patriarchos Institute. He is an officer and a generous donor.

He is now the senior public figure in the Bay Area Greek American community, save for George Christopher of San Francisco. Now that Nick will be retiring from the legislature and have some free time, we will be getting him involved in more leadership things.

Paul Manolis,
former executive editor,
Oakland Tribune

March 1996
Patriarchos Institute
Berkeley, California

INTERVIEW HISTORY

The following oral history with Senator Nicholas C. Petris was undertaken with several goals in mind. The goals, which are reflected in the narrative, are a testimony to many long friendships and to shared ideals of a golden age of affection and responsibility for family, church, and community. As Petris makes clear in his interviews, these ideals include a passionate, historical belief in a government that, in turn, takes responsibility for its people.

The volume was sponsored by a number of his friends and colleagues as a personal tribute, first, to honor the senator's 38 years of service in the California assembly and senate as he prepared to leave office in 1996, under the provisions of Proposition 140 [1991] which set limits to the terms of elected officials and, second, to express their concern for losses sustained when Anna and Nick Petris's home burned in the disastrous October 1991 East Bay Hills fire.

Among the losses was a series of pocket-size, looseleaf notebooks in which Petris had for many years typed bits of information, ideas, and stories related to his many interests--a habit from his years as a journalism student at the University of California, Berkeley. Anecdotes and ammunition drawn from the notebooks were reported to have a legendary power to convert audiences and overcome objections to Nick's legislative crusades. It was hoped that doing an oral history could somehow replace that accumulated research. As the recording of seven interview sessions between December 1993 and October 1994 progressed, many of those stories and arguments appeared effortlessly from the senator's memory as he provided a thoughtful discussion of the workings of a legislative district office and the public issues and political relationships that have been important in his long career.

The sessions were taped in Petris's office looking over downtown Oakland, where he has been readily accessible to his constituents, an articulate, heavily Democratic mix of San Francisco corporate commuters, working class minority communities, and University of California students, faculty, and administrators. The senator is well-built, of medium height, smartly tailored, and always open and welcoming in manner.

Much of the narrative focusses on development of local programs on behalf of children, the university, and the need for affordable housing, among other long-running issues in which the senator has played a leadership role. Petris and his staff spend considerable time with community groups, many of them spearheaded by women activists. Since the 1970s, he has pioneered in appointing women of diverse backgrounds as his administrative aides in both his district and state capitol offices. The beginning of the January 1994 session includes an extemporaneous interview

with Alfreda Abbott, who keeps in contact with local housing matters for the senator.

A further goal of the oral history was to gather information on the Greek American community in the Bay Area. Petris provides a substantial account of his father's arrival in Oakland via Utah in the early years of the century and of family and church life since the 1920s, stressing historical and cultural roots that go back to the Age of Pericles and are alive and well today. Whenever he or another Greek American wins an election, Petris notes, all Greek Americans take pride in their success.

While the present volume provides a close look at district issues, an earlier interview, recorded in 1988 and 1989 in cooperation with the California State Archives, focusses on legislative process in the 1960s and 1970s, in which Petris played a key role as chair of the Senate Finance Committee and member of the Rules Committee.¹ That interview deals with the senator's role in early efforts to control air pollution through elimination of the internal-combustion engine, improve nursing home conditions, update state tax policy, balance the conservation and development needs of the Bay Area, and other critical public policy issues. The two volumes provide an opportunity to compare and contrast a legislator's responsibility to state government and to district constituents. An effort was made to avoid repeating topics in the later sessions. A few of the senator's speeches are included in the appendix. Information about specific legislation he introduced can be found in the State Archives historical bill files in Sacramento.

Because Senator Petris responses were well-organized and fluent, the interview transcripts needed only minor editing and addition of headings to guide the reader. They were sent to Senator Petris for review early in 1995. At the end of the legislative session in late summer, he made time to read through the manuscript and make a few revisions before leaving on one of his frequent trips to Greece.

Those who made this oral history possible are listed in the front of the volume, and their generosity is greatly appreciated. Alex Spanos, Stockton contractor, sports entrepreneur, and boyhood friend of Petris, is due special thanks for his notable gift. Others whose time and thought have been important in carrying out this project are Alfreda Abbott, Anne Huff, Gus Petris, Kathy Pirelli, Lynn Suter, and Germaine LaBerge. In addition, Robert Peyton, assistant to UC President David Gardner, gave encouragement to the project, in its early stages, and Peter Haikilis, head of the Modern Greek Studies program at San Francisco State University, verified names and terminology in the manuscript.

¹Nicholas C. Petris, Oral History Interview, Conducted 1988 and 1989 by Gabrielle Morris, Regional Oral History Office, University of California at Berkeley, for the California State Archives State Government Oral History Program. See Appendix D.

Without the organizing skills and devotion of Martin Huff and Paul Manolis, both of whom have provided illuminating introductions for the volume, the oral history would not have happened. Martin Huff, former executive of the state Franchise Tax Board, and Nick Petris go back to the 1940s together, when they worked to help build a viable Democratic party in Alameda County and the state. Paul Manolis, former executive editor of the *Oakland Tribune*², and Nick "never discuss politics," but share a lifelong love for Greek culture, which Manolis is nourishing through the recently formed Patriarch Athenagoras Institute that brings a Greek Orthodox presence into the Pacific School of Religion.

Another special relationship is that between the senator and the University of California. As an alumnus with scholarly interests and chair of the budget subcommittee on education, Petris has developed considerable expertise on university operations. "Nick Petris has been a friend of higher education in the good times and the difficult times," Chancellor Chang-Lin Tien said recently. "No one has a better grasp of the challenges ahead."

With friendships like these, the senator's talents are not likely to languish when he retires. His amiable enjoyment of people, ability to rise above the frictions of warring factions, and generosity in giving credit to others for hammering out progress in solving society's problems will undoubtedly be called upon in Sacramento and throughout the Bay Area.

Gabrielle Morris
Project Director

April 1996
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley

²See Manolis, "A Friend and Aide Reminisces" in *Remembering William Knowland*, Regional Oral History Office, University of California, Berkeley, 1981.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please write clearly. Use black ink.)

Your full name Nicholas C. PetrisDate of birth Feb. 25, 1923 Birthplace Oakland, CAFather's full name Chris N. PetrisOccupation Railroad ^{Locomotive} Mechanic Birthplace GreeceMother's full name Mary Kakouris PetrisOccupation Housewife Birthplace GreeceYour spouse Anna Sam PetrisOccupation Housewife Birthplace San LeandroYour children NoneWhere did you grow up? OaklandPresent community OaklandEducation A.B., U.C. Berkeley; ~~LLB~~ LLB Stanford Law SchoolOccupation(s) State Senator, AttorneyAreas of expertise Revenue + Taxation, Pesticides, State Budget, Financing of public education,Other interests or activities Reading (Non-fiction, Biography),
Hellenic culture,Organizations in which you are active President Modern Greek Studies Association,
Dynamis; Turtles; Vryonis (Center for the Study of Hellenic Sacramento. Board member, Oakland Museum of California AHEPA, Board Member Patten College Oakland, Anatolia College, (an American school in Thessaloniki, Greece with headquarters in Boston)



Oakland Democratic Sen. Nicholas Petris sees himself as "an unabashed Roosevelt New Deal liberal."

Petris, mugged, remained a liberal

This is one in a series of occasional articles on longtime state lawmakers retiring this year. Today: Sen. Nicholas Petris

Oakland Tribune
By Sam Dolson
POLITICAL WRITER

SACRAMENTO — It's been said that the definition of a conservative is a liberal who has been mugged.

But state Sen. Nicholas Petris never has wavered from his liberal philosophy, even after he became a crime victim.

After thieves broke into his Sacramento home, the Oakland Democrat took to the Senate floor, not to call for tougher anti-crime measures, but to argue against the "Three Strikes and You're Out" law.

"I felt violated," Petris said. "But if they caught those guys, I wouldn't want them to go to prison for the rest of their lives."

While many Democrats today shy away from the "L word," Petris proudly describes himself as "an unabashed Roosevelt New Deal liberal." Over the course of nearly 38 years in the Legislature — a tenure now ending because of term limits — that kind of consistent application of principles has won Petris admirers from both ends of the political spectrum.

"He has been one of the premier champions of the poor and disadvantaged," said Casey McKeever of the Western Center on Law and Poverty. "You could always count on Petris."

Fresno County Schools Su-

Petris: 'It's a Greek thing,'

Continued from A-13

perintendent Peter Mehas says he idolizes Petris even though he disagrees with most of his views.

"My politics are 180 degrees different from his, but I respect his dignity, his grace and his commitment," Mehas said. "He's not only eloquent and intelligent, but he's got a passion for what he believes in. It's a Greek thing."

With the end of his legislative career, Petris, 73, is being inundated with honors.

The University of California has announced the creation of a Nicholas C. Petris chair in classical Greek studies at its Berkeley campus. The university also will award an annual scholarship to the top graduate of his alma mater, McClymonds High School in West Oakland.

Petris says the honors are welcome, but he's more interested in substantive achievements.

"I want to be remembered as someone who really tried to help the level in our society that wasn't empowered to move the world themselves," he said.

Petris is most proud of laws to ban pesticides that cause birth defects and to require posting of pesticide levels, to protect farm workers and consumers. It took him 20 years to win approval for the warning signs.

He also created the state legal services trust fund and authored the Lanterman-Petris-Short bill of rights for the mentally ill, which protects people against involuntary commitment without due process.

Other Petris laws established kidney dialysis centers and banned smoking on planes, trains and buses in California. As a board member of the Oakland Museum, he recently secured state funding for a series of exhibits on the California gold rush.

But his list of failed and unfinished efforts is almost as long.

Soon after his first election to the Assembly in 1958, Petris campaigned to ban the internal combustion automobile engine.

In the '60s, he introduced bills to outlaw new cars that could travel faster than 60 mph, to award a \$25 million prize for the

invention of a non-polluting car and to ban cars in urban downtowns.

Petris' repeated efforts to reform nursing homes have failed, and his legislation to establish a universal single-payer health-insurance system didn't get very far.

But he's not about to give up.

"I feel I've been ahead of my time," he said. "We call it the Petris gap."

Many capitol offices are like revolving doors, with new staff members chewed up and spit out each year. But Petris aides tend to stay for the long term.

"He's just the best," said staff director Felice Tanenbaum, who joined Petris as a student intern in 1972 and has worked for him full-time since 1974.

"I thought I'd be here just a few months, but I never left," she said. "He's been the major joy in my life."

Daunting odds haven't prevented Petris from taking on unpopular causes.

"I am very proud of sticking up for the underdog," he said.

When state Supreme Court Chief Justice Rose Bird came under fire for her failure to implement the death penalty, Petris traveled around the state and delivered almost 100 speeches in a futile attempt to save her job.

He also has worked to help political opponents when he believed they were unjustly accused.

Petris campaigned for the release of insurance industry lobbyist Clay Jackson, who was convicted of political corruption based on the testimony of Alan Robbins, a former senator who was seeking to reduce his own prison sentence.

"Clay never lied to me," Petris said. "We were pretty strong antagonists philosophically, but I always respected his integrity."

His independent streak led him to split from his liberal allies on a few issues in recent years.

In July, Petris was considered the key vote on a measure aimed at barring California from recognizing gay marriages.

He voted for the bill, but added

conservative friend says

an amendment that would give gay couples official recognition as domestic partners. The amendment effectively killed the bill, because it was unacceptable to its conservative sponsors.

"I'm opposed to gay marriage on a very strong gut level," Petris said. "I just don't like it, period."

He has also repeatedly tangled with rent-control advocates.

Last year he cast a pivotal committee vote supporting a bill that will phase out rent-control laws. Petris voted against the bill on the Senate floor, but it became law largely because of his earlier vote.

Petris notes he has sponsored several bills boosting the rights of tenants. But he adds that he wanted to send a message to the Berkeley Rent Stabilization Board, which he believes has harassed landlords.

"They act like if you buy a piece of income property in Berkeley, you've committed a felony," Petris said. "I think that's total nonsense."

Petris learned his affinity for the underdog from his Greek immigrant father, who for 40 years worked at the Southern Pacific Railroad roundhouse in West Oakland.

His parents instilled a reverence for Greek culture and philosophers, and Petris still frequently quotes Pericles, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle.

Plans for retirement are still being developed, but Petris said he and his wife, Anna, hope to spend more time in the land of his ancestors, where one cousin is the president of a township and another is a high-ranking jurist.

Colleagues from both ends of the political spectrum speak of Petris in glowing terms.

"There is no one I have known who did not have tremendous respect for Nick Petris," former Senate Republican Leader Ken Maddy of Fresno said. "He has always been a dedicated advocate. He has a passion for his cause."

Senate President Pro Tempore Bill Lockyer, D-Hayward, called Petris "my role model, my inspiration, my leader," and said, "There is probably no other public or private person who has had a greater impact on my life."

During an emotional tribute to Petris on the Senate floor, Lockyer's voice broke as he declared, "Your words will always echo in this room, forever and ever."

When Petris' home on the edge of Montclair was destroyed in the 1991 Oakland hills firestorm, he dedicated himself to helping his neighbors rebuild and to preventing future disasters.

A Petris law standardizes the equipment used by fire departments, so that the trucks and hoses used by different departments will be compatible. Another creates a statewide emergency management system to coordinate agencies during disasters.

Reconstruction of Petris' own home wasn't completed until last year, and the fire destroyed his massive personal library.

But his Senate colleagues tried to soften the blow. Soon afterward, Petris was surprised on the Senate floor when each of his colleagues lined up to present him new books to replace the ones that had burned.

I FAMILY HISTORY AND TRADITION

Greek Dancing and Festivals in California

[Interview 1: December 16, 1993##¹

Morris: It was wonderful of Alex Spanos to make such a generous gift to the oral history project. How long have you been friends?

Petris: Since we were kids. I can remember him in the line dancing at some of the big Greek family picnics.

Morris: Would that have been here in Oakland?

Petris: No, they were usually out in the Valley. Could have been Stockton. In some of these places, they have a bandstand in the park kind of thing. I have a vision of the two of them dancing away to the sound of Greek music, and really enjoying themselves, having a great time.

I must have been in the seventh grade. So I've known him since then.

Morris: Great. And you boys weren't dancing yet, it was your fathers?

Petris: Yes, the fathers were doing it. We shied away from that. We got into it much later.

Morris: Is that a coming-of-age thing, that you have to be a certain age before you can dance with the men?

Petris: No, no. Today, the little kids get in it real early. I don't know, some of that was shyness, some of it was resistance to

¹ This symbol indicates that a tape or tape segment has begun or ended. A guide to the tapes follows the transcript.

getting up there and dancing in front of people, whether it was at a big picnic or at home.

Anna, my wife, and I got into it much later in a very serious way. As a matter of fact, the whole West Coast movement of Greek folk dancing started at our house.

Morris: Really? When was that?

Petris: Well, let's see. It was in the sixties. The guru of Greek folk dancing in this country is a fellow named Athan Karras, who was born in Greece. He danced with the Dora Stratou dance group, which is the number one in Greece. He came over here pretty young, actually; he grew up in New York City not far from Telly Savalas. They knew each other way, way back. Anyway, he was in the navy during the war, and he was stationed out here. He met my in-laws at a Greek restaurant, night club kind of thing. He was sitting by himself, but he loved to dance, so whenever the dance music got on, he got up and danced.

My in-laws really were impressed; my wife was there, and her sister. So they invited him to join them for dinner, and that's how they got acquainted. He taught them a lot of the intricate dance steps. They stayed in touch ever since. We're talking World War II.

He came out for a visit, something in California. He was in San Francisco and he called us to say hello. I had never met him. We promptly invited him to come over to the house, which he did. We called Perry Phillips, who later was the entertainment editor of the *Oakland Tribune*; he wrote the column on what's going on in the entertainment world, local night clubs and things of that sort. Very popular with the entertainers. He had a good column; a lot of people read it.

At any rate, he was interested in Greek dancing, so we brought him over. We put on some records and invited some more people, and we had a great evening. Karras was very impressed. First of all, we had an enormous record collection of Greek music. He asked me if I played any instrument. I said, "Not any more." He said, "I can't believe you have this many records and you're not a musician." He liked the spirit that he saw among those who came over.

So Karras said, "You know, you ought to put on a Greek dance festival." We didn't think that was very practical. How are we going to do it? He said, "I'll come back, I'll help you." And sure enough, we put some plans together, and he came back from New York and stayed quite a while. He brought some beautiful,

beautiful pictures of Greek costumes from various parts of the country. The women in our group made their own costumes.

Then he taught us the various dances, and we put on this big festival at the Oakland Auditorium, sell-out crowd. We presented forty-two different Greek folk dances. My wife and I were both in it.

We started at our home in the rumpus room, but as we got more and more and more people, we couldn't accommodate them. We knew some basic Greek dances, but we didn't know all of them. They vary from island to island, and in the mountains there are quite a few different ones. We got live music, some good musicians that were around. They'd come over to our house and they would play, and we would do the dances and he would teach us another one and another one.

Then we had to move it to a restaurant. Andy Mousaliniias owned one of the restaurants that was called the Villa de la Paix, it's not around any more. He let us use his great big banquet hall for practice. Gradually, we got to more than a hundred dancers. It was a sensational program we put on.

After that, they said, "Well, we can't let this die out." They did it again the second year. They held it at UC, in the open, in the Greek Theater. They barbecued a lamb while they were at it. I missed that one. My mother [Mary Kakouris Petris] had died in the meantime, and we weren't going anywhere. She had just recently died. So we didn't take part in that one.

But from that, it branched out to having more and more dance groups form, and now the movement is really very, very big. Every Greek community has its own group of dancers. In my church here in Oakland, we have four different age groups. My niece teaches one of them. They have a convention every year for the diocese. The bishop strongly supports it as a way of getting the young people together. They have competition among the various dance groups, and they give an award. They move it around from place to place. The diocese covers all the Western states.

Karras went on. After that, he moved to Los Angeles, and he's done some acting on TV and on the stage. But he formed his own dance center, and a lot of people came to that. Dance groups were formed down there as a result. He still does a lot of that out of L.A.

Morris: Was that related to the start of the big festival that the church has every year?

Petris: No, not directly, although a lot of the same people were involved. The way our big festival started, it was intended as a one-time celebration for the burning of the mortgage. It was all paid up. We did this terrific festival at the Oakland Auditorium. The following year, we started getting phone calls from the public asking, "When is your festival this year? What's the date?" We had no plans to have a festival, but literally through sheer public demand, we decided to do it again. And it became an annual event. It's been going for twenty-five-plus years.

Morris: I know. People come from all over.

Petris: Oh, yes, they come from all over. It's the granddaddy of all the festivals in northern California, maybe in the whole state. We did it at the auditorium for quite a while, until they closed it down for renovations for a couple of years. So we moved it to the church grounds, and it turned out to be even more successful there.

They have a windmill that looks like the windmills at Mykonos, right out in front of the church. They have a wide variety of activities. They have tours of the church, they have the choir singing every hour on the hour, they have dancing in front of the church. They have the big community center for food, tremendous food, and barbecued lamb in the back outside. It's just wonderful activities, two and a half days. Starts at noon on Friday, and it ends Sunday night. It's really a lot of fun. A lot of people come to that.

Morris: Does it bring in a lot of money for church programs?

Petris: Oh, yes, it's a fundraiser. I don't know what the numbers are, but it probably grosses at least a couple hundred thousand dollars. Expenses are pretty high, but a lot of the work is done by volunteers, so the expenses are on buying things, I guess. They have a lot of little booths. They have Greek literature, they have icons, and they have cooking demonstrations, and they have a deli selling Greek foods. They have a coffee shop where you can go in and buy a cup of coffee and have some of the delicacies. It's quite a big operation; takes a lot of planning. In recent years, we've had the Frugal Gourmet giving cooking demonstrations.

Morris: Is your wife on the planning committee?

Petris: Well, she was for a long time. She's not on it now. She was very active for a while.

Morris: In helping it get started?

Petris: Helping, yes, organize it and get it started. For a while, she was a fortune-teller. You know, the Greeks read your fortune through the coffee grinds in your coffee cup. Greek coffee is what we used to call Turkish coffee; the coffee is ground to a powder and mixed with hot water, and they serve it in a small cup. There's always a big residue at the bottom, looks like mud. When you finish it, you turn it upside-down on your saucer and let it sit for a while, and then you flip it over and you read the patterns that have been made. They do that a lot in Greece, to tell your fortune. My wife knows how to do it, so she would sit there for hours, all day long, telling people's fortune. I think they charged a dollar or dollar and a half, and it went into the pot for the church.

Morris: Had she learned that from her mother?

Petris: Her mother, yes.

Morris: Does she have any other kinds of second sight?

Petris: Oh, yes, she's very psychic. Her mother, too. It runs in the family. But she's got it stronger than any of the other three daughters; she has the strongest--very similar to her mother. Yes, it's spooky, I've got to tell you. I used to make fun of it, but I don't any more. The scientists scoff at this stuff, but they've never been exposed to it.

We were at her mother's home one time and we had dinner, the three of us. Then we sat in the TV room. She was knitting something, and I happened to be looking at her. All of a sudden, she just went like this, as if she'd had a heart attack. Just hit her. A real jolt. I looked at her, and I looked at my wife, and I said, "Are you okay?"

My mother-in-law said, "Yes, I'm all right. It's okay." Then about five minutes later, she announced that her mother had died. I thought, Well, hell, she didn't say anything during dinner or during the day. I said, "When did she die?" She said, "Five minutes ago." Well, her mother was living in Greece, and she's in San Leandro. And sure enough, about a week later we got a letter saying, "Please go to your mother and tell her that her mother died on this date. We didn't want to write to her; you go tell her." It was that date.

So Anna wrote back and said, "I want to know the time." It was right on the minute. Now, you go to a scientist and tell him that, and he'll say, "Coincidence, this, that." They just pooh-pooh it. But I--

From that point on, I stopped making fun. Same thing happened to her father, when his mother died. He was a businessman, and it was close to midnight. He was doing the books for the day before going home. He was all alone in his office upstairs. He had a couple of retail stores. He heard his mother shout to him, call out his name. It really terrified him.

Morris: She was also in Greece?

Petris: She was in Greece. He jumped up, and he ran all the way home, several blocks. Left the lights ablaze, the store open, didn't lock it or anything--just ran. He got home in a big huffing and puffing, and his wife was very concerned: "What happened to you? Is somebody chasing you?" He said, "My mother died, my mother died." And they got news that that's exactly when she died.

Morris: There must be something to that, because that particular memory, that happens to a lot of people, I gather.

Petris: I guess so.

Role of Church and School in Greece

Morris: That gets us back to Greece, which was kind of where I wanted to start.

Petris: You want to start in Greece? [laughs]

Morris: Yes.

Petris: Where do you want to start? With Pericles?

Morris: That's fine. He was an early forebear of the family, Mr. Pericles?

Petris: Oh, I say that jokingly. No, we don't have any connection. But sometimes when I want to make a point, even on the Senate floor, I will say, "Well, as one of my relatives said a long time ago, this and this and that," and they'll say, "Who was that?" and I say, "Pericles." [laughter]

Morris: Were Pericles' part of the family lore and discussion that you learned at your mother and father's knee?

Petris: Yes. Both of them used to talk to us at home about Greek history, and some of the great figures in history. Pericles is very prominent among them. And the philosophers.

Morris: The classical--

Petris: Classical period, yes. And they also talked about modern Greek history, four hundred years of oppression. The Greeks were slaves of the Turks for four hundred years. The revolution was in 1821, which we celebrate every year. In those days, we used to have big annual programs, just like the Fourth of July. My father [Christos Petris] used to say, "We have two Fourth of Julys--one of them is in March and the other one is in July." March 25 is the Greek Independence Day. They fought for eight years before they won their freedom. We always put on a play at Greek school.

The Greek school we had in the afternoons Monday-Wednesday-Friday from four to six, after our regular school. There was always a dramatic play on the struggles with the Turks. I would always be in the play; it was a good way to learn the language.

Morris: You did the play in Greek?

Petris: In Greek, yes, always in Greek. And had poems, patriotic poems and songs, and the play. I played the villain, the Turkish pasha that ruled over the community. And I played the hero, one of the heroes of the uprising.

Well, there's more than one. I think there were about three or four of them that I played--one of them was a fellow named Ypsilantis, another was Athanasies. There was a fellow named Markos Botsaris, who was actually an Albanian, a Greek from Albania.

Morris: Well, if you go back to classical times, what's now Albania was part of where Greek people lived, wasn't it?

Petris: Yes.

Morris: Over the mountain?

Petris: Yes, Greece at that time covered that whole area.

Morris: Amazing. Would your mom and dad have learned the classical Greek history at the village school before they came, or did it come through the church, or--?

Petris: Came usually through the school, and it starts at an early age. If you live in Greece, especially at that time, you can't help but

feel that national consciousness. It's very deeply ingrained, and the church plays a major role, because when you stop and think, if you have a nation under military occupation for four hundred years, which is very cruel and oppressive in many parts of the country; the treatment of the local natives varied from place to place, depending on how harsh the local Turkish pasha was. And they took their orders from the sultan in Constantinople.

But in many parts of Greece, they weren't allowed to have schools, and they weren't allowed to have a church. So the question is, well, how did their religion and language survive?

They conducted schools in secret. They sent their kids to school at night in local hideaways, many times in caves. I have a painting at home which is a famous scene of a priest sitting in a cave with some candlelight and a bunch of kids sitting around them. He's teaching them. In fact, the first poem I learned when I went to Greek school is an ode to the moon, which I recited in school, and all of us learned it. It says to the moon, "My bright little moon, shine on me so that I can walk to go to school and learn letters and God's things." That was the very first poem we learned, way over here in the States.

So there's an appreciation in Greece by the public of the historic role of the church. Number one, it preserved the culture, it preserved the religion, the language, and when the flag of revolution was raised finally successfully, a bishop raised the flag of revolution--Palaiou Patron Germanos--in my father's part of the country. It had been done many times but the Turks were very quick to stomp on them and wipe out any resistance, but there were flare-ups--they'd just jump on them. There were many instances of flare-ups. It sometimes might just be a little village rising up against the oppressor. Most of the time, it would be a coordinated thing, secret underground activities.

Morris: Coordinated by the priests?

Petris: Yes, the priests almost always played a role. They also had what we now called guerrillas, who fled the villages and the cities and lived up in the mountains. They would be constantly raiding the Turks with harassment and swooping down on them whenever they could. They were protected by the priests and the people.

Morris: Like the colonists in the United States of America.

Petris: Right. That kept up for a long, long time. Finally, the various captains started communicating with each other around the country, and they agreed to have a rising at a certain time. They had

tried that before and got slapped down, but this last time the flag was raised by a bishop in the Peloponnesus, a place not far from where my father comes from. St. Lavra. It's at Kalavryta, near Patras. So it was the church that raised the flag of rebellion.

So you talk to Greeks about the separation of church and state, and they don't accept that. If it weren't for the church, there wouldn't be a state. There is actually a Ministry of Education and Religion in Greece. The clergy is paid by the government, to this day. It's not paid by the local congregation. Paid by the government.

Morris: During the years of the Turkish rule, the priests were also underground?

Petris: Oh, yes, in many places. Not everywhere. In some places they were allowed to have a church, but in most places they weren't. In my own family, my mother comes from a long line of clergymen and teachers. Her father was a priest, and she comes from a little village near Olympia, Greece. She was born in a little place called Romesi. But I learned just a few years ago, after she died, that her roots, the family roots were in Arcadia, near Trípolis, which is right in the heart of the Peloponnesus.

I have a first cousin in Greece who did some extensive research and came up with a whole family history, and he sent it to me. It's about forty pages long. What he learned was that the family originated--this is my mother's side--they actually came from Megara, a suburb of Athens. They left there for some reason that we don't know, and worked their way all the way down to a place near Trípolis. The head of the family was a priest, and they lived--

Morris: None of this business about priests couldn't marry?

Petris: No, no, our priests marry. They have to get married before they're ordained. Once they're ordained, they can't marry. It's like *West Point*; do you remember that movie with Dick Powell and-- maybe it was before your time, but it was a great movie--

Morris: I remember Dick Powell.

Petris: --called *West Point*. Dick Powell, and I forget who the gal was. Maybe Ruby Keeler. He was a cadet at West Point, and it showed what they go through at West Point, before they become officers. The tradition at West Point is you walk down a lane--and they did that song, "The Lambeth Walk"--with your sweetheart to whom you're going to be engaged.

Morris: And then you get married under--

Petris: Yes, arch of swords, and they get married in the military chapel. That's before they are--

Morris: Become officers.

Petris: Yes, before they go on duty.

Morris: Makes for stable officers.

Petris: Yes, right. So the priests, they get married as they leave the seminary, or sometimes while they're in the seminary. Those who don't get married--

They're encouraged to marry. Of course, if they intend to go up the hierarchy, they can't get married. The bishop is a never-married person. The bishop is always single.

Morris: What has happened to his wife?

Petris: Well, he just never got married, that's all. You make up your mind when you're in the seminary, you decide that you want to be a bishop and an archbishop and go all the way up, then you know you're not going to get married, so that's the end of it. But the overwhelming majority who are parish priests, they get married.

Morris: I read that in spite of all of the occupations and the political upheaval, there is also a strong tradition of local government in the towns of Greece.

Petris: Oh, yes, that goes way back. Goes back to the old city-states, I guess. But their system is different from ours today. The central government plays a big role, and provides money for their budget. They don't have a local tax to finance the operation of a local municipality. That money comes from the national budget. And they have prefects, or provinces. The head of each province is appointed by the national government. For years, they've been saying they're going to make those offices elected, and they may be today, but I don't think so. They're appointed by the national government.

Petrises Arrive in Idaho

Morris: But in the early part of the century, when your mother's and father's families were coming over here, did they leave because of the political troubles?

Petris: No, no. Just strictly economic. The economic conditions there were very bad. Like 95 percent of all the others who left Europe, southern Europe, they left for economic reasons. Now, in some countries it was political, like Germany after the revolution of 1848, and so forth. But the reason the Greeks left was to seek a better life in the United States, more opportunities to have a better life financially.

Morris: To stay in this country, or did they come--

Petris: No, the intention was to make a lot of money and send it back home, starting with dowries for their sisters, and then to take care of the parents as well, and come back with a lot of money, pay off the family mortgage, the farm mortgage, and remain in Greece. But very few went back. My father and his brother, Peter, sent money back to pay the dowry of their sister, Katina. As a matter of fact, she married a fellow named Tsakalos who was with them in Idaho. My mother and father separately came to Idaho.

Morris: Your mother came to Idaho too?

Petris: Yes. She came to Idaho because her brother was living there. He was working on the railroad with my father; they were roommates. They lived in a boxcar off a siding, maintenance--

Morris: Must have been kind of hard. Idaho winters are not very mild.

Petris: No, they're not too mild. I guess they had a little coal heater in the thing, I don't know how that worked, but anyway. Her brother was so impressed by his friend and roommate that he brought his sister over to marry his roommate. That's how she found a husband. She never knew him before she came over.

Morris: Was that a custom?

Petris: Yes, it wasn't unusual. In those days, the idea was to go back home. When they realized they weren't going to go home, and they wanted to get married and settle down, there were no Greek women around. Hardly any, actually, in those days. So they would send for someone. If they had the money, they'd go back home and get

married and return; or have the bride come over. Often the bride was picked by others, family members usually.

Morris: Would your mother have traveled by herself from Greece to Idaho? Or did she come with a party of people she knew?

Petris: Well, on the boat, there were always people that you knew, because the boat came out of Greece. She landed in New York, and she was met there by an old family friend, Charles Davis Kotsilibas, who came down from Massachusetts, who had already established himself and was a successful businessman. My mother was orphaned at an early age, and this fellow's family took in her and her brothers--

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Petris: --the family in Greece had written to him that she was coming on a certain date, and he was there to meet her at the docks. He tried hard to persuade her to come up to Worcester, Massachusetts. He said, "We have a lot of fine young men, they know your family; some of them know you, but they know your family. We've got a lot of fine men who are already successful in business, and they would make good husbands."

She said, "Well, I'm going to this place called Idaho; my brother's expecting me." And that's how they met. My father was not a businessman, he was a laborer on the railroad. So they got married in Idaho, and came to Oakland on their honeymoon.

Morris: Had your father and his brother been mechanics, worked on the railroad, in Greece?

Petris: Oh, no, they were farm boys. They just learned the job here. When he went to Idaho--it was Pocatello--his older brother was already there.

Morris: Pocatello, Idaho, seems a very unlikely place for a couple of boys from Greece.

Petris: Well, the pattern that was established was that immigrants of all ethnic groups gathered together in clusters. If you have one person who leaves a village and comes to Pocatello, he writes home, first to his family. He says, "I have a good job and I'm making good money," which is probably \$1.80 a day in those days. But it bought a lot, compared to now. So he's persuading the brother to join him, or a cousin, or a good friend. So pretty soon there's another one that leaves the village. There may be five or ten together. Where are they going to go? The only person they know in the whole country is in Pocatello, Idaho. So they go to Pocatello.

My father lived in a big house with his brother and four or five others. Some of them were cousins.

Morris: Is this after the boxcar?

Petris: No, before. They all worked on the railroad in the local round house. One of them would stay home, and they'd alternate. One of them would stay home and be responsible for taking care of the house and doing all the cooking, paying the bills. And then after his service time was up, he'd go back to work and someone else would take his place. They built a church in Pocatello. They were the nucleus for raising the money to build a church, which is still there.

That's a pattern that you saw everywhere. So people stick together--first of all, they're related. If they're not related, they come from the same village.

Morris: Where did they learn English? Was somebody teaching English at all in Pocatello?

Petris: No, they just learned it on the job and wherever. They didn't go to school in those days. My father wanted to go to school, he always told us that, but they said, "No, you can't do that. You've got to go right to work." He was a teenager. "We got to make money and take care of our family and go back home." My uncle came much earlier. He was an older brother, and he must have come over around 1908. But then he went back to Greece to fight in the Balkan War in 1912; a lot of them did. There were trainloads of young Greek Americans.

Morris: Went across the country?

Petris: Went across the country. I remember stories and I've seen pictures of a train leaving Oakland. It had a Greek flag on the locomotive. There was an American flag and a Greek flag right in front of the locomotive, and at every stop, they would pick up more young men who were going back home to go into the army, and fight in the Balkan War against Bulgaria and others.

Morris: And Russia?

Petris: No, it wasn't Russia at that time. It was just among the Balkans. The Turks were involved, too.

Turkish Occupation of Greece, 1453-1912

- Morris: This was the end of getting the Turkish influence out?
- Petris: Well, they were out by that time, but not completely. You see, Thessaloniki (Salonika), which is the second largest city in Greece, was not returned to Greece until the end of that Balkan War, 1912, just before World War I. Thessaloniki was the name of a sister of Alexander the Great.
- Morris: Yes. I pulled out an encyclopedia and read amazing tales of what Greece has been through in the modern era.
- Petris: Yes, people don't realize that.
- Morris: Well, it almost seems like World War I, the Western powers were an afterthought, that it's almost a continuation of the Balkan Wars. Usually you read that it grew out of issues in the West.
- Petris: Well, of course, World War I started in the Balkans, Sarajevo.
- Morris: Right.
- Petris: It was kind of a continuation of the Balkan Wars; yes, that's true. But when Greece finally won its freedom from Turkey, 1821-1829, only a small part of the country was liberated, starting with Athens.
- Morris: The political solution or treaty was not made in--
- Petris: It was in Lausanne.
- Morris: --the Balkans, it was made for the West.
- Petris: Yes. That's often the case. And later, after World War I, the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, which the Greeks point out the Turks have violated over and over and over again--the Turks were on the losing side in World War I, but they came out pretty well. Anyway, Greece didn't reach--it took Greece over a hundred years to reach its present configuration. You take the Dodecanese Islands, twelve islands in the Aegean Sea, were not returned to Greece until after World War II. They had been taken over by Italy at some point. Rodhos (Rhodes) after World War II; Mussolini had Rodhos prior to World War II.

And, as I say, Salonika, the second largest city in Greece, was not returned until 1912. At that time, the king entered the city in triumph. He was an active military leader himself; I

believe that was Constantine. He marched into the city, it was a time of great celebration and excitement. But that's a major addition. It wasn't just a city; it was the whole area that was restored to Greece. And the Greeks always dream of the Great Idea, it's called, which is to regain its former territory, especially Constantinople. The Greeks still call it Constantinople; they don't call it by its Turkish name, Istanbul. Of course, that was conquered by Mehmet the Second in 1453. May 29, 1453, Constantinople fell after years of warfare and a siege--

Morris: Prior to which it had been a Greek city?

Petris: Oh, yes. It was the seat of the Byzantine Empire, and the head of the church as well. The Patriarch was there, and the Emperor was there. The Turks had been hammering at them for centuries, starting in the Middle East, kept pushing them back and pushing them back. The last siege took about three or four months. [Edward] Gibbon describes it very dramatically in his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Gibbon is notorious for his anti-East sentiment. The church was divided between East and West, and he was very heavily biased in favor of the Western part of the church, and treated the East very unkindly in all of his writings.

But when it came to that final siege and the fall of the city, and the valor of the Greeks in defending it--and the fact that they were totally abandoned by the West; they wouldn't send in one soldier, except some Venetians who happened to be there who joined with them and fought very gallantly, just a handful of men --Gibbon pays real tribute to the way the Greeks fought, right down to the end.

The supreme irony, one of the occupation tools that the Turks used in all their occupied areas--they didn't just occupy Greece; they had all the Balkans; they went all the way to Vienna; remember, they were stopped at Vienna in the fifteenth century-- they had an annual gathering of young men, and they would go to the villages and towns all over the occupied area--

Morris: Take up all the young men.

Petris: Yes. They'd line them up, and they'd just pick them out, the ones they wanted. They had to be strong, and they would start at age twelve. But some of them were twenty or more when they were taken. They were taken and pressed into serving the sultan. The greatest architect--

Morris: They removed the able young men from the occupied territories.

Petris: Yes, sure. It's a great control. Most of them went into the military. But they treated them very well. They sent them to school, a lot of them went to the university. They came out as officers, and they were pressed into military service. They were called janissaries. The final breaching of the walls of Constantinople, pounding of artillery and all that for a long time, the first wave of shock troops that poured into the city for the conquest were all Greeks, or Serbs, or--

Morris: Who had been taken as young men.

Petris: Who had been taken in. They were the janissaries, and they went in there and just slaughtered people. Their own people; they just slaughtered them. Because they were raised from twelve years old and up to do that.

Morris: Sounds familiar.

Petris: Yes. [laughs]

Morris: I understand that in that city now, that they tell people that it was a welfare program, that they were taking care of orphaned young men in their territories.

Petris: Well, that's typical of any oppressor--especially the Turks. They have a way of twisting things around, make you believe they're great benefactors. When they took Constantinople, there was a slaughter that lasted for three days and three nights, and finally the conqueror himself got sick of it. He put out an edict to stop it.

Morris: A cease-fire?

Petris: Yes. The Turks describe him as a very benevolent conqueror, because he did that. They don't describe the fact that he was the one who issued the order to go in there and do your thing, which meant looting and robbing and raping and burning. They desecrated the churches, especially St. Sofia, which was the Greek Orthodox equivalent of St. Peter's in Rome, a magnificent building.

They're doing that in Cyprus today. They're desecrating the churches of Cyprus every day; nobody does anything about it. In fact, I have something here on that, come to think of it.

Morris: It sounds as if you have plowed your way through all the volumes of Mr. Gibbon's work on the Roman empire.

Petris: Yes, I have, but it was a long time ago. But I remember his description of the siege, magnificent writing.

Morris: Did you read that for a course you were taking?

Petris: No, just on my own. If I could just take a second here--[looking through papers] This is an English-language Greek-American paper published in New York City, a weekly.

Morris: How long has that been around?

Petris: Oh, the current version of it has been around for maybe twenty years or so, but they've had Greek-American newspapers for a long, long time in New York, Chicago, and Boston, and for a long time in San Francisco. We still have one in San Francisco called the *Hellenic Journal*.

Morris: Is that primarily about activities in the United States?

Petris: Yes, it covers Greek Americans pretty thoroughly; but they also, of course, have a lot of stuff on what's going on in Greece. See, here's an issue here that has the two men running for prime minister in Greece. The last issue before the election.

Morris: Are there absentee voters--Greek citizens who live here, but still vote there?

Petris: They don't do absentee voting. They go back home. I noticed the Russians did that the other day, they went to the Russian consulate and voted in the Russian election.

Morris: Yes, I read that. It surprised me.

Petris: But Greeks don't do that. Even in Greece, you don't vote absentee. You have to go back to your village. You live in Athens for thirty years, you still go back to the village to vote. You don't vote in Athens. You go back to your origins.

Morris: Are there any people whose home village is Athens?

Petris: Oh, yes. Most of the population is in Athens, it seems. I forget the population now of Athens, but you take the greater Athens area, it's more than half the population of the country. How are you going to keep them down on the farm? The people just leave the village and go into the big city and get a job, and seek their fortunes.

II GREEK AMERICANS IN OAKLAND

Early Twentieth Century Arrivals; A Close-Knit Community

Morris: When your folks came here, did they continue to be interested in what was going on in Greece, and did they go back and visit at all?

Petris: No, they never made it, unfortunately, until after my father retired, at which time my brother and sister and I got together and we presented them with round-trip tickets to go to Greece and back. They spent a few months there. After that my mother never made it back again. They were there for about six months. My father was able to go back two or three more times before he died. But when we were growing up, it was unheard-of for anybody to go back to Greece, by train, and boat, and it was very expensive.

As a matter of fact, when someone would go--I remember a fellow that was a businessman, the owner of the Athens Market down on Seventh Street in West Oakland, he went back for a visit, and the whole community turned out. I remember it was a great event. I remember as a little boy going to the railroad station.

Morris: Oh, everybody here, in Oakland, to see him off?

Petris: Yes, everybody here went down to the railroad station to see him off, it was such an unusual event. [laughs] And he was considered the wealthiest man in the community.

Morris: Was he one of the earliest?

Petris: Yes, he was one of the earlier ones for this area. His family is still here. His name was Alex Paris. His children still live in Oakland or nearby: George, Pauline, Harriet, and Jennie.

Morris: When would he have gotten here, to Oakland?

Petris: Probably turn of the century. See, the big wave was just before and just after World War I, for this area. But there are a lot of exceptions. Most people who came from Greece settled in the East, up and down the Eastern Seaboard. But there were others who worked their way to the West.

My wife's family is exceptional in that they're now in the fourth generation.

Morris: She's fourth generation?

Petris: No, she isn't, but her nephew is, because both of her grandparents came here. Her maternal grandfather was in San Francisco, and he returned to Greece in 1892.

Morris: To find a wife?

Petris: Yes. He went back and he got married, and he stayed, he had made some money. He stayed. His daughter, my mother-in-law, was born in 1908.

Morris: In Greece?

Petris: In Greece. So on my wife's father's side, his father came over. He brought two boys with him. They were just youngsters; they were early teenage. He had a confectionery in San Francisco. In 1906, it was demolished in the earthquake, so he moved to San Leandro and he opened another one. Then he returned to Greece later, and the two boys took over the business. One of them was my wife's father.

Morris: What's the family name?

Petris: Vlahos [spells].

Morris: How did candy-making get to be a specialty in the Greek community?

Petris: I wish I knew. There's an old saying when the boys flirt with the girls, a beautiful girl walks down the street, and they ask, "Was your father a confectioner? Because he made a daughter so sweet."

Morris: Oh, that's cute.

Petris: I don't know, but a lot of Greeks got into candy-making. There was a very famous one in San Francisco, for example, the Red Poppy, owned by a fellow named John Pappas who came from my in-laws' village of Kyparissi--in the province of Laconia. He died several years ago.

Morris: Is that the same family that has the Star Grocery in Berkeley?

Petris: No, different. There's a lot of Pappases. Those particular ones aren't related. Those Pappases come from central Greece, they come from an area called Rumeli, which is a very, very historic--near Thebes. Played a major role in Greek history from the most ancient times down to the present. But there are a lot of Pappases that aren't related to each other.

John Pappas' candy, I am told, and I've eaten a lot of his candy; a lot of people said at the time he had the store it was better than Blum's, which is pretty darn good in San Francisco. He sent a lot of money back to his village. He and my father-in-law Sam Vlahos had them pave the streets, and they built a fountain for water, and they actually paid for piping the water into the homes.

At UC San Francisco, if you're ever over there, between a couple of the buildings right on--what's the name of that street? It's a Greek mountain. Parnassus, right on Parnassus is a statue of Hippocrates.

Morris: The healing-oath fellow, right.

Petris: Yes. There's a statue there that he had commissioned and brought from Greece to put in front of the medical school. And it's got a little tablet inscription. I was invited to go over for the dedication years ago.

Morris: Were there any limits on immigration, or could as many people as wanted to come from Greece to the U.S.?

Petris: Oh, in those days, there weren't. The limits were adopted later, and Greece got a very, very small quota. It was during a period of reaction to--like they're doing now--immigration. Senator Patrick McCarran up in Nevada was the architect for a very restrictive immigration policy in which the quotas were set based upon existing numbers of immigrants, which meant that England and the northern tier, Scandinavian countries, Germany, England, had the largest quotas because they had the most people here already.

And as you moved from north to south down into the Mediterranean countries, the quota became very small. In fact,

the quota for Greece was one hundred per year. One hundred. One hundred. In fact, at one point, Chinese were excluded altogether, as were the Japanese, and then they gave China a quota of a hundred. So you had a lot of people jumping ship, Chinese and Greeks. They'd jump ship and come in. A tremendous number of illegal immigrants who later became legal and became independent businessmen and contributed enormously to the society. But it was a very narrow policy that we had.

Morris: Did the ones who came first have to look after the illegals? Were they persecuted by the immigration authorities, or once they got here, they were on their own?

Petris: Well, they helped them out certainly, especially their family members. But what they would do was get a job as soon as they could and get married and settle down. Once they got married, they became eligible for citizenship, if they married a citizen.

Morris: Yes. So when you were growing up here, how many people roughly would there have been in the Greek community?

Petris: Oh, not very many. We had one church that served the whole East Bay, served all of Alameda County and Contra Costa County. Except they did have a church in Pittsburg, but that was pretty far off. Who knows? When I was growing up, I'll bet you there weren't more than a couple thousand. Nobody knows the numbers, and I have a saying of my own. People ask me, "How many Greek Americans are there in the Bay Area? A hundred thousand?" I say, "Oh, yeah, about that." Probably closer to ten.

Morris: How many youngsters would there have been in the Greek school?

Petris: All right. There were four or five classes, you put them all together and it's barely over a hundred.

Morris: That's pretty sizable.

Petris: Yes, that's a pretty good size, but--.

Morris: But you really would know all those people.

Petris: Yes, of course. You lived with them. You got to know them, and most of them lived in West Oakland at the time, except for what we called the rich people. Some of them lived in Piedmont. We had some pretty good businessmen at that time. In Oakland, we had two bakeries that served the Greek community. One was called Athens; the other was called Olympia. [laughs] Olympic Bakery. They delivered bread to the homes. They made what we call Greek bread, that's made in a round, like a great big donut. It has sesame

seeds on it. That was the favorite. They made other kinds of things, but that was the staple, you might say. They would deliver it to the homes.

Morris: How much crossover was there, people coming in because they had it at their Greek neighbor's houses and liked it, and things like that?

Petris: There was some, but not a lot. Pretty much limited to the Greek community. People in the neighborhood would go in and buy right at the bakery, down on Seventh Street.

Continuing Concern for Politics and Government in Greece

Petris: [moves away from table] I'm sorry to be distracted here, but I'm looking for--here it is. This is a recent issue--well, August--of this paper called the *Greek American*, published in New York. "Turks Desecrate Occupied Cyprus." There's just one picture of a church--

Morris: Oh, my goodness.

Petris: They use them for stables. That article says one of them has been turned into a bar. Greeks get very upset about that, because it shows they haven't changed at all since the 400-year occupation.

Morris: Is Cyprus now Turkish territory or Greek territory?

Petris: Well, it was never Greek territory in modern times. It was always Greek. It was settled originally by Arcadians at least 1,000 years B.C., maybe more. But Cyprus was an independent country. It was part of the British Commonwealth. In 1974, Turkey invaded Cyprus, in violation of all the international rules of law, in violation of treaties with the United States relating to arms for Turkey, and in violation of the United Nations laws. They used military equipment sent to them by us. That means airplanes, tanks, whatever you need for an army. Instead of using it for defensive purposes, they invaded the island of Cyprus.

To this day, there are between 1,600 and 1,800 missing persons who were taken by the Turks as prisoners, hostages. The Turks have refused to account for them. They deny that they have them. And among them are a handful of American citizens who happened to be there and were gobbled up. The United States, to my great dismay, has never pushed Turkey to get its own citizens back. At the time it happened, the cold war was on, and every

time Turkey sneezed, the United States caught the cold. They pampered them, and were very skillfully manipulated and exploited by Turkey.

The Greeks are very, very unhappy about that, understandably, because it was 82 percent Greek, 18 percent Turkish. And on the basis of the 18 percent, Turkey invaded Cyprus, to "protect the constitution," they said. It's a long story. The Greeks contributed to it. The Turks had been waiting for years for an excuse to invade Cyprus. What happened was that when the dictators took over in Greece, they, being extreme nationalists, revived the movement for unification with Cyprus. The dictators put pressure on the Ethnarch or leader of Cyprus. He was an archbishop who resisted the Greek dictators--

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Petris: --and he had to flee the country, and the Turks moved in and said, "This is a violation of the constitution and everything else; we're here to restore the constitution." Well, that was 1974. They're still in Cyprus. The constitution has been restored for many years.

Then more recently, they arbitrarily declared the occupied portion of Cyprus to be a free, independent state, Turkish Cyprus. That's one time that the U.S. acted, I think, promptly and correctly. They put on a heck of a campaign to dissuade all nations from recognizing this so-called independent state. To this day, the only country that's recognized that state is Turkey. Not one of the Muslim countries has recognized it, which says a lot for our policy. Not one. Of course, it's understandable, the Arab countries are not friendly with Turkey. They're all Muslims, but the Arab countries were also under occupation for 400 years, some of them longer. Some of them weren't liberated until World War I.

Morris: That's one of the many untold tales of history that we never learn in the United States.

Petris: Yes. The book *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* tells it all--by the Englishman "Lawrence of Arabia." So the Greeks have a very strong bond with the Arabs, the basis of which is a common persecutor.

Becoming American Citizens

Morris: Did your mom and dad become citizens of the United States?

Petris: Oh, yes. As quickly as they could. In the twenties, when we were in grammar school, they went to night school down in West Oakland. It was at Prescott School.

Morris: Is that where you went to grammar school?

Petris: That's where I first went to grammar school, right. They worked very hard. It was a marvelous scenario there among all of the immigrant groups. In our neighborhood, we had Serbians and Italians, all the southern Mediterraneans, as well as black people and Mexicans and Chinese and Japanese and Armenians and Polish and Portuguese--it was marvelous. It was absolutely great.

They studied very hard. They had a little book that they were told to study, and it had questions in the back. My brother and sister and I would read the questions to them, and they would answer. We'd check the answers in the book. We learned a lot about our Constitution before a lot of other people because we were helping our parents through the studying for naturalization--they had to take an oral exam in court before a judge. They both made it, first time around. They were very proud of that.

Morris: I should say.

Petris: As a matter of fact, they never missed an election. They were very proud of being citizens, and they were good citizens.

Morris: Did you and your brother and sister go to their naturalization--

Petris: No, for some reason or other, it was school time, we were in school. They would go over in groups to support each other. If it's your turn today, I would come with you for moral support, and then you'd come to mine the next time. So we weren't there, unfortunately. I wish we had been. I think it was in San Francisco. Later they also did it in Oakland, they did it in the state court. But in those days, they were mostly in the federal court.

Morris: And they took the exam and then the oath of allegiance the same day?

Petris: No, that was usually done later, the oath of allegiance was done later. My father used to go into the court whenever he could on his day off and listen, and watch the proceedings when other people were being examined.

Morris: Oh, he went to the naturalization court.

Petris: Well, it wasn't called a naturalization court; it was just a normal federal district court or state superior court. He used to tell the story and get a big kick out of it, one of the Yugoslavs who worked--I think he knew him, he worked with him at Southern Pacific at the round house in West Oakland--he was doing very well on the exam. The judge asked him about, "What does the United States government consist of?" and he explained the three branches, and who's the president, and did all of that stuff about Congress.

Then he came to the state, and he said, "Now I'm going to ask you some questions about California." "Yes, sir." "Who runs the state of California?" "Southern Pacific!" [laughter] And of course, my father said he was absolutely right, because the SP--he worked for SP. They were all-powerful. Turned out he was very accurate at the time.

But anyway, they both made it, and they never missed an election. I remember a few times seeing them get out of a sick bed, one or the other, on a cold, rainy November morning to go vote. They just wouldn't miss.

Morris: Would this be still in the twenties, or would it be--

Petris: Thirties. Forties. All the way through, they never missed. Yes, they took it very seriously.

Morris: Did they talk about the local elections--

Petris: Oh, yes, they talked about that, and they'd talk about the national. My father was a very strong liberal Democrat.

Morris: Was he a union man?

Petris: He was a strong union man. He wasn't very happy with his union; he thought the union was too weak.

Father's Work for the Southern Pacific Railroad

Morris: Was he a machinist?

Petris: He was what they call a truckman. A truckman is responsible for maintaining the truck bed on which the locomotive sits, you know, the series of wheels. They bring the locomotive into the round house, and the workers are down in the pit underneath it. It's wet and oily and noisy and grimy, and a very, very tough job. He

did that for many, many years. He was a railroad mechanic, but mechanics were in charge of that field, the trucking. The truck.

Morris: So would it be one of the predecessors to the AFL that he was a member of?

Petris: Well, eventually they joined it. The railroads always had a separate thing of their own. They had a national union, and it doesn't matter which craft you were in, they all belonged to the same union, railroad.

Morris: A company union?

Petris: No, no, it was a good, independent union. They had a national newspaper of their own called *Labor*, it was a weekly, and he always read that. But in the local disputes with management, he always thought the union was not militant enough. Although he was very loyal to the company. It wasn't that he was a trouble-maker; he just felt the unions just didn't have enough guts to really fight for the workers' interests as much as they should have. But he never wavered in his loyalty to the company as well. See, he managed to keep his job all the way through the Depression. He saw a lot of other guys laid off.

I remember when I was in law school at Stanford, I used to come home about once a month. I remember one Sunday morning, six o'clock, the phone rang. I heard my father answer the phone, and he said, "Okay, I'll be right down." I got up and I said, "What's going on?" He said, "I have to go to work." I said, "What do you mean, you have to go to work? This is your day off. You're one of the senior guys down there. Can't they call somebody else?" He said, "Nope, they called me, and I'm going." I said, "Goodness' sake. Maybe you shouldn't answer the phone on Sundays. Let somebody else answer and tell them you're not here."

He said, "My boy, I want you to remember something. All through that Depression, we saw a lot of bad, bad times. They never fired me. I owed them." This is how many years later? This is thirty years later we're talking about.

Morris: Was that true of SP in general, did they not lay people off during the Depression?

Petris: Oh, no, they had to. They laid other people off. It just happened that he wasn't one of those that was laid off. So he never forgot it. It was quite a lesson that I learned that day. He would often double over, not just work two hours of overtime. When they asked him to double over, that meant a whole shift, sixteen hours. My mother, he'd call home and my mother would have

the food ready, dinner. She'd pack it into something and we'd get on our skates, my brother and I, and skate down to the round house and deliver him his dinner.

Morris: Roller skates?

Petris: Yes, on roller skates.

Morris: Oh, that's neat.

Petris: Yes.

Female: I know you could go on forever and ever, but your next appointment is at eleven. He's not here yet, but--

Petris: Well, we have time.

Female: But I wanted you to start thinking about that.

Morris: Thank you for warning me. Yes, you're right.

Female: Because I did kind of make you a tight day today.

Petris: Yes, I know, unfortunately. We could run over a little bit.

Remembering our childhood, we really had extraordinary parents, in an extraordinary generation. You talk to anybody of my generation and they'll tell you that they broke the mold.

Morris: How's that?

Petris: And it wasn't just us. [long pause]

The Italian kids, the Portuguese, the Yugoslavs, they'd all tell you that, of their own folks. Because they, first of all, it was a home that was just full of love, just this enormous love for the children. Everything they did in their lives centered on the children. They'd go without many, many times so one of the kids could have a new suit or something. You know what I mean? They were always interested in what we were doing. And of course, they had this tremendous reverence for education.

Teachers and Lawyers in the Family

Petris: My mother came from a long line of, as I said, priests and teachers. The two brothers who stayed behind, in addition to the

one that came here that brought her over, there were two other brothers. Both of them became teachers. One of them was a principal in a school for a long time. Both of them were principals, as a matter of fact. Another one was kind of the head of the school district, one of them, up in Salonika. So they were educators. My first cousin, brother of the one who did the family history, became a lawyer. He's about three years older than I am, maybe four. He became a lawyer. His name is Constantinos N. Kakouris. He has a younger brother named Christos.

Morris: He's part of the family that stayed in Greece?

Petris: Yes. He's a son of the oldest of the brothers, whose father--

Morris: And he got his legal training in Greece?

Petris: Yes, in Greece, in Athens. His father, whose name was Nikolaos (Nick), was a teacher. He got into the judicial system. Over there, it's not done by appointment as it is here. It's done by competitive examination. He came in number one out of 300 lawyers in Athens, applying to start in the chain of advancement in the judicial system. He started out--you don't start as a judge, you start as a--I forget what they call it, but it's something like a research staff person.

Morris: Like a law clerk here?

Petris: Yes, kind of like a law clerk. And then you get on the bench, and you move up. But he became a member of the supreme court of Greece on the administrative tribunal. They have--for years, he was a member of the supreme court, and now for the last ten years, he's been in Luxembourg as a member of the International Court of Justice of the European Community. That's the highest-ranking judicial position in all of Europe.

We went over and visited him there one time, my wife and I. He introduced us to some of his colleagues, about three or four. Every one of them had resigned a position of chief justice of the supreme court of his country to take that appointment. One time I was in Greece--I used to go to Greece a lot more often than now. There's a period of about ten years, I was going at least twice a year. I know a lot of people over there, and politics, and both parties, maintain good relations with both sides. I was visiting the prime minister, who was Papandreou at the time, who just went back into office a few months ago. He was a prof at UC Berkeley. He was the head of the Economics Department for several years, at UC Berkeley, before he went back to Greece. He was born and raised in Greece, but he spent a lot of time over here.

Anyway, as I was leaving him--my custom was whenever I went over, I'd call on him, and we'd have a nice visit together. I've been to his home and so forth. I said, "Do you mind if I bring up a personal matter?" He said, "No, go ahead." I said, "I want to congratulate you on your judgment in a certain judicial appointment." He said, "What's that?" And I told him. He said, "Do you know him?" I said, "Yeah, he's my first cousin." He said, "Why didn't you tell me?" I said, "Well, first of all, I didn't know he was a candidate, and second, I wouldn't dare interfere. That's a local matter here." Although I've written letters of recommendation for people over there from time to time.

I said, "And my cousin never said a word to me." He said, "Well, then there's something you ought to know about your cousin. First of all, I don't do the appointing. By law, that position is so important--"

Morris: This is to the supreme court?

Petris: No, to the International Court in Luxembourg. The prime minister nominates, but it has to go to a vote of the full cabinet. Well, the full cabinet in Greece at that time was about forty members. Even now, they have eighteen or twenty. I don't know what the number is now, but it's a pretty good big number. He said, "You can imagine how many people were vying for that position. We had professors of law, we had nationally famous attorneys who practice in the international field, we had professors from the university, we had judges sitting in other capacities, a lot of people. We had to interview every one of them. Your cousin was elected by the cabinet unanimously on the first ballot."

Morris: Isn't that exciting?

Petris: Yes. So when I walked out of there, I felt ten feet tall.

III EDUCATION AND CAREER DECISIONS

Admission to Stanford Law School

Morris: Was it knowing that he was a lawyer that got you interested in going to law school yourself?

Petris: No. That was mostly my father. I really wasn't interested in law; I didn't have any idea what lawyers did except it seemed to me they spent a lot of time with their noses in dry books. My father, following a Greek tradition--in Greece, everybody wants to have his son become a lawyer.

Morris: Really? Not a minister or--?

Petris: Yes. No, they want him to be a lawyer.

Morris: Why is that?

Petris: Well, it seems to be the road to success over there. There are a lot of people who have been trained as lawyers who don't practice law. They've gone into other things, but they like to have that on their curriculum vita. It seems that a very high percentage of people that I meet today who come over from Greece in some capacity or other are trained as lawyers. That includes, for example, the consul general in San Francisco. Both he and his wife were trained as lawyers. She never practiced, and a lot of them don't practice at all, but they go to law school.

So my father told me from an early age, "You should be a lawyer." He was just following the tradition. I resisted it. I finally decided to do it when I got back from the army after World War II. I had the G.I. Bill, and I was still in uniform when I got home. I went up to Boalt Hall [University of California law school] to sign up, and they wouldn't let me sign up. It was in August, and they said, "Well, you're a little bit late. The

deadline is May 1. You're several months late." "Well," I said, "I didn't know when I was going to get out, I wasn't home," and I raised a lot of fuss. I was pretty noisy there in the admissions office.

A professor walked by, he wanted to know what the commotion was all about. It was Max Radin, the international law professor.

Morris: Amongst other things.

Petris: Amongst other things.

Morris: Political activist--

Petris: Yes, yes. I told him the problem. I said, "You know, you can see I'm still in uniform. I just got home yesterday, and I don't--"

Morris: "Defending my country."

Petris: Yes. "And I'm told I'm too late, and this and that. I don't want to lose a whole semester. I've lost three years." He said, "Well, you don't lose a semester; you lose a whole year. This is an annual thing." Oh, that made me feel worse. I said, "What am I going to do?" He said, "Well, there are other schools in the area that are on the quarter system. You don't have to stick to Berkeley, although it's a great school." I said, "Like what?" He said, "Well, you can go to Hastings, or Stanford. Why don't you go down to Stanford?" I said, "Stanford? That's too expensive." He said, "Well, you've got the G.I. Bill."

So I went to Stanford the next day, and they tried to discourage me, because they already had over 2,000 applicants for 220 spots. I was close to the deadline. In fact, I got there about four days before the filing deadline. But they discouraged me and they said, "Don't expect anything, we've got more than 2,000, and there are only 200-some spots, so don't expect anything." I was admitted, much to my amazement. So that's why I went to Stanford, on the G.I. Bill.

Morris: Do you suppose Max Radin called up and said, "There is this bright fellow--"

Petris: No, I don't think so, because he didn't know my name. I didn't give him my name. [laughs]

Morris: You didn't have to take the LSAT?

Petris: No, they didn't have them in those days. No, I didn't take any other exam. They just said, "Get your transcript down here." And of course, I did that right away. In a few days, they--

Morris: Did you get points for being a veteran?

Petris: No, I don't think so. I think 90 percent of the class were veterans, though.

Morris: Oh, that's a dumb question. That's very true.

Petris: Well, they do give points on civil service exams; we still do it. Veterans get a 5 percent preference. But not the schools. I don't think the schools--

Military Liaison to Greek Elections; Assignments from a Family Friend

Morris: But you had already had some military government experience, hadn't you?

Petris: Well, no, not military government. I was in kind of a diplomatic mission. After the war, I was sent to Greece as a liaison officer during the first parliamentary elections after the war. They'd gone through a very bitter civil war in Greece. At the peace conference, they made an agreement called the Varkiza [spells] Agreement, that's the name of the suburb where they had their meetings. It's a neighborhood, suburb of Athens. In which they agreed that they would hold free elections, which they hadn't had in Greece for quite a while, because prior to the war, they had a dictatorship. There were no elections under John Metaxes, the dictator.

So to get back to their democratic system, they wanted to take advantage of a provision in the Teheran Conference that the Allies had had--Churchill and Roosevelt and so forth--in which they offered to send observers into any country that requested them for elections after the war.

Morris: What an enlightened provision.

Petris: Yes, it was great. Because a lot of the countries hadn't had elections for a long time. Both sides took advantage of that and invited the Allies to come in. They invited Russia, England, France, and the U.S. Ironically, Russia declined under Stalin on the ground that, "We don't interfere with the domestic affairs of

other countries. We consider that interference in a domestic affair." And of course, all the time they had a strong Communist party in Greece that had fought like hell to take over the government. Some people call it a civil war; I think it was an insurrection myself.

But anyway, I wasn't in military government. I went over as an interpreter or liaison officer--

Morris: Still in uniform?

Petris: Oh, yes. I was on detached duty serving with the State Department. My brother was on that mission, too. There were five of us who were officers--six of us--who were officers who were needed for that purpose. It's an interesting story; I don't know if we have time for it.

But briefly, after the war, and they decided to do this, they had the State Department representing the United States. Each country sent a person in with the rank of ambassador to head up their portion of the mission. So the French went in and the British went in and the Americans went in; the Russians stayed out. So they divided the country into zones. Each zone was headed by a person with the rank of minister. I was assigned to the southern Greece zone in Trípolis, in the Peloponnesus. Our man there was William W. Waymack, who was a Pulitzer Prize-winning editor of the *Des Moines Register and Tribune*, a marvelous, remarkable man. He was appointed by Truman for this job, and later he was one of the first members of the Atomic Energy Commission. One of the great influences on my life, as a matter of fact. He was a marvelous man.

Morris: I should say, because you were a journalism student.

Petris: Yes, I was a journalism major. He really reprimanded me severely because I had failed to tell him about an opportunity I had when I went over to Greece on this mission. Before going, I was stationed in Washington, D.C., at the time, and I called this family friend that had met my mother at the docks--

Morris: Oh, the guy from Massachusetts.

Petris: Yes. He was a very wealthy, successful businessman. When I called home to tell my parents that I was going to Greece, "Give me some names of people to see when I'm over there," my mother said, "Call Mr. Kotsilibas in Massachusetts, because he has people, too." We wanted to help him. [telephone interruption] He said, "Meet me in New York, I need to see you before you go over."

So I went to New York. I had never met him before. He's a wonderful man. He came down, and he brought me a movie camera and 2,000 feet of 16-millimeter color film. During the war, you couldn't get that stuff. It was just very hard to get. He got 2,000 feet, and he said, "I want you to go visit these relatives." He gave me a list. "Because I haven't seen them for years. And then of course, when you visit your relatives, you can take pictures of them, too, and we'll see them." He gave me a money belt with \$2,000 in it. He said, "I want you to wear it in the shower and everywhere, and don't take it off until you get over there, and these are the names I want you to give the money to. People in Athens, and people down in the village."

I carried that out, of course, very faithfully, and took the pictures, and went to his home when we got back, my brother and I together, and showed him the movies. (We lost them in the fire, by the way.)

Journalism's Loss

Morris: What a shame.

Petris: Yes. Well, the point of the story is that he said, "I took the liberty to call Joe Alex Morris at *Colliers*." It was either *Colliers* or *Saturday Evening Post*; I think it was *Colliers*. Joe Alex Morris was a very famous war correspondent. When he came back home, he was made editor of the magazine, which was very popular at the time. He said, "I know you majored in journalism; here's your opportunity to write a story about this mission. It's different, something unique." So he took me by the hand and he introduced me to Morris. Morris was very impressed. He said, "Yes, this is a great story opportunity."

So we made arrangements for me to write a story. He said, "Take a lot of pictures, keep a journal, and when the mission is over, write your story and send it to me. I'll try to have one of my people come over to see you while you're in Greece before the mission is over. But whether or not that happens, I want you to send me the story."

Well, I took copious notes. I had a splendid journal--which also got burned, by the way. Now here I am living with Mr. Waymack, the Pulitzer Prize-winning editor of one of the great newspapers of America. I didn't breathe a word to him about this opportunity to write the story. So I didn't put the story together.

In the last week of the mission, just before we left, we were in Athens. I was with him every day, because I interpreted for him at press conferences, and in talking to local government officials, and all the way through. I was his right-hand man.

Morris: What an incredible experience.

Petris: Yes, just fantastic. So I told him in Athens, and he chewed me up one side and down the other. He said, "What's the matter with you? We've been together for three months. I could have helped you, I could have edited the story." [interruption]

Morris: You didn't write the story.

Petris: I didn't write the story, and he said, "Do it now. You've got a couple of days; I'm leaving tomorrow. I will take it with me, I will personally deliver it. I've known Morris for years. I will guarantee that he reads it. I don't know what he's going to do with it, but I'll guarantee that he reads it." Well, I sat down for an hour or so, and nothing came down. I just couldn't do it. I don't know what happened.

So I look back on that, and I say, "Well, if I had done that, I think it probably would have been published, and that would have launched my career in journalism. I wouldn't have gone to law school." Who knows?

Morris: And Oakland and California would have been bereft. What's the name of the Massachusetts gentleman who was such a benefactor?

Petris: Charles Davis Kotsilibas [spells]. He and his brother owned a restaurant in Worcester called Putnam and Thurston's, which is an old, old, traditional restaurant. They owned it for many years, and made a lot of money. He did well in investments and so forth. He was very active in the Greek-American community. He was a national officer of a couple of the organizations. He had two sons and a daughter. One of the sons took over the business and ran it. I don't think it's there any more. The other son became a writer, and he's written two or three books. I've seen a couple of his articles in *Life* magazine--

IV AIDE ALFREDA ABBOTT ON DISTRICT OFFICE ISSUES¹Helping Constituents

[Date of Interview: January 7, 1994] ##

- Morris: I'd like to ask you what your main responsibilities have been as an administrative aide to Senator Petris. I understand you've been on his staff here in his Oakland office for twenty years.
- Abbott: When I first came to work in the district office, his directive to me was to help constituents, especially poor people. I was hired because I had been involved politically, and was also very community-oriented. I had worked at the Alameda County Probation Department with child abuse for a short period of time, and then stayed home for many years to raise a family. When our children became school age, I became active in the schools. I have a background in social welfare. I had also been very active as a volunteer, particularly in education. I worked part-time as principal in an after-school church program, and after that in a senior citizen's program.
- Morris: Did you work on school board election campaigns?
- Abbott: I was politically active in school board races. Later on, in 1986, I ran for the Oakland school board. Education is really the area where my heart is, and the senator's, too. He chairs the fiscal committee for all of the budget for education. He is deeply supportive of both K-12 and higher education. One of his other areas of expertise is housing. He has authored a lot of legislation in housing, to make it easier to develop affordable, low-income housing.
- Morris: Wasn't he on an Oakland housing committee a long time ago, before he got into the legislature?²

¹ Senator Petris was delayed in starting the scheduled session, which provided an opportunity for the following interview with his aide Alfreda Abbott. Ms. Abbott reviewed this chapter and added several useful details.

² See Chapter XX for Senator Petris's discussion of his work on housing legislation.

Abbott: I was not here when he was in the Assembly. He has chaired the Senate's select committee on housing. He developed major legislation that created the California Housing Finance Agency.

Morris: And that was in the seventies.

Abbott: Some years ago. I believe he chaired the committee when I first came to work for him. He no longer chairs the housing committee, but he is an expert in the housing area. I spend time helping nonprofit housing developers; they are the major developers for low-income housing.

Developing Low-Cost Housing

Morris: Nonprofits?

Abbott: Nonprofit corporations are eligible to receive subsidies from foundations, governments, and private funders that for-profit organizations could not receive because of tax restrictions. I help the nonprofits and city agencies with state-related housing problems traverse the bureaucratic maze, especially now--there are still buildings and housing that have not been rehabilitated because of damage from the Loma Prieta earthquake (1989). I'm still very busy with earthquake problems.

Morris: Did you help get some of these low-cost housing organizations started?

Abbott: No. Most of them were in business before, rehabilitating old buildings, also new construction. To be successful in the construction business, it takes a lot of knowhow and experience for large multi-story, multiple-unit buildings like the California Hotel and San Pablo Hotel. Large construction projects cost millions of dollars, and one especially wants the best use of funds because of the need for good quality, low-cost housing.

Morris: What are these organizations?

Abbott: Oakland Community Housing, Inc.--OCHI--is one of them. East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation; the acronym is EBALDC. Now Catholic Charities is developing low-income housing. They have called us to help them with an application that they wanted to submit for a hotel that they bought, the Drake Hotel, which was damaged by the earthquake.

My housing involvement started with the senator when he supported a group called Neighborhood Housing Services (NHS). I believe it was in the early seventies. It's now a nationwide

organization. It was started by Mary Widener and Warren Widener [different families]. Their program provides loans to rehabilitate homes in mostly low-income neighborhoods.

Keeping housing stock in good repair helps not only families, but also protects property values, strengthens neighborhoods, and, therefore, the city. Because of financial and insurance institutions redlining poor neighborhoods, this kind of program plays a vital role in low-income areas. You understand what I mean when I say "redlining"?

Morris: That's where the financial institutions decide they won't make loans in a particular neighborhood?

Abbott: Yes. Racism plays a key role in the decisions as to who can qualify for loans. Without loans, people often can't do the necessary repairs to maintain, or even buy their own homes.

Morris: Is that something that the senator's office can do something in terms of working with the banks to--

Abbott: Well, that's been a hard one. That's not an area that I know. In fact, I've been meaning to ask the senator again what could be done. I think there's some work that's been done on the federal level where they are supposed to do a certain amount of lending to low-income individuals, within their communities. I believe it's called the community reinvestment program.

And oftentimes, the nonprofits can get special funding from government programs to help them with construction or purchase of buildings. They're also eligible for foundation grants, since many foundations cannot lend to private for-profit developers because of tax restrictions.

Morris: Has most of the work in Oakland been the renovation of existing hotels and apartment buildings?

Abbott: Mostly. Land is expensive, and we've got a lot of old, old buildings. Although they often say it's easier to tear something down and rebuild it, it's interesting how often the law or regulations won't let you do that.

Morris: Tear it down?

Abbott: Yes, that was the feeling. After an earthquake, FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Administration] funding won't let you do it.

Morris: Have you lived in Oakland yourself?

Abbott: All my life.

Morris: So you would have been here in the fifties when a lot of housing was removed in the urban renewal program.

Abbott: I remember that. I wasn't working, I was still in school then. But I remember they said that it was a political decision "to break up the black community," the minorities in West Oakland. There was really a very strong voting block. So they removed housing to break that up.

Morris: Minorities as a voting block?

Abbott: That's what I've heard from old-timers in the black community.

Morris: And then for a long time, the land just was vacant.

Abbott: Yes, the Republican leadership then was very powerful, and they wiped out all the housing. A lot of people had to move to East Oakland, which didn't really have the quality of housing there was in West Oakland, and not many resources. There are smaller units there, which lead to crowded conditions. And then nothing was really done to replace West Oakland housing in a planned way.

I was born and raised in West Oakland. The homes there were larger and more beautiful.

Morris: Yes, really old.

Abbott: Old homes, really beautiful. In fact, I remember going into this house that had gold-leaf wallpaper and a lot of old Victorian decoration. A lot of homes had beautiful woodwork in them. So now the plus is, it is very beautiful and historical; but the minus is, as you know, all of that is very expensive to repair. Even with low-interest loans, you're talking probably, and this was years ago, \$100,000 minimally to do all the wiring and plumbing and all that is required to bring one of the old houses up to code. Foundation work and all of that. Because those big Victorian houses are horrendously expensive to restore. They're beautiful. I don't know whether you've gone into any of the ones that have been cut up into flats--

Morris: I've just seen a little bit of the Preservation Park section, between the freeway and city hall. Is that something that came out of the neighborhood organizations?

Abbott: No, that was mostly federal funding. I think the original developers were for-profit and went into bankruptcy over that. Then the big downtown developer, the Canadian outfit--Bramalea--came in and took over that project. They received additional public funding. As you know, it's an award-winning project now. It's mostly nonprofit corporations that are housed there.

Morris: It's very, very pleasant and a very nice surprise right next to the big downtown highrises.

Abbott: I know. It's unheard-of to do this. I actually questioned spending such a tremendous amount of money for office space, when we need housing for people. I mean, I am very supportive of housing preservation but, I don't know, it's not like we lack rental space for offices.

Morris: Yes, that is kind of odd, when you think the Preservation Park structures were originally built as homes.

Abbott: Yes. The houses were moved there, because they wanted to preserve the different architectural styles.

Morris: I thought it had a cultural center or educational center mission too.

Abbott: They do. They have a lot of your nonprofit offices there. So that clearly serves the public, and the rents are probably lower. It's all right; it's just, do we have resources for all this kind of activity?

Working with State and Local Government

Morris: Does your job description in this office include going to the city council and things like that?

Abbott: I'll go if there's a community issue and I am needed. A good example is the rehabilitation of the Touraine Hotel. It was damaged by the Loma Prieta earthquake. I worked really closely with the project. After the emergency, \$4.7 million was raised for earthquake victims by the Red Cross. Their purpose was to house and retrain homeless people, many of whom were made homeless by the earthquake. The hotel was the only location where the Red Cross center could be housed after the earthquake. It was privately owned. Had it not been for Warren Widener, who was there serving on the Alameda County Board of Supervisors and had been former mayor of Berkeley, and has such an extensive background in housing, we never could have purchased the hotel. It was necessary to have the City of Oakland support, and I attended meetings to make certain the support was there.

Morris: Did the rehabilitation process after the Loma Prieta earthquake work better in Oakland than in San Francisco?

Abbott: I do not know, overall, how their program succeeded. I checked with San Francisco and also down in Santa Cruz, and there have been many difficulties in both areas. Most of the problems have

been with the California Department of Housing. Applications regarding loans are submitted to the housing department by the city, and there are a lot of nitpicky issues.

I told the top department administrators when they came down from Sacramento for a meeting with the senator that if we ever have another disaster here, we can't go through this again. Because the Wilson administration is not community-oriented, it is very difficult to work with.

Morris: Because it's a Republican administration and Oakland is pretty much a Democratic town?

Abbott: It has more to do with a different philosophy. It's a totally different style. You get the feeling that they're not really interested in helping people. [You don't hear,] "What can we do to help, how can we make this work?"

Public-housing funds are last-resort monies; of course you need guidelines, and we want to help people who really have no alternative. But you don't want to make applying for them so difficult that either the people give up and get private loans that they really can't afford, or they just are not being able to repair their homes at all.

Morris: And this is state loan money which is separate from Federal Emergency Management Administration funds?

Abbott: Yes, it is emergency state money that was appropriated for repairing earthquake damages.

Oh, the senator is ready for you.

Just to summarize, I'd like to add that, in addition to housing, I have worked on so many projects with Senator Petris in education, childcare, environmental protection that have greatly benefited the people of Oakland. He is responsible for more legislation benefiting poor people in the state of California than any other legislator. So much of his legislation has benefited people nationally and internationally.

V MORE ON CULTURAL AND COMMUNITY TRADITIONS

The Class of 1923; Keeping a Journal

Petris: Hi!

Morris: Good morning.

Petris: I got a postcard from our mutual friend Martin Huff and his wife, Ann, mailed from Russia six weeks ago.

I don't think he's over there now. Because now he's back into politics.

Morris: Yes. What is it? Treasurer for the city of Walnut Creek?

Petris: Well, the mayor is an old friend who prevailed on him. I think if it weren't for the mayor, Martin wouldn't have done it. Eugene Wolfe.

Morris: I thought that might be it.

Petris: He and Martin and I and Robert Kroninger, who was a superior court judge here for years, now retired, belong to the class of '23. We get together periodically, used to be once a year, to celebrate our birthdays. We were all born in that year. Gene Wolfe is one of them.

Morris: I see. Is there something about having been born in 1923, do you think, that made you all so interested in public service?

Petris: Well, I don't know about that, but the important thing is that that's when we were born. [laughs] I found in Sacramento a photocopy of an article that impressed me. This is just to

illustrate what these notebooks are that Martin keeps talking about.¹

Morris: Oh, wonderful.

Petris: It's not a journal, you see. It's not that, "Today I had a tough time in this committee because I was short one vote." It's not a daily journal at all. It's usually other people's thoughts, and this is one little example. I think I have one volume that was saved from the fire because I had taken it to Sacramento, maybe two volumes. I'll have to get it to you.

But this happens to be a photocopy I made--once in a while, I made several, so I could send them to people. This is a commencement speech about thoughts for graduation day; the title actually is, "What's Education Good For?" I thought it was a marvelous speech. So this will give you an idea of what I put in these notebooks. This is the volume number and the page number, and that's the date. Well, this starts with the tail end of the preceding article out of the *New Republic*. But this commencement thing I thought was an excellent and provocative speech.

Morris: Great. This looks very tidy and well organized. Did you do this on a computer?

Petris: No, no, that's all on an old-fashioned typewriter. It wasn't even electric.

Morris: Good for you!

Petris: And it's a small size. See, the photocopy makes it eight-and-a-half by eleven, but it's about a six-by-nine notebook.

I thought you might want to take that along.

Morris: Thank you!

Petris: I'll tell you what. Before you go, let me have them make a copy, That volume got wiped out in the fire.

¹ See appendix

Establishing a Greek Orthodox Church

Morris: Last time we met, we were talking about the Greek community in Oakland, and the kinds of lessons you learned from your Mom and Dad. I wanted to ask you if they were part of the group that got the Greek Orthodox Church built here in town, and the kinds of activities that were centered around the church.

Petris: Okay. First of all, they met in Idaho, where my father first went when he came from Greece. He went to his older brother Peter and some cousins and he worked for the railroad up there. He was doing work on a section gang, as they call it--that's maintenance of the tracks. So they lived in a boxcar on a railroad siding.

The roommate, James (Kakouris) Williams, was also from Greece, and he admired my father very much, to such an extent that he brought his sister over to marry my father. That's how they met. She didn't know who he was or anything. They got married in Idaho, and they came down here on a honeymoon in Oakland. They never left; they just stayed here.

Now, when my father was living in Pocatello, Idaho, he and his small group built the Greek church there which is still standing. They raised the money for it. They each put out a considerable amount of their pay each paycheck into the building fund for the church. When they came down here, this church had already been built.

Morris: The one that you now see near the freeway?

Petris: No, that's the newer one. That's about twenty-five years old. The one that they went to that I was baptized in and so forth was on Tenth and Brush. The freeway went right through Tenth and Brush, so that church was moved at state expense a couple of blocks over, because it had been declared an historical monument. When it has that designation, they can't tear it down; they have to move it. We weren't in it any more. By that time, it had been acquired by the Baptists. It's now a Baptist church.

If you go see the church, it's kind of a standard old village church with the ancient Greek columns in the front, and across the top in capital letters in Greek is an inscription, which the Baptists tried to block out after they bought it, and when we learned about it, we complained and stopped it, because they're not supposed to change the facade. It says in Greek, "In churches ye shall worship God."

Morris: That sounds like something appropriate for the Baptists, too, doesn't it?

Petris: Well, of course.

So when my parents arrived in Oakland, the church had already been built. The community had been formed; it was small. Prior to the building of the church, they had services in different homes. Once in a while, they'd rent a hall down on Seventh Street upstairs on the second floor. It was a hall owned by one of the other ethnic groups, Portuguese or Serbian or something. They rented this hall for church services. But eventually, they built the church on Brush Street, and that served the community from 1920 or '21 until this new one was built up on the hill twenty-five years ago. The community had grown so large that the church was much too small for them. They had to have a bigger one.

But my parents were very active in the church. My father was secretary of the board several times. It's an elected position. Our church is a congregational type. We're first cousins of the Catholics, but we were the first to break away. So we were the first Protestants. The schism came in 1215--

Morris: Before Henry VIII?

Petris: Oh, several hundred years before. Before the great schism it was one church, the eastern branch of the Catholic church, although they called themselves Orthodox even then, and the western branch, centered in Rome. The eastern branch was Constantinople. The head man there was the Patriarch. We still have an ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople. There are five Orthodox Patriarchs, but he's acknowledged as the first among equals, unlike the Pope. The Patriarch is not infallible and this and that; he's subject to the same rules as the other Patriarchs.

The other jurisdictions are Antioch in Syria--that's an old, venerable one that produced a lot of great theologians--; there's one in Jerusalem; there's one in Egypt; I guess there's two or three in Africa. Oh, there's one in Russia, too, of course. In Moscow they call themselves the new Rome, the third Rome. Rome, Constantinople, and Moscow. So each of them has a Patriarch with the different, separate jurisdictions. The church in North and South America is run by the Archbishop in New York City.

Morris: He's another level than the Patriarchy?

Petris: Yes, he's a lower level. Patriarch's above him. The Archbishop has jurisdiction over all of North and South America, and he in turn is subject to the jurisdiction of Constantinople.

Morris: Where do you go to find a priest for a local parish?

Petris: We go to our archdiocese in New York.

Morris: Did your father ever talk about how they got a priest for the church in Idaho?

Petris: Well, it was hard to get priests in those days. It was not unusual to have a local layman be persuaded to become a priest who might be so inclined; he might be the cantor, he might know more about it than any others. In the early days, there was no seminary in the U.S. They had to come from Greece. They all came from Greece. And they were very scarce. They used to have a circuit priest in Idaho who would go around to different communities and cover the whole state. So if you belonged to the church in Pocatello, you wouldn't necessarily have services every Sunday, because the priest would have to go off to other parts of the state and rotate, just be on the circuit. [interruption]

Morris: And by the time you were a boy going to Greek school, was there a full-time priest in Oakland?

Petris: Oh, yes. Yes, we had a full-time priest. The church community is run by an elected board of directors. They have jurisdiction over the whole community, including the church. The church is a central focus of the community. They're the ones who arrange for the priest to serve that particular community. The way they do it now is they go to the bishop, because we have decentralized since those days, and we have the bishop of San Francisco who has most of the western states this side of Colorado, and Alaska and Hawaii in his jurisdiction. So he's the one who arranges to get a priest. He often has to check with the archdiocese to see what they have. We have a seminary now, but there are only a handful of graduates each year. They're still in short supply.

We now have three priests in our Oakland church, because it's a much bigger congregation. We have a priest who's been with us quite a few years, and then two assistants.

Morris: Is the community larger than just Oakland?

Petris: Oh, yes, it covers most of the East Bay. There are two churches down in San Jose. There's one in Pittsburg, and there's one in Vallejo, and there's one in Concord. When I was a child, there weren't any of those around.

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Petris: A lot of people, even though they come to the Oakland church, don't live here. They live in Richmond, and all East Bay cities like Berkeley and Albany and Alameda and Piedmont, El Cerrito, and I guess all the way down to--well, lot of people from Hayward. There's also a church in Castro Valley. It's a splinter group from our church here.

Morris: Splinter philosophically?

Petris: We had a falling out on administrative issues, not theological. That's fairly typical in the Greek community; you have a lot of splinters. So they left our church and formed their own in Castro Valley. So they've drawn on people from the southern part of the county.

Teaching Greek Language and Culture

Morris: When you were a boy, do you remember who the priest was? Was he somebody that was important to a boy?

Petris: Oh, sure. We served in the altar as acolytes. There were several I remember. The first one was Father Germanos. And then there's Father Phoutrides, and later Father Arsenios Pallikaris. He also taught us in our Greek classes. He was a University of Athens schoolmate of my mother's brother, Nicholas Kakouris. They both became theologians, but my uncle did not join the clergy--he became a teacher.

One of the duties of the priest in those days was to teach the Greek language school. We had Greek school three days a week normally, Monday, Wednesday, Friday, from four to six. So when we got through with school, we got to go to Greek school. We'd go home and get our milk and cookies, and then go to Greek school. And for many years, the teacher in the Greek school, whose principal function was to teach the language and a little bit of history--all that was done by the priest. In the later years, they hired teachers. They brought teachers over from Greece, as a matter of fact.

They still do it. We still have a Greek school at the church. It's a little more difficult to operate it now, because the community is scattered all over the place. When we had it on Brush Street, most of the people lived in that area, in west Oakland. They were within walking distance, and we'd walk to

school and walk to church. But now you can't do that; they're scattered all over.

Morris: So it was important enough to have the next generation learn Greek that they brought in a teacher rather than just relying upon parents to do it?

Petris: Oh, yes. The parents, of course, they all came from Greece, so they spoke Greek at home. Most of them deliberately chose to speak Greek at home in order to teach the children. That was certainly true in our case; my parents always spoke Greek at home. In fact, parents deprived themselves of the opportunity to talk a lot of English at home in order to help them learn their English. But they kind of sacrificed that.

They did okay. They both learned the language pretty well, and they became citizens, naturalized citizens. That was a common pattern throughout the community. They would go to night school to study English and study about citizenship, and then take the exam in court, and so forth. They had a marvelous teacher named Mrs. Beatrice Webb. Her husband was a minister. She taught English and citizenship at Prescott School in the evenings. My father always said she had the patience of Job and that the immigrants should have erected a monument in her honor.

Morris: Did your Greek school after school include literature as well?

Petris: Oh, yes.

Morris: They teach you from the classics?

Petris: Started out with poetry, as a matter of fact. I remember the first poem I learned when I was in Greek school, the first two or three poems. One of them is very old and historic, and taught us a little bit about history, too. That poem was an ode to the moon, and it calls on the moon to "shine on my path so that I can go to school and learn letters and God's things." The reason for that is that during the occupation of Greece by Turkey for 400 years, the Ottoman Empire, in many parts of the country they did not allow the Greeks to have a church or a school. It was very oppressive. So it fell to the priests to preserve the religion and the language. We have a painting at home which we've had for many years--well, we lost the one we had in the fire, but a friend of ours took one right off of his wall--Paul Manolis. I think you know Paul.

Morris: Yes.

Petris: He took his painting like that right off the wall of his living room in Piedmont and gave it to us.

Morris: Oh, my goodness.

Petris: Yes. And that shows a priest with his frock and the beard, typical priest, sitting in a cave. He just has one single light, with children around him. It depicts the typical scene of the secret school where the priest is teaching the children both the language and the religion. They had secret churches, too. A lot of them were conducted in the home, church services in the home, with elaborate security precautions. Always had the guards posted, in case the Turks came by.

As a matter of fact, in my own family, my mother comes from a long line of clergymen. I think I mentioned that before. Her father was a priest, and his father, and way back quite a few generations. In my family history, I've learned through a cousin who did all the research, a first cousin, that my great-great-great--I don't know how far back--grandfather in the latter part of the eighteenth century was living in this small village north of Tripolis, and the village name was Kakouri [spells]. That's my mother's maiden name. He was conducting services in this secret church that was built to look like a barn, so it had none of the characteristics of a church. There's no stained glass, there's no dome, there's no cross. The villagers knew what it was, but a Turk passing by wouldn't know.

Morris: Did they have a few cows?

Petris: Yes, for effect. They would make it look like a barn. One day, when he was conducting services, the villagers stormed into the church and said, "The Turks are coming!" This had been right after one of their many uprisings against the Turks, which were always squelched. The priest shook his head and said, "Again?" and took the holy symbols from the altar, and wrapped them up in a holy cloth, went out through a secret passageway to his home, got his wife and two sons, and left the area. He said, "I've had it." The Turks time and again swooped down on them.

He worked his way down to a neighboring province, to the province of Elia [spells], where my mother was born, more than a hundred years later--about a hundred years later, I think. But my family personally was part of the group that preserved both the religion and the language by entering the priesthood and doing these things in secret.

Now, in other parts of the country--it depended a lot on the local pasha. If he was a generous and liberal kind of person, he

didn't persecute them. But in many, many areas, they weren't allowed to have their schools. You go to Greece and you ask, "Where's the nearest secret school?" and they could take you to it. They've preserved--I've been to one or two of them.

Morris: Yes, I would think that would be an important way to preserve the Greek people's sense of identity in those years of Turkish occupation.

Petris: Yes. So when the Greeks went abroad, the first thing they did was build a church. They used the church as a school. Then later, they'd build a school.

Morris: You said that the elected board of the church in this country is kind of in charge of the whole community.

Petris: Right.

Morris: In the early days, did that mean seeing to it that the newcomers found jobs and helping people find housing?

Petris: Oh, yes, all kinds of things like that.

Morris: And helping each other in business?

Petris: Yes. A very closely-knit group.

Solon Democratic Club; Remembering Senator Bill Knowland

Morris: Did the local Greek group take an interest in local politics here in California?

Petris: Yes, they did in some areas. In Oakland we had a fellow who was very active. His name is Chavalas, same name as Telly Savalas, except spelled differently in English. His first name was Jim, James Chavalas. He had a little candy store at the T&D Theater. I don't know if you're familiar with that. T&D Theater was down on Tenth Street off Broadway. It's not there any more.

Several Greeks had these little candy stores next to the theater. They would sell candy to the passer-by, and they had a few seats where you could get milkshakes and things. But they also had direct access to the movie theater through a panel that opened, so people who went to the movies could get their candy through the window. We had another one like that down at the Lincoln Theater in West Oakland on Seventh Street.

But James Chavalas was a very active and ardent Democrat who formed a Democratic group called the Solon Democratic Club, named after Solon. I remember one time he had some kind of meeting at the church hall, and he invited then-State Senator [William] Knowland (Republican) to be the speaker. Knowland came and spoke to the group. That's the first time I met Knowland. I was pretty young at the time. I remember following him out after he finished his speech, and I thanked him for coming to our community and speaking to the group, even though the sponsor was a Democratic club. Most of the Greeks at that time were wage-earners and they were Democrats. My father was a very strong Democrat. Mr. Chavalas also encouraged our people to become citizens. One of his sons, Gus, was student body president at Oakland Technical High School and later president at Stanford.

I said, "Knowing that, you still came over, and I appreciate it." [laughs]

But they didn't get actively involved in running candidates of their own at that time.

Morris: What did you think of Bill Knowland then? Did he comment on how come he had taken the trouble to come talk to a bunch of Democrats?

Petris: He gave a good answer. He said, "Well, I'm delighted to do it. It's part of my duty to visit with all the people. I'm happy to be invited," and so forth.

Morris: He had a reputation for being pretty crusty, conservative Republican.

Petris: Oh, yes. He was a very strong conservative. He was a leader-- when the Republicans had a majority under Eisenhower, he was the majority leader. On a personal level, he was very shy. I got to know him years later. I met him and got to know him quite well. I've been to his home, and he's been to my home, especially when my wife and I would have a reception when some visiting dignitary would come through from Greece. Before I got married, I would have a reception at my parents' home. I remember the president of parliament came through from Greece. Well, I was married by that time. So for him we had a reception in my home. And I invited the senator, and he came. I developed a great deal of respect for him even though we were far apart politically.

But on a personal level, he was always shy. He would just stand in the corner, and you wouldn't hear him making any loud comments or trying to dominate the conversation. He was very respectful and very shy.

- Morris: That's interesting. At that point, did it seem like the Republicans did indeed control things in how decisions were made in Oakland?
- Petris: Oh, yes, Alameda County, they ran the show. They were so strong in Alameda County that all through the Roosevelt administration--they ran the WPA, for example--they got all the appointments. There weren't any elected Democrats from this area.
- Morris: How about the postmasters?
- Petris: Yes, they got that too. They got everything.
- Morris: Wasn't there what was known as the Kelly machine here?
- Petris: Yes, they were rivals. Kelly was a rival of the senator's father, Joe Knowland.
- Morris: Okay, so he was another kind of Republican?
- Petris: Yes, oh yes. He was the machine guy. They weren't too friendly to each other. They were the ones that were always competing for power to run the show in Alameda County. I guess the Knowlands got the upper hand most of the time. He had the newspaper, and that helped. Earl Warren was one of their proteges, although he was much more liberal than they were. When Hiram Johnson died, Bill Knowland got appointed to the U.S. Senate. He was in the army at the time, and they pulled him out of the army and sent him to the U.S. Senate. He served there for a long time.
- Morris: Did he keep his hand in with Oakland politics?
- Petris: No, he didn't. When he was in Washington, his presence was known and felt, but he didn't do much interfering.

VI RISE OF THE CALIFORNIA DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Council of Democratic Clubs

Petris: That was the period when the Democrats finally woke up and started to organize, and started to run people for office, and we started --we won a lot of victories at the local level. Up to that time, you would never dream of having a Democrat elected to the city council or the school board. And Republicans used those offices very effectively as stepping stones. They would appoint a person to the board when someone left, died or resigned, and pretty soon he'd be stepping up into some other office, and he'd wind up maybe in the legislature.

Morris: Of course, that's been said about the Democrats too.

Petris: Well, sure. That's right. Both parties did it, no doubt about that. But my point is that they really had all the power in those days. It didn't start turning around until the latter part of Roosevelt's years.

Morris: During the Second World War?

Petris: No, even after the war, after Roosevelt. We didn't start electing Democrats until after the war. It was in the fifties.

Morris: Who did the organizing? Did the Solon Democratic Club get involved in that kind of thing?

Petris: No. When Chavalas left, when he died, that just kind of petered out. There wasn't any activity there. [Then a lot of] Democratic clubs sprang up beginning in 1952. After Adlai Stevenson was defeated by Eisenhower in the presidential election, a rejuvenation of the Democratic party began. George Miller, the state senator from Contra Costa County, was one of the leaders who

called a meeting of Democrats to a statewide convention to do something.

A lot of the clubs that were formed were called Stevenson Clubs. That was a marvelous movement that grew and grew and grew, and reached 100,000 members at one point, in just small individual clubs around the state. We sponsored issues conferences periodically, would invite the public to talk about issues.

Morris: Is this the California Democratic Council?

Petris: Right. The longer title is California Council of Democratic Clubs, and later we dropped the Clubs. I was vice chairman of that under Alan Cranston. He was the first statewide president. I was a regional vice president for the Bay Area and north all the way up to Chico, I think. My job was to organize new clubs, be available to bring the gospel to the Democratic clubs in the area.

Morris: Do you remember how you first heard about that?

Petris: Yes, Martin Huff recruited me. He was secretary of the Alameda County Democratic Central Committee. We belonged to a club in East Oakland called the 15th Assembly District Democratic Club. Martin was a member. We had good strong membership there, and very active. We even had a headquarters on MacArthur Boulevard near Fruitvale that later became the county committee headquarters. And later, Martin is the one who persuaded me to run for the Assembly in 1958, along with Bob Crown, who was the assemblyman from the neighboring district [in Alameda.] He died years ago.

Campaigns of the Fifties: Helen Douglas, Jerry Voorhis

Petris: The two of them are the ones responsible for persuading me to run. They had asked me before--'56, '54--I said I wasn't ready. In '52, I was very active in the campaign. The first campaign I worked in was in '50; it was [the year of] Nixon's campaign against Helen Gahagan Douglas for the U.S. Senate.

Morris: Just because you were ready to get involved in politics, or was there something about the Douglas candidacy?

Petris: Well, I was a very fervent Democrat from way back, from school days. There's something about Nixon that just made me boil. So it was partly to do the natural thing and become active as a Democrat, and the motivation was increased substantially by

Nixon's conduct and behavior and record and so forth, his philosophy, and his lack of ethics.

Morris: That campaign mostly is remembered because of Nixon's repeatedly saying that Douglas was soft on communism.

Petris: Oh, yes. Well, it went before that. Before he ran [against her for the Senate], when he got elected to Congress, he ran against Jerry [Horace Jeremiah] Voorhis. Voorhis had been named the outstanding member of Congress by some independent group two terms in a row. He was a new member of Congress from southern California, marvelous man.

Morris: Did you know him at all through the Democratic Council?

Petris: No, I met him later, and we became very good friends. We corresponded and we exchanged books. I got to know him very well. He's a remarkable man. He came from a pretty wealthy family, but he toured the country--he took one or two years to tour the country. He just got odd jobs here and there, just to see what it was like to have to support yourself as a working man in those days.

Morris: After the service, or after college? How did he happen to do that?

Petris: After college. He worked on a farm, he worked in factories, he worked here and there. Just marvelous. He gave most of his money away. He had a lot of money, and he gave it away. He wrote a book about his life.¹ I had an autographed copy; he autographed it for me after I met him. We became very good friends. I really admired him.

Nixon pulled him through the mud by claiming he was a Communist. He was a vicious, horrible man, Richard Nixon. Just unforgettable things that he did. No conscience whatsoever. He was lying in his teeth, and he knew he was lying, and he believed that the end justifies the means. Anything goes.

Morris: In other words, getting himself elected?

Petris: Yes, getting himself elected no matter what. And he, in Voorhis's case, he distributed leaflets comparing Voorhis's voting record with Vito Marcantonio of New York. Marcantonio had a reputation of being the most radical member of Congress. A lot of people thought he was a Communist. I don't know whether he was or not,

¹*Confessions of a Congressman*, New York: Doubleday, 1947.

myself. I doubt it. So Nixon picked ten issues, and he'd show how they voted, how Marcantonio voted and how Voorhis voted. And of course, they voted alike on all ten issues. So here's this [alleged] Communist whose record is being followed by Voorhis.

Now, what he didn't put in was that in eight out of ten of those cases, Nixon voted the same way. Eight out of ten. And people didn't know that, unless you did some reading. I had done some reading. I used that in my speeches. And then against Voorhis he also used the whispering campaign, where people mount a phone bank and call the voters. Instead of saying, "Be sure to go out and vote for Nixon," they would whisper in a conspiratorial tone and say, "You know that Voorhis is a Communist."

Morris: Oh, I hadn't heard that one.

Petris: Oh, absolutely.

Then, with Helen Douglas, the literature he distributed against her was always printed on pink sheets [of paper] with her name on it, to illustrate that she was a pinko. He just had no conscience whatsoever.

Morris: There was a lot of anti-Communist hysteria in those days.

Petris: Yes, there was, and he was milking it. He was riding the tide. Sure, he was feeding it.

VII EXPERIENCES IN POSTWAR GREECE

Communist Influence

Morris: That reminds me that you had been in Greece helping with the election after the war. Wasn't one of the issues whether or not there was undue Communist influence on the political scene in Greece?

Petris: Oh, yes, that's been an issue in Greece for a long time. Especially right after the war. They had a civil war in Greece. Some people called it a revolution. It was [about] who was going to run the country. There was the Communists versus everybody else. But the Communists had a lot of allies who weren't Communists, they were genuine democrats. There was a power struggle between the traditional, very conservative forces in Greece that supported the monarchy, and the democrats. But the Communists took the lead because they had the most underground experience in the pre-war days when Greece had a dictatorship under Metaxas. General [John] Metaxas was a very brilliant general. In Europe, they called him "Little Moltke," after Von Moltke, the great German general, who was a mastermind in World War I. He had studied under Moltke when he went to the military academy in Germany. He was acknowledged to be a brilliant general.

Greece had gone through some turmoil in the thirties, and the parliament invited Metaxas to come in and run the country. So he was an invited dictator. [laughs] He came in under the legitimacy of perfectly proper authority, being appointed by the parliament. But he took it a lot farther than they expected, and he had a pretty strong dictatorship.

He still became a hero, because in 1940, when Mussolini demanded that Greece surrender to him, Metaxas told him to go to hell and proclaimed his famous "No" on October 28, 1940. To this

day, all over the world wherever Greeks are, they celebrate "No (Ohi) Day." We have a celebration here in Oakland, October 28.

And of course, they fought very hard, and they defeated Mussolini and drove him back into Albania. It was the first victory during World War II by anybody over the Axis powers. In October of 1940, the Allies were flat on their backs. France was down, all the Western countries that had been invaded by Germany were down. There hadn't been any victory anywhere, except a few at sea, sporadically here and there. But on the land, the first ones to give them a bloody nose were the Greeks. They just did a miraculous job because they were outnumbered, and Mussolini had tanks and a modern, mechanized army. The Greeks didn't. And there was no prospect that the American cavalry would come to the rescue like in the movies. They knew defeat was inevitable.

Greek pilots were doing suicide missions as the Italians would try to come through the mountains--actually dividing their airplanes into narrow mountain passes to bottle them up [keeping them out of Greece.] Later, the Germans came down--Hitler decided he'd better come down there and rescue his ally, and he wanted to protect the southern flank, because he was getting ready to go to Russia. He diverted a couple of army divisions through Yugoslavia and Greece. Yugoslavia resisted very fiercely also, and the Greeks did too, and they delayed his campaign against Russia by three or four weeks.

The military experts will tell you, that's what made the difference in World War II. His jumping-off date was delayed until June 22. He had wanted to make it a month earlier, because June 22 is the day Napoleon marched on Russia; he didn't make it; he got frozen there. Same thing happened to Hitler. The military experts say if it weren't for Greece defeating Mussolini and compelling Hitler to divert his troops down there, he'd have defeated the Russians, and the whole story would have been different.

Morris: Was the concern about the Communist influence in Greece similar to what was going on here, or was it a different kind of political force there?

Petris: Well, over there, it was uglier, because it included a war, an internal war. The Communists were accused of trying to take over Greece and bring them under the iron curtain, and become part of the East. That's when the Truman Doctrine was enunciated, and he sent advisors over. Not a lot of troops, but advisors. The commanding general of the marines, General James Van Fleet, headed the military advisory mission.

Now the Greeks, after being the first ones to win a victory over the Axis, were the first ones to drive the Communists out. They stopped the Communists. Communists were going to pour in from Yugoslavia and Bulgaria and Russia. There weren't any Russian troops, but there were plenty of Russian fingerprints on the ones who came.

As I say, it was an ugly period in Greek history. A lot of people got killed. The Communists kidnaped something like 30,000 children from the northern villages and took them into the Eastern countries. The Greeks had a postage stamp commemorating that, very dramatic scene, showing the map of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, and a huge hand reaching over, coming down from that area and grabbing children. It was called the "Pedomazoma" (children gathering).

Morris: And this is after World War II?

Petris: This was after World War II.

Morris: To replace the children that died in Russia?

Petris: I don't know about that. No, they were going to raise them, indoctrinate them as fanatic Communists, train them, and send them back as their point people on infiltrating and taking over Greece.

Morris: Sounds like the Turks.

Petris: Yes. As a matter of fact, the Turkish troops which breached the walls of Constantinople on May 29, 1453, after a long siege, were young Greeks who had been kidnaped in this same way and sent back as shock troops.

Allied Election Observer; Easter Traditions

Morris: And then after the war, you were one of the people sent to supervise the elections that were held in 1946?

Petris: Yes, that's right, but we didn't supervise the elections, we monitored them to prevent fraud and intimidation. When they finally ended that civil war [in October 1945], they made a treaty, it was called the Varkiza Treaty, for one of the suburbs outside of Athens. One of the terms was that they would ask the Allies to send in observers for their first post-war elections. That came about as a result of the Teheran Conference, in which Truman, Churchill, and Stalin had agreed to send observers into

any country that asked for them, because a lot of the countries had not had elections for a long time, including Greece.

So Russia and France and England and the U.S. were invited, and they all accepted except Russia. Russia said, "That constitutes interference into the domestic affairs of another country, and we don't do that. We don't interfere." [laughs] Supreme irony of the day. That's the mission that I went on with my brother. It was called the Allied Mission for Observing the Greek Elections. The U.S. part of it was headed by Ambassador Henry Grady.

Henry F. Grady, as I've mentioned, was a professor at U.C. Berkeley, head of the Department of Commerce (it was then called) as was Papandreou later on. Grady was sent over there by President Truman with the rank of Ambassador to lead the U.S. part of that mission. The country was divided into five areas for administrative purposes. Those of us who were in the army were sent over on detached duty from the army with the State Department just to facilitate their getting around the country. Because all the bridges had been destroyed during the civil war, and by the Germans earlier, and it was hard to get around the country to observe the elections. So the military provided jeeps, and we threw up temporary bridges, pontoon bridges, wherever they were needed, to make sure that the observers would get around. The French and the British had their counterparts as well.

Morris: Did each country have responsibility for a different area of Greece?

Petris: No, they were all together. In our area, for example, we had our headquarters in Trípolis, Arcadia in the Peloponnesus, and the leadership rotated on a weekly basis. One week it would be run by the Americans, and the next week by the British, and the next by the French. So they were all three together, and they worked very nicely together. Actually it worked out very well.

So I was the liaison officer between the American part of the mission and the local officials, as an interpreter. My brother did the same thing up in Salonika. The Communists boycotted that election. They said it was rigged, and they said, "This is interference." They didn't want the observers. Even though the Communists had agreed to do it, at the Varkiza Agreement when the civil war ended--they had agreed to bring in the observers.

Morris: They changed their minds, then.

- Petris: Yes, they changed their minds, and they boycotted it. There was still some killing going on. There was a very dramatic funeral in Sparta when I was there. A young woman was killed as part of the partisan, Communist activity down there.
- Morris: They were trying to keep people from voting in addition to not voting themselves?
- Petris: Yes, that's right. They wanted everybody to boycott it. But it didn't work; they turned out in pretty good number. That was the first election of the parliament after the war.
- Morris: Was that part of the idea, that the Americans, French, and British would make it safe for people to vote that wanted to?
- Petris: Yes. Well, it wasn't so much military security; the government tried to take care of that. They didn't send troops in for that purpose. It was to monitor the polls and make sure there was no intimidation at the polls.
- Morris: What was it like at a polling place?
- Petris: Well, they had all kinds of people around. [laughs] There were observers that we had, and the military people, but we didn't have any soldiers that were menacing any of the citizens there. The election monitoring was done by State Department civilian personnel. They were just there to make sure that nobody else did anything. They were there to make sure that citizens weren't prevented from voting, and that the counting was proper, there was no fraud in the counting, things of that sort.
- Morris: Was there any evidence that there was--?
- Petris: No, I don't think so. The critics claimed that the election was rigged, but they were absolutely wrong. I think it went very well. It was the first exercise in a free election that they had had for a long time.
- Morris: Was that your first visit to Greece?
- Petris: Yes, that was my first time.
- Morris: That must have sort of blown your mind.
- Petris: Oh, yes. It was great. After it was over, we went and visited our family that we had never met before. We were there during Holy Week, just before Easter. My brother and I spent the first half of the week in my mother's village, my mother's home town, and the second half in my father's village, and met with them for

the first time. Of course, Easter is the best time of year in Greece, for a lot of reasons--the weather, and the spirit of Easter.

The tradition there is that everybody comes home for Easter. You could be the presiding justice of the supreme court in Athens, but if you come from a small village, that's where you go to celebrate Easter. You go back home to your village. So the school kids were all home from the university; I got to meet a lot of my cousins and others who were there who always came home for Easter. So it was a very exciting, very emotional experience. We saw the house where my father was born, and where my mother was born. So it was a very emotional thing for my brother and me.

Morris: What did the members of the family have to say about what they felt about the political scene? Did they feel that the election had been something that was--?

Petris: Well, for some reason or other, they just didn't get into that. There were very few comments about the election. I don't know whether that was by design on their part, so that the local things wouldn't erupt, because all the villages were split. They had differences everywhere. They take their politics very seriously in Greece. For example, if you have a couple of coffee houses in town, you find that one of them is patronized by one political party, and the other one is patronized by the other party, and they don't mix.

But if you happen to have Easter, and you have all these strangers coming back home, or strangers coming into town, you try not to do anything. Moreover, as part of their warm hospitality, they did not want to drag us into their political disputes.

Morris: You have sort of a truce.

Petris: You just have a truce, yes. So they just didn't talk about the election at all when I was there.

Morris: Well, that's interesting. So in a way, you had more experience with communism as an active part of the political scene--

Petris: Oh, yes. Because we had the American minister--see, in each area, they had a person with the rank of minister, which is just below ambassador. In my area, it was William W. Waymack, who was the Pulitzer Prize-winning editor of the *Des Moines Register and Tribune*. He was a wonderful man. After we returned to the States, my brother and I visited him in Iowa. I corresponded with him until his death.

Morris: I can't believe it.

Petris: He was appointed by Harry Truman. After he came home, he was appointed one of the first members of the Atomic Energy Commission. So he, as the head of the U.S. part of the mission, would have press conferences from time to time, and I would interpret for him. The local press would come. The Communists always gave him a bad time. Instead of asking questions, they'd get into big arguments. They always made it a political rally. That's their style.

Morris: How about Henry F. Grady? He's sort of a legendary figure.

Petris: Oh, yes. Well, he was in Athens, in charge of the U.S. part of the mission (Allied Mission for Observing the Greek Elections).

Morris: Did you have any contact with him?

Petris: Yes, I did, [laughs] I had one very unpleasant one. He was a marvelous guy. Before we went over to Greece, we had a briefing in Washington. That's where I first met him. He told us that he knows the situation, that there are a certain number of Greek Americans---. Well, it's kind of a longer story than that. I have to back up a little, because it is interesting, I think.

I learned about this mission in the newspaper. I was stationed in Washington at the time. It was in the *Washington Post*. It said that General Maloney, who was in charge of lend-lease in England during the war, had been sent to Greece to confer with the government officials about the upcoming elections, and the sending of Americans and British and French into Athens for that purpose. He was going to be in Washington after a certain date. I said, "Wow, I've got to get on this mission!" It was just a little blurb.

So I went to the Pentagon, and I spent four days out there trying to find Maloney's office. It's such a huge place, nobody ever heard of him. I knocked on every door in the Pentagon. I finally found it. There was a colonel there who was his aide. He was very discouraging. He said, "Well, I can't do anything on this. You have to talk to the general, but from what I understand, if you're of Greek descent, you can't go on this mission." But he arranged the appointment.

I met with the general, and the general immediately told me the same thing. He said, "We're under very strict rules from the State Department." I said, "Well, General, you're going to need some people who speak the language. It's very hard to find somebody who speaks the language who is not of Greek descent." He

said, "That may be right, but I am honor-bound to find somebody, at least try. So give me a week. Call me in a week, and we'll talk."

So I called him a week later, and sure enough, they turned up only one man. He was raised in Salonika. His father was head of the YMCA in Salonika. His name was Bruce. He later became president of the American Farm School for many years. Wonderful guy. He was in the navy, so they pulled him out of the navy and made him a civilian and sent him on this mission.

But, there were all these others. So when I went back to see the general, he said, "Okay, Petris, you win. We were only able to find one." Now, he had told me they were going to send 600 troops to Greece, to drive the jeeps and do this and that. So I said, "Very well, sir. I can get you 600 Greek Americans in twenty-four hours!" He said, "No, no, no!" [laughter]

Morris: What about all the people that supposedly they'd been training in military government to help in civilian conversion projects after the war?

Petris: Well, those were in the occupied countries.

Morris: They couldn't detach any of them?

Petris: No, I don't think they had any of them.

Morris: Or they didn't speak Greek.

Petris: This was just a temporary thing, just during the elections, and then they were leaving. They left right away. The military government people were for Germany and Italy, countries that we had conquered, and they had the military government running things until the civilian things could be reestablished properly. But they didn't use that in Greece at all.

Morris: Your brother--

Petris: So the general says, "You're going to get me in big trouble; I'm in trouble already if I take you. All I want you to get is six. We need a lawyer at the Athens headquarters, and we need one officer for each of the districts. That's five, plus one. You'll be one of them." I said, "Well, how about my brother?" He said, "If he knows the language, fine." My brother happened to be visiting me in Washington from Missouri, where he was stationed. So we went back, and he had somebody test us in Greek. We passed with flying colors.

So then I started calling friends of mine. It was late in the day, and people were getting out real fast. This was 1945. Or was it '46 even? Forty-six, I guess. Anyway, I made calls around. I called people at their homes to see if they were back yet. Long story short, we got our five, plus one for the headquarters, and I picked all of them. [laughs] They all did well. We went over there and we spent time together and came back. Not together; we were scattered around different parts of the country. It was a marvelous experience for six young Greek-American army officers.

But that was my first trip to Greece, and my first contact with family and with officialdom. I was there about three months all together.

The military operates in strange ways, I'll tell you. When you're in the army, you learn to get around the system. For example, the thing with the ambassador. They said, "Now, look. We are not supposed to take any persons of Greek descent, because the government does not want us to be accused of trying to influence the elections by sending a bunch of Greek boys over there. Now, we have to have this small number, five or six. We're going to give you strict orders, you are not to communicate with any of your relatives, and you're not to socialize with the local people. You just stay at the headquarters, and don't go out and fraternize. You've got to promise me that. If you fraternize, we'll send you home."

Morris: And you can only speak Greek during working hours.

Petris: Yes. So we said, "Okay," we were so eager to go.

Well, when I was in Trípolis, I would go into Athens every two or three weeks for the weekend. I went in this one weekend and met with Jim Harakas, an old Greek-American friend who had been in Greece during the war as part of the OSS [Office of Strategic Services, predecessor to the Central Intelligence Agency] troops; they blew up bridges, fighting the Germans. He was one of the great heroes. He was on this mission, too. So I went to visit with him. I couldn't go visit relatives, but I went to see him. He was staying in a hotel there.

He took me out to dinner. We had a great dinner, and then after dinner, a party of people came in at one of the tavernas led by Sofia Vembo. Sofia Vembo was a household name in every Greek family throughout the world. She was the most popular singer in Greece before the war. During the war, she sang some very strong anti-Mussolini songs. One of them in particular was kind of funny, just made fun of him. He thought he was something, and he

was going to do this and that to Greece, and the Greeks kicked him out and defeated him.

Mussolini put a price on her head. So when the Germans came in, of course, the Italians followed behind them. They got her out of the country, the Greeks, and she went to Egypt. She entertained the troops in Egypt. There were a lot of Greeks who had gone to Egypt, and they fought with the Allies all the way across the African desert. They won some great victories. So she was a real heroine, and all of us here, we had her records at home. When I saw it was Sofia Vembo, it just blew my mind! I said, "My God." And we joined our parties. She was there with her brother and several others.

Encounter with Ambassador Henry Grady

Petris: When they finished singing at this place, we went back to the hotel where I was staying just for the weekend, and I thought the party was over. It was two in the morning or later. They went into this dining room, and they had some musicians playing the guitar and the bouzouki, and they kept on singing. So I enjoyed it. I was having a great time.

All of a sudden, there's this huge knock on the door. Somebody opened the door, and I didn't have the presence of mind to jump out of the way. There's Ambassador Grady, with his nightcap and his nightgown. "What in the world is going on here? Don't you people know what time it is? People are trying to sleep!" And the only one he saw was me! He looked right at me, oh, my God! My friend who was there from the OSS jumped behind the door. He opened the door, but he stayed behind it, so Grady didn't see him.

Morris: You learn things like that in the intelligence service.

Petris: Oh, man. Yes, but I didn't. I was right in the line of fire.

So the next day, I was having breakfast in the hotel, and he came in, in the big dining room. He spotted me, and he looked at me, and he goes like this. [gestures] I said to myself, "Well, this is it. I guess by tomorrow I'll be on the way home." He said, "Didn't I see you last night at two o'clock in the morning?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "You totally ignored our instructions. What kind of riffraff were you associating with here, that keeps people up all hours of the night with that loud singing?" I said, "Well, it was so-and-so. She's a great

heroine." I told him something about her. It's like a young man now meeting Sophia Loren, that kind of thing.

He chewed me out, and he said, "You know, I have a good mind to call General Maloney and have you on the airplane before this day is over, and dismiss you and send you home." And I was trembling, I'll tell you. And he looked me over and he said, "How old are you?" And I told him. He said, "You're from California?"

Morris: You were twenty-three at the time?

Petris: Yes, about that. He said, "You're from California, aren't you?" I said, "Yes, sir." "UC Berkeley?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Well, I have a couple of sons that are close to your age. I can understand how you got into this. If you promise to behave the rest of the time, I'll forget it." Bless his heart, he didn't do a darn thing. He let me go.

Years later, I met his wife, Lucretia, who was very active in the Democratic party, and I met her at a big banquet one year. I told her the story. She just laughed and roared, she was so happy I had told her the story. This was after her husband had died. After the mission, he was ambassador to Greece, and then he was ambassador to India. He had quite a career. He treated me well, I'll tell you. He saved my fanny from being shipped home in disgrace!

Morris: That's pretty unusual, isn't it, for somebody who's a college professor to end up as an ambassador?

Petris: Yes, I think it is. You don't hear about that happening very often. Galbraith is another example. Grady was also, at a time he was president of one of the shipping companies, I believe, president of the Dollar Lines or American President Lines.

Morris: Well, Mrs. Grady, Lucretia, was part of the Del Valle family, which is old California--

Petris: Old California Spanish, right. But he was president of one of the big shipping companies.

Morris: Yes, it was an interesting family all together. Had you taken a course from him by any chance?

Petris: No, I didn't know him. I hadn't met him before that.

Morris: How about Mr. Papandreou? Was he on campus when you were?

Petris: No, he came much later.

Morris: After he was prime minister, he came back to the States?

Petris: No, this was before. He was here during the war. I think he served in the American navy. He pursued his studies here. I think he had already graduated from the University of Athens. No, he went to Athens College; it's an American school. He didn't go to the University of Athens, he went to an American school. It's one of the leading American colleges in Greece. There are several of them there.

Morris: Is it run by an American in Greece?

Petris: Yes, it's run and financed by Americans, but it's accredited by the Greek Ministry of Education. Also accredited by our people over here. He came over and studied at the University of Minnesota. Don't know if he was teaching there, but he got a degree there. He also studied at Harvard. He was at Minnesota when he was recruited by UC to come to Berkeley. The fellow who recruited him was an econ prof I had taken a course from, Professor Frank Kidner. I stayed in touch with him. Then later, he turned up as the Sacramento lobbyist for UC, and I used to see him a lot.

Drama School Dedication; Representing Governor Pat Brown and UC

Petris: But anyway, I was talking to him one day in 1966, I was getting ready to go to Greece representing the university and Governor Pat Brown.

The University of California was establishing a study center for graduate students in Greek drama at Delphi. It was a marvelous program. So I was asked by the university to represent the university, and Pat Brown asked me to represent him at these ceremonies. I went there, and I stayed at Delphi for three or four days. I got hold of a first cousin of mine, Constantine Kakouris, that I had met the first time around. This was now my second trip to Greece. This is the cousin who is now a justice on the European Community court, the International Court of Justice in Luxembourg; I think I mentioned that to you before.

Morris: Yes.

Petris: We went to Delphi together, and they had this ceremony of dedication, and they had faculty members, and they had administrators from the UC system, not just Berkeley but elsewhere. I know they had the chancellor from Irvine there, for

example. They had this nice lunch, this beautiful lunch. The queen was there, or the princess. They still had the royal family then. They were later voted out, but they were there at the time.

Morris: I love the business of electing the king and telling the king to go back--

Petris: Well, they've told the king many times to leave, and this is one of the times he screwed up. He collaborated with the dictators, and the people didn't like that, so they got rid of him. But anyway.

Morris: This was to train people in the classical Greek drama?

Petris: Yes, Greek drama. And put on plays. Professor Bogard was in charge. He's a big wheel in the drama department at UC; I think he's retired now. Travis Bogard. I worked with him on that, and I really liked him. I used to see him for a while; I haven't seen him for quite a while now, I'm sorry to say.

But it was a marvelous project. I was asked to speak, so I spoke on behalf of the governor in Greek. I had a tape of this whole thing, which is now burned up. But anyway, it was exciting for me.

Morris: What were you talking about?

Petris: Well, I brought greetings from the governor, and from the university, although the university was there officially anyway on their own. I don't remember, but I talked about the impact of classical Greek drama and the tragedies and comedies on all of Western civilization, some of the great playwrights, and how we had a Greek Theater in Berkeley, one of hundreds around the world that is copied after the theaters in Greece. I don't remember all the detail, but it wasn't very long. Mostly greetings from the governor, and then some of my own comments.

I guess I was only there a week or so all together, a week or ten days, and then I came back.

Morris: Was Mr. Papandreou there at that point?

Petris: No, he was not there. I've got to get my chronology straight here. I was there in 1963, and that was the year of a big election of his father. His father got elected in a landslide. He was still in office and was up for reelection in '66, and that's when the dictators took over. All the polls showed that he was going to get reelected, and the military colonels that pulled off this coup didn't like it. They intervened and threw the prime

minister in jail, and they threw the son in jail. They threw a lot of members of parliament, they put them in jail right away.

In fact, Papandreou, the current prime minister, cut himself up pretty bad in the leg, the ankle. He jumped through a skylight to get away--because they sent troops into their homes to arrest them. He saw them coming and sensed what was up, and went up to the roof. In his haste to escape, he jumped through the skylight and got all cut up. So they took him to the hospital, and then they put him in jail.

So I met him in '62 or '63, at a time when I was going to Greece every year. I didn't meet him here. I never met him when he was at Berkeley. But I visit with him in Greece, and have been to his home. He invited me to his home, and I had lunch with him. We had good long bull sessions about the future of Greece and relations with the U.S. I got to know him pretty well.

He was invited to come back to Greece by the prime minister prior to his father. Most people think his father brought him back. But it was [Constantine] Karamanlis, who later became president; he was prime minister at the time. He asked him to head up an economic research group to do some good, thorough studies on the economy of Greece and see what they could do to improve the economy. He headed that up at the request of Karamanlis. Then later, he resigned from that and ran for parliament. That's when he got into politics. (He was succeeded in the economic research project by Mr. Pan A. Yotopoulos who later came to California and has been a very distinguished professor of economics at Stanford for many years.)

Thoughts on Economic Aid

Morris: Would you talk together about economics in Greece, and in the U.S.?

Petris: Yes, we talked about that, and what his hopes were for the future, and what could be done. I had a lot of long bull sessions with him, either at his home or someplace or Athens where you could sit down and have a cup of coffee and talk. Of course later, when he got into government, he got so busy, he couldn't spare that kind of time. But I always visited him every time I went over. When he was prime minister, he would always receive me warmly. I'd see him at his office and sometimes at his home.

I took some delegations over there. The World Affairs Council had a trip a few years back, they asked me to lead it, to Turkey, Cyprus, and Greece. Papandreou was the prime minister at the time. He invited us to come to his home out in the outskirts of Athens and spent a couple of hours with us. Always very gracious and generous with his time.

Morris: Was there American aid going into Greece in this period to help with the restructuring of the economy?

Petris: The American aid was very limited. It was the first few years after the war. It was cut off fairly early. Some people have the impression it's still going on, but they haven't received any economic aid for a long time. They do have the military aid, and they get paid for the use of American bases there, but recently the bases have been withdrawn, too. I don't know if there's any left. I think there's one big naval base in Crete. But they had a lot of different air bases which are no longer there.

Morris: Every now and then, there's talk about California should have economic ambassadors to various countries. Was there anything you could do in the way of aiding California business enterprises in Greece? Is that of interest to anybody?

Petris: Well, I think it would be, yes. But it's very hard to do business over there in Greece; I've tried it. As an attorney, I've gone over on several different things. None of them panned out. It's hard to get through that attitude they have and their bureaucracy. In one situation, I had a friend who was a banker who was of Greek descent. He came up with the idea of a private Marshall Plan for Greece, which would be very beneficial to the country by doing things that all economic reports said should have been done, should be done, like--

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Petris: --[fix up] the seaports, improve the highway system, put in a whole new electronic system for communications.

So we formed this group that was going to raise money to do this from Greek Americans. The vehicle we decided on was a bank. I mean, Greece might be in great need of a shoe factory, but you go around the country telling the Greeks, "How about investing in a shoe factory in Greece," it doesn't have too much glamour. But if you tell them, "We're going to invest in a bank which in turn will take part in plans that the Greek government has approved to enlarge the economy by building various things," it's much more likely to draw attention. So that was the idea.

We formed a corporation, we had a board here in the States from around the country, and then I went to Greece several times on that. We formed a board for the Greek counterpart. We were making very good progress. We filed an application in Greece to get a permit for the bank, and they stalled us for about four years. This was the conservative, pro-business government. For four years, and I spent a lot of my own money going back and forth, because I thought it was a great idea.

I just thought that the people here would make money if we made the investments wisely, and the benefits would go to Greece by improving this and that. I was very enthusiastic about it. We had lined up a lot of people who were eager to help. Some of them were very successful in their own businesses, and some of them offered to come over as a dollar-a-year man. "I don't want any pay; I'd like to contribute. I know all about this particular kind of business, and they need it over there." That kind of spirit.

What happened was that I would be the person communicating with the government. They have a currency committee there composed of some of the leading ministers--commerce, industry, et cetera--and it took us a long time to persuade them. It's not like a local planning commission where you go before the board and you present your case; you had to collar each one of them separately. And by the time you sold the majority, they'd play musical chairs and new ministers would be appointed in their place, and we'd lose some of them and have to start over. [tape interruption]

All this has to do with our relations with Greece. So here's this conservative government that's supposed to be pro-business, and they're giving us a bad time. They're saying, "Look, if you're going to set up a corporation here to go into business, according to our law, the majority of the shares has to be owned by residents of Greece."

I said, "Well, that didn't apply to the Arabs, did it?" They had granted a big permit to Arabs to set up an Arab bank. "Well, there are special considerations there." I said, "Well, what are you afraid of? You think this is some powerful international conglomerate that's going to come in and try to control the economy of Greece? These are your children and your grandchildren coming home. We want to do some good things. It's easier to persuade people at home to invest across the street, not all the way over in Greece." Couldn't move them.

So one day I was sitting in the office with our attorney, and I said, "Explain to me dual citizenship. I am told that I am

a citizen of Greece by virtue of the fact that my father was born here." He said, "That's right." And that I have certain privileges and certain duties. I said, "What are they?" "Well," he said, "in case of war, you can be drawn into the service, for one thing. That's your duty. On the privilege side, you can vote here if you want, you can run for office, you can own property anywhere in the country, including the restricted area." They have certain restricted zones where foreigners are not allowed to buy property. It's a military thing, on some of the islands and things. But, "you could buy property anywhere, and you can do this and do that."

I said, "Well, let me tell you what else I can do. I can take the stocks of our company and sell every one of them to similarly situated Greek Americans in the United States, male Greek Americans whose fathers were born in Greece. And there isn't a damn thing the government can do." He said, "You know something? You might be right. Let me check that out. Come back tomorrow."

So the next day he said, "You're absolutely right. I've made an appointment to go see the key minister among these currency committee people, and I want you to present your case." So I did. He in turn called in his lawyer, and the lawyer without doing any research said, "Mr. Petris is right." I said, "You see? We've been very generous. We've offered 40 percent, instead of zero. All we said was 60 percent ought to be ours. We can't sell any shares over there to hard-headed Greek-American businessmen who've worked hard to make their money if they don't have somebody to protect their interests. They want to know the control is with the people who organized this thing." So they said okay.

By the end of the week, we had our permit. Now we've got to go out and sell the shares. So we applied for a permit with the SEC. That takes forever. That took eighteen--

Morris: This is back in this country?

Petris: Yes, here. That took eighteen to twenty-four months.

In the meantime, we were already talking to people about the idea. About that time, the Greek elections are coming up, and Papandreou is running for election. He's going around bashing the United States.

Morris: Your friend.

Petris: Yes, my friend. And foreign corporations in general, and saying that they don't want any foreign corporations coming in here and

intermeddling and this and that and, "When I get elected, we're going to socialize everything anyway. We're going to nationalize all the big companies." Well, when the Greek Americans saw that, they said, "Forget it." They wouldn't even--. In spite of that, we got about \$2.5 million in pledges. We were looking for \$25 million, \$18 million from here and \$7 million from Greece. So needless to say, that got shot down.

So right after Papandreou got--. And the other thing is that during the time he was out of office, whenever I went to visit, I'd see the prime minister from the other party, and then I'd call on him as the leader of the opposition and as an old friend. I gave him the whole program. He said, "That's exactly what Greece needs. Anything I can do to help, let me know. Sooner or later, we're going to win the election and when I'm prime minister, I can tell you, we're going to do it."

Well, I went back. He's now the prime minister. I brought the company president with me. The first question he asked was, "How's the project going?" I said, "It's dead in the water." "Oh," he said, "what happened?" I said, "Your speeches." [laughter]

Morris: Oh, dear.

Petris: So he said, "Well, what can I do to help?" The other fellow told him, "Well, maybe you ought to make a few public statements at some of your press conferences that the foreign companies' investments are welcome, particularly from the United States, and more particularly the Greek Americans." He said, "I don't have to wait for my next press conference. In a few days, I'm going to give my first speech to the parliament, laying out my program. I will do it." And he did it. I saw it in the *Wall Street Journal*.

So I clipped it out, and I went around talking to potential investors, and they said, "That's just a politician's speech. Promises. We'd rather wait and see how he performs." So it went down the tubes. But it would have been a great thing for the country. Anyway, that's what happens.

Morris: Was that a lesson that was useful in politics in this country, that the same kind of thing sometimes happens?

Petris: Yes, but not on that much of a scale. We have our problems, but they're easy compared to trying to get things done over there. Yes, after that I had three or four other projects and nothing ever got off the ground.

Morris: Oh, that's too bad. Where you want to do good and--

Petris: Yes, right.

VIII MORE ON STRENGTHENING THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY IN THE 1950s

Alan Cranston

Morris: I have about fifteen minutes left of tape here if you want to talk a little bit more about how we got the Democrats a good working base in Alameda County and in California. You said you were working with Alan Cranston. Wasn't he one of the founders of the CDC?

Petris: Yes, he was a leading founder. George Miller was the one who really issued the call. He was chairman of the Democratic Central Committee, the state committee, Miller was. And he issued the call to arms for a weekend of self-examination and review and to find out why in the world we lost the election, and what we can do in California to rebuild the Democratic party. Cranston was one of the founders.

Morris: Had he been in politics before? Was he looking for a way in?

Petris: No. He had been very active on his own, as a writer and journalist and creator of the World Federalist movement, one-world idea. He was pretty well known for some of those activities, but he hadn't been in partisan politics before that. This was his first venture. He had previously gained a lot of fame for a book he wrote on Hitler.

Morris: Was the one-world idea considered pretty far-out in California at that time?

Petris: Yes, I think it was. One-world was somebody else's. Cranston's was called Federalists.

Morris: That was Norman Cousins, who was at some point the editor of the *Saturday Review of Literature*.

Petris: And Alan had written a bunch of articles. He was a good writer. He had written a biography of Hitler and other things. So anyway, he was a good leader, and he became the first president of this organization, and later he ran for controller; he was in the statewide office. And then he ran for U.S. Senate.

Now, the Democratic movement really got its start after the Eisenhower-Stevenson first election. Of course, he was defeated a second time in '56, but the movement became stronger. In California, we concentrated on making it a volunteer group with citizens that were really active and interested in getting something done, were willing to commit themselves and spend time at it, and that's why we had issues conferences around the state. Here in this area, we would invite people from the university, from business, from labor to come in all day on a Saturday in some public school building somewhere. It was very stimulating and educational on the issues of the day and so forth.

Seeking Control of the Legislature; Special Elections

Petris: But on the partisan political side of it, we decided that in order to get anywhere, we'd have to get a majority in the legislature, which we didn't have at the time. So we started going after legislative seats in special elections. Oddly enough, over a period of a couple of years, there were a whole flock of elections, especially in the Assembly. People were dying off, and they had to have special elections.

Morris: This is the business about people who had been in office for twenty--

Petris: For a long time, right. Some of the old-timers just were dying off. So we marshalled our resources statewide to throw everything we could into one Assembly election. We had volunteers from all over the state. It wasn't that we raised so much money, but we had an awful lot of people power, walking the streets, ringing doorbells, and things of that sort. We won something like twelve out of thirteen or fourteen elections.

Morris: Good heavens.

Petris: Bang, bang, bang, bang. And that created quite a storm, and created the climate that made it very attractive for Pat Brown in '58 to run for governor. By the time he ran, we had this tremendous number of people around the state that were active in the club movement.

Morris: Had you done some of this volunteer doorbell-ringing in other districts?

Petris: Oh, yes. Sure. Well, I did it in my own, and then I'd go in some of these special elections, too. But I started, as I said, before that, in '50 with the Nixon thing. I was a volunteer, and that's how I got into the club movement, because I was active anyway.

But that was a very impressive, remarkable series of victories. Of course, when Pat Brown got elected, we got a majority in the Assembly. I think the Republicans still had a majority in the Senate. But they elected a Democrat as the president pro tem; that was Hugh Burns of Fresno. He was a conservative Democrat, but he was still a Democrat. It wasn't until later that we got a majority in the Senate.

And of course, when Pat Brown got elected, we enacted some marvelous programs. He had very good relations with the Senate, and some of the Republicans went along in the Senate and supported his programs.

Morris: What was there about Pat and the Senate? The Senate used to be described as the old boys club.

Petris: The old boys club. Well, that's true, that's what it was. But some of the old boys were pretty darn good when it came to enacting Democratic programs. George Miller, Stan Arnold, James Cobey, Joe Rattigan, Steve Teale, "Doc" Teale we called him. He'd been there a long time. He was one of the giants. They worked very closely with Pat Brown. He had good relations with them.

Morris: Because they liked the issues, or it was ideas whose time had come?

Petris: Well, I think a combination of everything. There was a lot of pressure from the Assembly. Pat had tremendous support in the Assembly, and even now, looking back on those years, those are the golden years of enactment of good legislation. Those are the years when we created the water plan and eliminated cross-filing in elections.

Morris: Had that come out of the Democratic Council?

Petris: Yes. Oh, yes. That was one of the platform planks. And Pat Brown, of course, said it's time to rebuild California. We had been slowed down during the war because of the priorities going into the war. It was during Pat's administration that we expanded the university system, new campuses, new medical schools and new law schools. The Cal State system was very substantially

expanded; the community college system, which was then called junior college, went into tremendous growth, all of them pushed very strongly by Pat Brown.

Some of the people were a little reluctant to support him for governor because he was a very strong Catholic, came from an old Catholic tradition, old San Francisco family--

Pat Brown's Program

Morris: Was that an issue in the fifties?

Petris: Yes, it was. Oh, yes. They said as a Catholic, he wasn't going to be so strong in supporting the public school system. Well, he was the best governor we ever had for the public school system from kindergarten up; he was marvelous. I was with him one time when he was entertaining a visiting group of businessmen. There were about a hundred businessmen from around the state. I happened to be with him and he asked me to stay. I was with him when he spoke to the group, and then he asked for questions.

The first question was, "Well, now that you're nearing the end of your first term, what do you consider your best achievement?" He said, "Education," bang, just like that. He said, "Well, what do you mean by that?" He said, "Well--" and he went through the litany of how many new schools had been built, how we kept up with the population explosion. He said, "In L.A. County alone, we're opening a new grammar school every Monday morning, and a new high school every three weeks. And we're doing it because we're committing the money to do it."

Then he talked about the UC system and Cal State, law schools and this and that. Then he said, "Let me put it to you this way. At this moment that I am speaking to you, 40 percent of the population of this state is in school. Now, any civilization that commits itself to education to that extent is bound to do well, and it's got a bright future. We have our preschool program, and we have our adult program, which has been criticized --why should we support a school at night for adults who are old-timers when all they do is go back and learn basketweaving? Well, that's a form of art. What's the matter with that? It stimulates your mind, it does this and it does that." And at that time, there were no fees in the adult school. Now we practically don't have any adult schools. [Governor Ronald] Reagan wiped them out.

But Pat was very enthusiastic in his description of the importance of a broad-based and very vigorous public school system. And when he talked, I was smiling. I was thinking of the critics who said, "Well, this guy is a Catholic, he doesn't care about public schools, he wants to have the kids go to the parochial schools." You know, it was ridiculous. He was really marvelous in that.

Morris: What did people say during the '58 campaign to quiet the Catholic issue?

Petris: Well, they just said, "Look at his record as attorney general and district attorney and public office that he's been in, his public pronouncements. There's no evidence whatsoever to support that."

Morris: Did he do the education legislation himself, or did he have somebody that he worked with in the legislature?

Petris: Well, he laid out the program, and then he picked people to carry it. The lawyers would work it out. Sometimes it would be drafted by people in his office, sometimes through the legislator's office, and the legislative counsel. Ultimately, it always winds up with the legislative counsel. Even if we got a lawyer on the outside to write a perfect bill, it has to be presented to counsel for their review. They prepare it in the official form with a proper jacket on it and so forth. But a lot of those ideas came from him.

Morris: Did you and he ever sit down and have a chance to talk about your ideas on education?

Petris: Yes, he was very open on that. I talked to him about that, I talked to him about the environment. I got interested in the environment early on. I was always a strong supporter of the public school system, so he kind of reinforced my own thinking on it. And we talked about a range of issues that were hot at the time.

Morris: Did he regularly meet with legislative people?

Petris: Well, on the special issues, he would call in the appropriate legislators. The committee chairmen; if it's a water problem, he'd bring in the water people. Members of the committee. And always the leadership of the house, and discuss the ideas. At that time, [Jesse] Unruh was the speaker, and of course, he played a big role. They worked very well together until later when Unruh felt the need for power himself, and he was going to run for governor, and he unfortunately became very critical of the governor.

Jesse Unruh and Assembly Leadership

Morris: What did you think about Unruh when you first met him yourself? Did you have the sense that he would become as powerful a person as he did?

Petris: Well, yes, you always had a feeling that he was going to be close to power all the time. When I first met him, he was campaigning around the state trying to get people elected. There was also a big speakership fight going on among the Democrats, and he was supporting Ralph Brown against Gus Hawkins from L.A., who was the first black member of the Assembly, later went to Congress, and just recently retired. Last year, I think.

There was a big fight then whether it was going to be Ralph Brown from Modesto or Gus Hawkins from L.A., and Unruh was from L.A. Before that, Unruh as a freshman had cast the deciding vote in the previous fight. [laughs] I forget, I guess that was Abe Lincoln, my predecessor. Lincoln was the 15th Assembly District assemblyman; that's my district. That was a very tight race between Lincoln and whoever else it was. Unruh cast the deciding vote in favor of Lincoln, in his first year as a freshman.

Morris: So that's what made him a--

Petris: Yes, made him a king-maker right from the beginning, in his very first year. Yes, he knew how to count votes. He knew the dynamics of the power situation there all the time.

Morris: Was there some reason that he and Hawkins didn't see eye to eye?

Petris: Well, I don't know. I think it was more a pro-Ralph Brown thing than anti-Hawkins. They both came from L.A. County, so I don't know, they might have had some clashes there before. I remember--

Morris: We're talking '59?

Petris: Yes.

Morris: Hadn't really gotten into--yes, Unruh had already introduced some civil rights bill. It's interesting he wouldn't back one of the few black men in the Assembly.

Petris: Rumford.

Morris: But that Unruh didn't back Hawkins for speaker.

Petris: No, he didn't. Byron Rumford was also opposed to Hawkins. Rumford represented West Oakland and Berkeley. He supported Ralph Brown. I remember one of the first caucuses I attended in the Assembly. It was before the election for speaker. Boy, they really went at it. Hawkins made a strong appeal for his own support, and Rumford got up and challenged him, and boy, they really went round and round. I was kind of shocked. I don't know what their differences were, to tell you the truth. I got to know Hawkins later a lot better, and I always admired him. He carried good legislation. He was a good man. Of course, Rumford was, too. Rumford did a lot of good up there, too.

Which reminds me, there's a little tiny sign as you come out of the tunnel on 13 coming into Oakland on the right side about this big, and it's bent. It says, "Rumford Freeway." I keep forgetting to get my people to get that fixed. I want to write a letter to Caltrans or call them--their headquarters is right over here--and say, "For God's sake, get a more decent sign up there, and put Honorable W. Byron Rumford Freeway. Not this little thing, my God, it's disgraceful."

Morris: Yes. Everybody knows it's the Caldecott Tunnel.

Petris: Yes. I'm going to write myself a note to do that on Monday.

Civil Rights Bills and African-American Legislators

Morris: Well, that's an interesting point about caucus, because on some of the civil rights legislation, Byron has said that he and Hawkins would alternate.¹ One year Hawkins would introduce a fair employment bill, for instance, and--

Petris: Oh, yes, there's no doubt about that. That's right.

Morris: They'd pass it back and forth. Interesting.

Petris: Rumford was chairman of the Public Health Committee. He did a lot of good work as chairman, and I always admired him. When he was in Sacramento, he went to--I guess it was Cal State, got a master's degree in public administration. He already had his degree in pharmacy and his bachelor's degree. He was quite a guy.

¹ William Byron Rumford, *Legislator for Fair Employment, Fair Housing, and Public Health*, Regional Oral History Office, University of California, Berkeley, 1974.

And he was very helpful to me. There's a book written about Rumford that describes me as one of his leading enemies, which I think is terribly unfair.¹ Because he and I always got along very well.

We clashed in '66 when reapportionment split the county into two separate districts. Before that they were at-large. I announced I was going to go for the Senate, and he announced he was going to go for the Senate. I don't remember the sequence, but for a while, it looked like there was going to be a head-on clash between the two of us.

Then the supreme court came in and said, "This isn't right. There's only two counties that have senators-at-large, that's San Francisco and Alameda. We're going to divide it. We're going to have two districts in Alameda County." So then the question was, well, do I go for the southern district or the northern one?

I went to see Byron. I forget--oh, we had a talk, and I said, "You're the senior guy, so I'll defer to you. You pick the district, I'll go for the other one. There will be other guys out there running too, but as between the two of us--" So we did that, and then the campaign started to get hot. Rumford's district somehow included south county, included Fremont. That's not good territory for him. So I went and offered to help. I said, "I have some friends in different parts of the county, and we can get people to send out postcards and this and that." I guess he thought I was an upstart, because he said, "You take care of your election, and I'll take care of mine." Well, he lost it, by a handful of votes.

Morris: Well, there was some question about the vote.

Petris: And he challenged the counting, and he never got over it. He thought they had cheated him. He told me at one time, "They cheated you, but at least you got enough to win. You really had more votes than they give you credit for." People checked that out; nobody ever found anything. He became very bitter after that; made me feel very bad.

But except for that original clash, when we were going to run against each other, which wasn't a personal thing, I never considered myself an adversary or enemy of Byron Rumford. I always admired him. We had our differences on issues. He was

¹ Lawrence P. Crouchett, *William Byron Rumford, the Life and Public Service of a California Legislator: A Biography*, El Cerrito, California: Downey Place Publishing House, 1984.

much more conservative than I on some of the social policies. He voted often as a businessman, which is okay. He owned his own pharmacy, and I could understand that, so I didn't get excited about that. But other people used to complain all the time.

They'd say, "You guys are from the same area, and you're much more liberal." I'd say, "Well, we're not the same area. I don't own my own business. I'm a lawyer, and that's a business, but it's not the same as having a retail operation that he has," and so forth. I could understand it. But he did a lot of great things, especially the Rumford Act.

Morris: And he must have been kind of a rallying point for organizing black people to get registered and--

Petris: Oh, yes.

Morris: --and take part in politics--

Petris: In the elections.

Morris: --because they had a kind of a black caucus that goes back quite a way.

Petris: Yes, that's right. And he paved the way for others.

Greek-American Fraternal Organizations

Morris: Why don't we stop there for today. We covered a lot of territory.

Petris: I don't know if we covered it all. We started talking about my parents and their activities. Maybe we can go back to it, because they were very active in the community, and they belonged to fraternal organizations. They were both regional governors of a group called GAPA [Greek American Progressive Association]. You hear about AHEPA [American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association] these days. There was a different group called GAPA, which was much more conservative. It was a splinter group that pulled out of the AHEPAs. They were much more conservative in that they felt there wasn't enough being done to hang on to the language. In HEPA, its main goal was to help newly arrived immigrants to this country.

IX STATE CAPITOL RESTORATION, 1978-1983

Joint Rules Committee Supervision

[Interview 3: February 25, 1994] ##

Petris: Well, this book from The Bancroft Library is beautiful. Thank you very much.

Morris: It is in honor of your birthday.

Petris: Somebody was telling me yesterday, you can't beat black and white photography. With all the technology and the colors and all that, it's something about black and white pictures that beats them all. I had the pleasure of meeting Ansel Adams.

Morris: He was quite a gentleman.

Petris: Yes, terrific. And we exchanged Christmas cards every year. I'd send him one of ours with a Greek recipe and drawing, and he sent one of his picture cards, with a note in it. Really nice. Thank you.

Morris: Enjoy it.

Petris: I certainly will; I look forward to it. In the new house, sitting in front of the fireplace.

Morris: Restoration of the state Capitol is one of the things I wanted to talk with you about today.

Petris: Yes. I was on that committee.

Morris: When the legislature decided to do a remodel of the state Capitol, did you realize that it was going to be such a long and expensive project?

Petris: No. Those things rarely work out as predicted. There are so many unknowns. In this case, they made it worse than average. It took longer and cost a lot more money than we had anticipated. But it's the only public project that I have heard about where the public says, "Now, this is money well spent!"

Morris: Really?

Petris: Yes. I mean, you could take people by a school and you don't get that kind of universal approval and acclaim. But the artistic beauty of the thing and the colors that have come out during the restoration--have you had an opportunity to see it?

Morris: Yes. In fact, I got a tour of it while it was still in hard-hat stage.

Petris: Oh, great. It's really been a marvelous project. We had a lot of battles during the course of it, and we still have a lot of problems, ongoing problems in protecting the integrity of the restoration. That's under the jurisdiction of the Joint Rules Committee. The Joint Rules Committee is chaired by the Assembly Rules chairman.

We have several joint committees in Sacramento, and the chairmanships are divided kind of down the middle. Traditionally, the Senate chairs certain committees and Assembly others, and this one has always been under the jurisdiction of the Assembly, although it is composed of members of both houses. It's not just an Assembly thing; both of them together.

During the course of the restoration, particularly in the early days when Senator [James] Mills was the pro tem--he is an historian from San Diego--he had some really bruising disputes with the Assembly on authenticity. The Assembly tended to treat it as a reconstruction project--"Let's get on with this thing." They weren't too concerned about doing the research and staying to the original that we were trying to restore, which was a certain period from 1900 to 1910. That's what we were trying to duplicate. They wanted to take a lot of shortcuts. Mills was always holding them back from that, and trying to keep them in line.

I served on that committee with him. I used to join with him in those battles with the Assembly. Unfortunately, that's still going on. We now have a subcommittee of the joint committee--[interruption] Since the project was completed, the subcommittee of the joint committee has been monitoring the maintenance. I chair that subcommittee, and have for some time--since the beginning, I guess.

It's amazing how people forget the historic nature and quality of the building that we're trying to preserve. For example, in the old building, there were only a few offices, and that's what we have in the restored building. But they're the leaders. Speaker [Willie] Brown has his office there, and the president pro tem, and the majority and minority leaders of each house. And they're beautiful, old, high-ceiling rooms, furnished with period furniture.

Once in a while, we have an occupant who wants to put in a picture. In the beginning--before we remodeled--they had this kind of picture: aerial view of the district.

Morris: Sure.

Petris: Well, in 1900, they weren't doing those aerial things, so it doesn't fit. So we had to go to the speaker himself and say, "Mr. Speaker, this doesn't conform to what we're trying to do." Well, he pulled it down right away. He said, "Okay, that's fine." And we have had the loan or gift of some beautiful paintings from that period. Thomas Hill, of course, is a leading artist of that time whose paintings are now in the Capitol. We have them mostly in the committee rooms so the public can enjoy them. Committee rooms in the old building.

Seismic and Highrise Considerations

Morris: And do I hear you right that the Assembly was more concerned with repairing the foundations and making sure the roof didn't cave in? Wasn't that part of the problem that led to the rebuilding?

Petris: Well, they called it reconstruction. And that's a terrible, terrible term. We said, "It's not just reconstruction, it's restoration." And the way it was done, the whole building was gutted. Only the walls remained standing. That was it. And that resulted from a kind of an unpredictable split on the Senate side between the old-timers and the young ones. Now, the old-timers were led by Senator Hugh Burns, a wonderful leader of the Senate, and Senator Randolph Collier.

You see, the project was forced on us by seismic concerns. We had brought in some state engineers to check out the building, and they were horrified. They said, "This thing, if you have another earthquake in San Francisco, this thing will go down."

Morris: The tremors will be felt seventy miles east?

Petris: Yes. It would be felt up there, and it would come down, because it just wasn't strong. The foundations, the whole thing needed to be strengthened. So then the question was, Well, what do we do? How much does it cost, this and that:

The old-timers opted for tearing the whole thing down and moving the Capitol across the street to the other side of the park--or moving the legislature across the street. I don't know what they had in mind--

Morris: To the Senator Hotel?

Petris: No, in the other direction, the other end of the park, going east. You go past the park and across the street, and buy up those properties, and put in two twin towers, highrise towers, one for the Senate and one for the Assembly. They got renderings of it and drawings and this and that, and they thought it was great.

The young members said, "Absolutely not! We're traditionalists, we want to preserve that building." And that carried the day. I don't know if they had a similar controversy in the Assembly, but that's the way it happened on our side of the thing. So the decision was made to bring in the experts who could restore it. And as a result of the building restoration process, they just took out everything. It was like the White House during Truman's restoration.

Morris: I remember, yes.

Petris: All they had were the four walls. So they had to do a lot of research, get photographs and everything, to bring it back to that period, 1900.¹ People from the Sacramento area sent us photographs, and it was a very exciting experience. As a matter of fact, they sent us furniture from that period, desks; they turned up the grand staircase, which is a marvelous, beautiful, wide staircase with banisters. We had put ads in the newspaper asking if people had anything that was from the Capitol from that period. They not only offered--we offered to buy them, but most of them just donated it. In fact, they all donated it. One of the big grand staircases came from a local church. It had been in the church facility, not the church itself, I guess, but an adjoining building.

¹ Historical materials collected for the Capitol Restoration Project included a number of tape-recorded interviews. These materials were part of the subcommittee's files and may have been transferred to the State Archives.

Morris: Was there some kind of a party for the people of Sacramento and California?

Petris: Oh, yes, when it was dedicated, there was a huge party. Had fireworks, and thousands of people came. It was an open house; people toured through the building. I walked around at the time, just to see the reaction of the people. I remember overhearing a young fellow, he was in his twenties. He had his parents with him, and he was showing them what he had done. He was very, very proud of what he had done, and that was the wood. He had carved out some of the woodwork on the banisters and things. He said, "This is mine. I did this, and it took--"

See, and they had to scour the world to get the right craftsmen to do things in a way that wasn't being done any more. They brought some workmen from Italy, for example, to train our people to do certain parts of the building.

Morris: Was that done in cooperation with the union apprentice program, or was it not that--?

Petris: Well, yes, they went to the unions to find some old-timers who might still remember from their own experience how you do certain things. You take the ceiling of some of the rooms, has these curlicue designs--

Morris: That's the plaster rosettes?

Petris: --part of the wall--the plaster rosettes. Well, they did that the same way you decorate a birthday cake. You got a cone made of paper, and you put the material in there, and then you squeeze it out and do the design.

Morris: Oh, my goodness.

Petris: Nobody had thought of that, but one of the old-timers said, "That's the way it's done."

Morris: And then they dry that and then put it up on the ceiling?

Petris: Yes, most of the time. But in some cases, they actually put it right on the ceiling, right on the wall. And there are photographs showing them doing it in the museum. There's a little museum room there that has a lot of pictures of the workers doing this and that.

Another problem was the floor. We had mosaics, and to save the mosaics, they cut huge squares, bigger than this desk, just cut them and lifted them, took pictures and lifted them, to

restore them. Then they would check how much damage or wear and tear was afflicting the particular section of the mosaics, and they would replace every one of them. For that, they brought workers from Italy. Really just a marvelous job.

Modern Conveniences vs. Maintaining Tradition

Morris: How did the traditionalists feel on the subject of putting in air conditioning, and I understand there's radio and television hookups built into the walls, to the hearing rooms and things like that?

Petris: Well, the air conditioning wasn't a problem. They handled that without being obtrusive in any way. Nobody objected to that, because it gets very hot in Sacramento in the summertime.
[laughs]

Morris: That's true.

Petris: But that's one of the ongoing disputes we had with the Assembly, on maintaining the integrity. When the Assembly decided to go for the daily television, a CNN-type thing, they poked holes in these walls for the cameras on their side, and that gave us the real shivers. They just did it arbitrarily without consulting anyone. Now, we have a couple of statutes that require every state agency, when it's restoring a building that's been designated an historic building, they can't make any changes or enlargements or anything else without submitting the plans to two separate state agencies. One is an historic commission, and the other is a seismic safety commission, historic seismic safety commission. They both have to approve these plans before they can be carried out.

Well, the Assembly just went helter-skelter, bang. Any time we did something on our side, we would pass it by those agencies to make sure we were on the right track. Our television thing is much less obtrusive than theirs. There's quite a difference between the two houses.

Morris: I've heard reports that there were some arguments with the architects. Was that a problem you were aware of?

Petris: Well, yes, the Assembly--since it was in charge, since they had the chairmanship, they tended through the chair to just do what they wanted to do. The state architect was not strong enough to stand up to them and say, "Oh, no, wait a minute, you can't do it this way," he just went along. Anything they wanted.

It got so bad that the Senate had to hire an historic architect who specializes in this kind of thing to be the monitor for the Senate. He became our watchdog. He was up there all the time, checking things out. I don't mean every day, but very frequently. When he saw things that weren't done properly, he would report to the Senate, and then we'd notify the Assembly. Sometimes they'd go along, but a lot of times they wouldn't pay any attention. We got into big brawls on that, too. It was terrible. It was really terrible. The architect we hired was Mr. Ray Girvigan of southern California. He was the best historical expert and still advises us as chairman of the Historic Preservation Commission.

Morris: Well, you know, that's what private citizens tend to say when they have to deal with a state agency, that the government doesn't obey the rules they set up for the rest of us. How is that resolved? You would think that the Senate, if anybody, could get an agency or another legislative body to do what they wanted. How do you deal with that kind of thing?

Petris: Well, you know, there's this fierce tradition of independence of the two houses. Neither house wants to be controlled by the other house. They don't want any dictation from the other house. And even if they're dead wrong, from an artistic or historic standpoint, they get their dander up and they go off and do their own thing. So we had a series of running battles on that. But thank goodness Jim Mills was very tough, and he remained very firm. He won most of those battles.

Morris: Who was on the Assembly oversight committee?

Petris: Let's see. The chairman of the Joint Rules was Lou Papan.¹ By virtue of being chairman of this Assembly Rules Committee, he was chairman of Joint Rules. Senator Mills, who was our president of the Senate, was chairman of the Senate Rules Committee. They clashed many times over authenticity of restoration.

I mentioned the participation of the public. One of the pictures that was sent to us pursuant to our intensive search, was of the front part of the Capitol as you come in off the bridge. It was a small picture. It showed some statues around the building, on top, like in ancient Greece, and it showed two dramatic horses, the part that goes up in a triangle--I forget the name of that.

¹ Papan discusses restoration of the Capitol in *Oral History Interview with Hon. Louis J. Papan*, Sacramento: State Government Oral History Program, California State Archives, 1988, 64-71.

Morris: The pediment?

Petris: Yes. At each end, there was a statue of a horse. On one side, there was an Indian woman with her baby, and the horse is rearing up, being attacked by a bear. On the other side was another horse with an Indian brave attacked by a mountain lion. The picture was very small. You couldn't really make it out very well, but that was the only one we had. So we turned that over to the experts to enlarge it as much as they could without making it too fuzzy. We decided, well, we've got to replace that.

We wondered what happened to the original sculpture of the horses. It turned out that the earthquake of San Francisco in 1906 caused considerable damage in Sacramento. Most people aren't aware of that. And those other statues that were around the top had fallen down. The horses stayed fast, but the people who were there at the time didn't want to take any chance, so they removed the horses as well, because they thought they might come tumbling down, and they put them away somewhere. They've never been found. They're in some warehouse, somewhere.

Morris: Still lost?

Petris: Yes. So we had to reproduce them based on the pictures. So we had a kind of a competition inviting sculptors to submit their credentials and so forth. The one who was picked was from San Francisco, a Greek fellow as a matter of fact, an Agnostopolis. I'm trying to remember his first name. But he was excellent. Just working from those pictures he replicated the horses.

Morris: That's amazing.

Petris: He did the work in his studio in San Francisco. They were brought up and raised by crane and put on top. We had a couple of staff persons who worked very closely with him.

We still have the historic architect, name is Ray Girvigian from Los Angeles. He was a real hero in this restoration project. Working closely with him was Dan Visnich, who worked for the Senate side of the Rules Committee. Unfortunately, he incurred the wrath and hostility of the Assembly, which still prevails. But he's still with the Rules Committee restoration subcommittee.

He was the messenger. He'd go up there, and Girvigian would explain what was wrong to him, and he'd be the one to go over to the Assembly and tell them, "You guys aren't doing this right." Well, they got sick and tired of that, and to this day if you mention his name on the Assembly side among the Rules people,

their hair bristles. They just don't want him around, but he always carried out his duties well.

Well, the reason is, it's embarrassing if you are going down the wrong path and somebody blows the whistle on you. If he does it once or twice, okay, but it's happened so many times that you want to kill the messenger. The messenger bearing bad tidings.

Morris: That's an old Greek story, isn't it?

Petris: That's right.

Morris: But he has survived? In 1994, he is still on the staff?

Petris: Yes, he's still there. And still doing basically that kind of work.

Morris: Trouble-shooting.

Petris: Yes.

Morris: That's a tough responsibility.

Petris: It's very difficult, yes. He is a bright young man. He had been around the legislature for some time prior to that in different staff capacities. He had worked for Senator [Mervyn] Dymally, who later was lieutenant governor and then went to Congress. Dymally retired last year, as a matter of fact. So he was an experienced hand in the Capitol, and he learned an awful lot about restoration. He goes to national meetings. He's really very good. He's visited other capitols.

Morris: The California Capitol restoration was written up in a lot of architectural publications.

Petris: Oh, yes. They call it the best public restoration in the country. I guess it finally cost about \$64 million, and that was considerably more than the estimate. But everybody says it's worth it.

It cost so much because, as I mentioned, a lot of unknowns came to light which affected the cost. For example, in the Senate chambers--I think it was true in the Assembly too--as you face the front, if you face the presiding officer up there on the dais--there were two gigantic Greek columns, one on each side, going straight up to the ceiling. Behind them, there was a false wall. We didn't know it was a false wall. So when they went in there and they started taking it apart, they discovered this beautiful set of double Greek columns, two tiers, with a space in between

for paintings. Everybody was absolutely amazed. Nobody had any idea that that was there.

When you see it today, you see these beautiful Greek columns, in a double layer, you might say, two stories. We no longer have the one gigantic one on each side, but we have right in the middle, behind the podium--and that was true on the Assembly side, too.

Well, that just caused everybody to gasp, and they wondered, well, what kind of other things are there behind walls? The old-fashioned elevators--see, what happened, what they found out was that California, like the rest of the country, in the 1920s went through this fashionable theory of eliminating anything that was old or baroque, and making the style a lot more simple. So fortunately, instead of taking things down and throwing them away, they just covered them. So we had some beautiful elevator doors that are still there. They were metal with scrolls and all that. Well, we never saw those before, because they were covered with a modern door that was just a plain sheet of metal. That's another one of the discoveries they made during the course of the rebuilding. Now, some of those discoveries required a substantial change in their plans to preserve and protect it, and cost more. That was one of the reasons it cost more. There was no way that we could know that unless we opened it up.

Remembering Governor Culbert Olson

Morris: The false wall reminds me of the tale that got a lot of press when Earl Warren became governor, that he ripped out some kind of a false wall, and there was supposed to be a wire directly from, I think it was the speaker's office to the governor's office, and the report was that Governor Olson had been under the thumb of the speaker. Were there any little marvelous secret passages--

Petris: No, we didn't find anything like that, as far as I know.

Morris: I just wondered. Because it was never very clear whether the speaker had actually had this kind of influence during the Olson administration, or whether it just was rumor.

Petris: Well, I remember one or two members who served under Olson. One of them was one of the leaders and he bragged about it all the time. Every time he'd get up and say, "Well, when Olson was governor, we did this and that." It made me very upset, because he was a Democrat who destroyed Olson's governorship. They had

this so-called reform group; I don't think it was much of a reform group. I don't remember the details, but--

Morris: Was that the Economy Bloc?

Petris: Yes, the Economy Bloc, and here was Olson during the Depression trying to get some things done, and the leading antagonists were Democrats, and they were bragging about it. I thought they performed a great disservice to the people of the state in doing what they did. So there was some very bitter battles during those days between the governor and the Democratic legislators in the Assembly. I don't know about the Senate at that time; I don't know what was happening.

Don Allen was the name of the one who would get up on the floor and give a little history lesson, a little footnote here and there. And every time, it was about this great victory they won over the governor. I didn't think it was a big victory for the people.

Morris: Well, that was another time when state revenues were down and people were in great economic need.

Petris: Yes. That was during the Depression.

X AFFORDABLE HOUSING, 1959-1994

Oakland Redevelopment Agency ##

- Morris: I would also like to ask you about housing today. I looked back in my notes, and I see that before you were in the Assembly, you were on the Oakland Redevelopment Agency board.
- Petris: Yes. I was appointed by Rishell, a Republican who was mayor, Clifford Rishell, on the recommendation of the vice mayor, Peter Tripp, who is an old, old, dear friend. Peter Tripp was born in Greece. He came here as a little boy, but he came from the same area as my mother. So we were what we call compatriots. That's a strong tie, to come from the same village or the same province. He was extremely helpful to me.
- Morris: Was he the first person of Greek descent to go on the city council?
- Petris: Yes. In fact, he's the only one. I don't think we've had anybody else on the council. When I first started practicing law, he was one of my first clients. He was very active in the community, and he had a successful real estate and insurance business. He had made a lot of money in that business during the war, and after. He had been sued by a couple of persons. He came to see me, he brought me the complaint and summons. I had never seen a complaint and summons. He dropped it on my desk and said, "I want you to represent me."
- Morris: This was in a real estate matter?
- Petris: Yes, in a real estate matter. Fortunately, everything fell into place. I had nothing else to do, so like Perry Mason, I only worked one case at a time. They say how great a lawyer Perry Mason is. Well, if you're only working on one case, you can be pretty darn good. Most lawyers would starve if they tried to do

that. You can't spend all the time on one case; you can't charge one client that much money, work full time all at once.

But in that case, I had nothing else to do. We won that case. It was a big, big victory, because I had to run around town and do a lot of investigating on my own, and talk to people who had some information and so forth. It turned out that in a particular transaction--I don't think Mr. Tripp even handled it, somebody else in his office handled it, but he was responsible because he was the broker--the buyer and the seller changed their minds.

Morris: Both?

Petris: Both. And instead of going to the broker and saying, "Hey, we want to unravel this thing," they concocted this plan to sue him and get some money out of him. It was terrible, it was absolutely terrible, and we beat the daylights out of them. They had a very prominent real estate lawyer on their side, and this was my first case. Anyway, I won it.

Morris: Really? This is right out of law school?

Petris: Right out of law school, yes. After that, he put me on a retainer, and he kept me on for years. I'd talk to him and say, "You haven't called me for two or three months. If you don't have any legal business, I don't think you should have me on this retainer." I was fighting to get off of it, and he said, "Oh, no, never mind." Anyway, he was very helpful to me.

And then later, when I decided to run for office, he helped me very much, along with Martin Huff, to launch my political career. In the first place, he got me the appointment to the Redevelopment Agency.

Morris: Was that a big move at that point, to be on the Redevelopment Agency?

Petris: Well, it was educational for me. Redevelopment was kind of new, and it was a hot thing in Oakland at the time. I think we made some horrible mistakes. We took out block after block in West Oakland, beautiful old Victorians, which we never should have done. I notice in Sacramento there are, very close to the Capitol, up and down several streets, there are beautiful old Victorians in an area that's been zoned for business.

So in Sacramento, they said, "Okay, we will zone this for business, not manufacturing but offices." Doctors' offices, lawyers, insurance brokers, et cetera. "Instead of tearing these

homes down and having you build an office building, we will rezone it and allow you to conduct your business in this area, but you've got to do it in those homes." So they would buy the homes and fix them up, and they're absolutely beautiful. You drive down the street, one after another--

Morris: Well, the governor's mansion is that vintage, in that area; though it is now a museum.

Petris: Yes, that's right. So I wish we had thought about doing that here, but the idea in redevelopment was to take everything out and come in with new stuff, including public housing and other things. So it was, I guess, a different kind of problem.

But anyway, I got into housing from that standpoint, redevelopment, but before that, I was on a committee--I forget the name of it, but it was a citizens' committee that dealt with housing problems.

Morris: I came across a reference, this was in old *Tribune* files, to an Oakland Citizens Advisory Committee on Housing--

Petris: That's it. And I was on that.

Morris: In 1967, you were chairman, but it goes back into the fifties.

Petris: Oh, yes. I was on that in the fifties, before I ran for office.

Morris: Who started that?

Petris: I don't remember. I remember Isadore Calderon was on that. I saw him the other day from a distance, didn't get to talk to him, [telephone interruption]

Morris: You mentioned Isadore Calderon--

Petris: Yes, he was one of those on the housing committee. I think he was from a labor group, and he was a very good and faithful member of that group. Came to all the meetings--

Morris: He was also a spokesman or leader in the Spanish-speaking community?

Petris: He's an Hispanic, but he didn't come from Mexico. I think he was from Puerto Rico; I'm not sure. But that impressed me, because all the Hispanics I had met prior to that time were from Mexico. Now, of course, you can't be sure at all. We have a lot of people here from Central America and Puerto Rico and so forth. That's why we moved from saying Mexican to Hispanic, I guess.

And then there was another fellow on there who was kind of the staff guy, who was absolutely marvelous. He knew that housing stuff cold. We did a lot of good work in support of expanding public housing. That wasn't easy in Oakland, or anywhere, because the real estate association had managed to get a statewide initiative passed that prohibited any further development of public housing in any city in California without going to a vote of the people.

Morris: Really?

Petris: Yes. Well, you know, they didn't want public housing at all, period. I used to tangle with them during those days, and when I went into the legislature, I kept on fighting them. I remember telling them, "Look, the way I see it, you guys are in this business. You ought to be developing public housing. But you don't, because you can't get a profit out of it, because the rents that are desirable would be much too low for you to go into it. So you don't do it.

"I would never support a program that forces you to do it. But why don't you get out of my way and let me do it? Just get the heck out of my way." And that was the theme for years.

When we finally decided to put the thing on the ballot, to our great surprise, Senator Knowland, or rather the *Tribune*--I don't think Senator Knowland was back yet from Washington--the *Tribune* supported it in a strong editorial. That was very influential in helping us get it passed.

Morris: This was an Oakland ballot measure?

Petris: Yes. It helped us expand public housing in Oakland.

Morris: I'd be interested in what you can remember about how that committee got started. It wasn't appointed by the mayor?

Petris: No, it wasn't one of the city commissions. That's why they called it the citizens' committee, as opposed to the Redevelopment Agency. It was not officially part of the city government at all.

Morris: But what you say about the real estate business sounds like it did not come out of the chamber of commerce.

Petris: No, no, it didn't come out of there. They weren't too enamored of this group at all.

Morris: Churches, maybe?

Petris: Yes, there were churches, and the usual socially conscious groups that wanted to do something.

Morris: The United Crusade?

Petris: No, no connection with the United Crusade.

Morris: But big enough to have a staff and an office?

Petris: I don't know about an office. We did have a fellow who was our staff; he did everything. To this day, he is working with seniors. He was marvelous, absolutely marvelous. And he's still in Oakland and he's still active--Ted Tarail.

I remember we also checked out public housing, and we had a lot of criticism of the way they managed public housing, the way they treated the tenants.

Morris: Did Oakland have some public housing, like San Francisco?

Petris: Oh, yes. Our public housing goes way back. As a matter of fact, when I was in grammar school, we were forced to move from our house, which we didn't own--we were tenants--which was a block from the school, because the city had condemned that whole area for the purpose of building public housing. So we were displaced by public housing.

I remember people would come to our meetings and complain and say, "You shouldn't be screwing around with this public housing, let the private sector do it and the marketplace," and this and that, "and furthermore, when you do that, you displace people, and that's a horrible experience."

I'd tell them, "Well, I'm one of those who was displaced, and I don't think it was so horrible." At that time, housing was plentiful, and we moved up the street a few blocks, and we got into another place. The benefit that came from providing housing, federally assisted of course--it wasn't funded by the city, it was--

Morris: There was federal money--?

Petris: Oh, yes, FHA [Federal Housing Authority].

Morris: During World War II?

Petris: This was after. This was in the fifties, I guess.

Morris: So did your committee work with the federal government agencies to get some actual money?

Petris: Yes, we did that, sure. I wish I could remember the name of the fellow who really kind of ran that operation, from the staff level.

Morris: There was a rumor when Oakland was tearing out all those blocks of old houses that they were doing so partly because some people wanted to get the black people who moved in here during the war out. Was there evidence of that?

Petris: No, I don't think so. At least they didn't admit to it in our meetings. I never heard anybody talk about that. And that would have been during the redevelopment; this is different. I'm a little hazy on the dates. I don't remember whether I was on the citizens' housing thing prior to going on Redevelopment, or after.

Morris: Sounds like both.

Petris: Maybe I was on both at the same time.

Morris: Yes, because as I say, the *Tribune* clips include a reference to you being chairman in '67.

Petris: Oh, that was quite late. I didn't realize I stayed on that long.

Morris: Or maybe you went back on, or something.

Petris: I might have. But I'd never heard of using redevelopment to knock down these houses and move people out, because the plan was to replace it with newer, modern multiple housing.

Morris: Apartment housing.

Petris: Apartment housing. And one of the big projects was done by one of the labor unions. Any time you talk about public housing, you're talking about low rents. So if you do it to move out the black people, and then look for other people that qualify with the income limitations, you're going to inevitably run into black people again. Their income just doesn't measure up to the general community. So it wouldn't make sense, given what the requirements were in the law. Looking back, I think it was a mistake to displace a lot of the poor from the homes they were renting in order to build different housing for the poor.

Morris: Well, at this point, in the late fifties and early sixties, was Oakland short of housing?

Petris: It was short of housing for the poor. But the general housing picture, I don't recall what it was, whether we were short of housing or not. Probably not. It was short of what we call affordable housing.

Housing Legislation; Tenants' Rights

Petris: But as a result of my work on that committee, when I went to the legislature, I carried a lot of housing bills, especially housing for the poor. I carried a bill, a series of bills, on a bill of rights for the tenants. I remembered some of my experiences from that citizens' committee, because we had complaints from people who lived in public housing that they're really governed by a very authoritarian management that wouldn't even permit the tenants to hold tenants' meetings. They considered that kind of conduct subversive and communistic.

So my first bill for a bill of rights for tenants related to public housing. Later, I carried legislation that gave the tenants a little better break in their dealings with the landlord. For example, retaliatory eviction was very common. If you as a tenant couldn't persuade the landlord to do certain repairs, which were to correct a condition that was so bad it would affect the health of the tenant, like windows open in the winter time, broken, and you went to the city and complained about it, the landlord would throw you out. It's called retaliatory eviction: you complain to the city, out you go. Well, that's been against the law for many years now, since I carried that bill.

Another device used by the landlord was cutting off your utilities. Today, even if you don't pay the rent--and that's when they usually did it; it was a form of harassment, if you didn't pay the rent, first thing they did was cut off your utilities to drive you out. No electricity, no water. Can't do that any more.

Morris: Withholding your rent--has that always been a legitimate form of protest against the owners?

Petris: It's been used for a long time. Whether it's legitimate or not depends on which side of the fence you're on, I guess.

Morris: And how good your lawyer is.

Petris: Yes, right. But the practice of this kind of retaliation against the tenants was very common. Thank goodness we put a stop to that, a statewide law, you can't do that any more. You can't go

around cutting off the person's water or electricity, or telephone. You can't throw them out because they made a complaint.

And there were a few other bills, too, dealing with--I also had a bill on rent disputes and requiring deposits of rent into a neutral corner, so to speak, so that a tenant couldn't use that as an excuse to withhold paying the rent; he'd have to pay it into an escrow while the dispute was going on, until it was resolved.

Morris: Was that before some of the celebrated Berkeley actions?

Petris: Oh, way before then.

Morris: So this has been developing over a long time.

Petris: Yes. But in spite of my long interest in helping tenants, I did it because there were some terrible injustices being committed out there by some landlords. In the Berkeley era, it was just the opposite. The victims in the Berkeley era were landlords, and that Berkeley Rent Control Board was tyrannical. So I put in legislation to balance the playing field there, and I was accused of treason by tenants' groups saying, "We thought you were for the tenants! Now you're doing this for the landlord!"

I said, "Well, if you thought I was for the tenants, you're absolutely wrong. I was for justice and fair play, and I didn't like what landlords were doing to the tenants in a lot of cases. Now, I don't like what the tenants are doing to the landlords. So I'm still doing the same thing; I'm trying to go for justice and fairness in this system. So it doesn't mean that's pro-landlord or pro-tenant. It's pro-fairness that I'm interested in." And I had a running battle with the Berkeley Rent Board. I had several bills trying to deal with that problem. This is years later, many, many years later.

Morris: Does it feel like some of these problems never went away?

Petris: Well, yes, that's true. They seem to recur.

Morris: Was the Oakland Redevelopment Agency, was that an early time when you got involved with federal government agencies about local--?

Petris: I don't remember myself meeting with federal people or having them come to our meetings. The federal thing was more on subsidizing public housing. But on redevelopment, see, the redevelopment wasn't only concerned with housing. It related to commercial property, too. It was an extraordinary era of groundbreaking of new legislation and new directions. They had the authority to

condemn property, and then sell it to private developers, who were going to put up commercial buildings. It wasn't limited to housing. And that came under a lot of criticism because they thought it was an improper use of public resources to help the private sector. But the concept was to improve the whole area, the whole neighborhood, and create jobs and so forth.

Morris: And restructure the center--

Petris: Yes, restructure the center of the community, right.

Oakland Housing Authority

Morris: Did it involve the Port of Oakland at all?

Petris: I don't think so. Not at that time.

Morris: I'm sort of feeling around with this because I don't quite understand all that was going on: the Housing and Urban Development people were also putting money into Oakland in the early sixties, in that same period, and I'm unclear how all these federal programs come together in a community like Oakland.

Petris: I don't know. I don't recall. I know that HUD was very active, and--

Morris: But it didn't come before the Redevelopment Agency?

Petris: No, I don't think so. I don't think we ever dealt with HUD. We knew HUD was around and they were putting in--we weren't active at all in creating housing. We were active in clearing the way, both for housing and commercial development. There were other folks standing by, ready to go. They had their plans and their programs for public housing. And we had a housing authority; Oakland Housing Authority was developed. For a long time, the housing authority was composed of the members of the city council. They had the right under the law to designate themselves as the housing authority.

Morris: Does that complicate things?

Petris: No, actually, it was supposed to make it easier. It eliminated one layer, and they considered the subject so important that they wanted to be in charge themselves. I thought it was a good move, actually, because they're accountable to the public, see. The board that runs the housing authority isn't. In fact, they didn't

have a board; they just had a manager. He was accountable to the city, but he wasn't accountable directly to the people.

Morris: So you must have gotten to know an awful lot of people, both downtown businessmen and in government.

Petris: Oh, yes, there was just a lot of activity going on.

Morris: Did they come to you with the idea that you should go into state politics?

Petris: No, nobody there talked to me. That was Martin Huff.

Morris: He was looking for a candidate--

Petris: I was active in the Democratic activities at the time, and he was secretary of the County Central Committee. He and Bob Crown were the two--Bob Crown was an assemblyman. I'd known Crown for quite some time, known him since high school. He went to school in Alameda, and I was in McClymonds High. There were periodic meetings of all the student body presidents--Oakland, San Leandro, and Alameda--and that's how I got acquainted with him. He was president over there, and I was president at McClymonds. Then later, I knew him at Cal. I used to run into him at UC.

So then we went off to the service, and after we came back, I think he was elected in '52, pretty early. We stayed in touch, and we were active together in the Democratic party things, the club movement. He talked to me several times about running. He talked to me in '52, actually, and I wasn't ready. Fifty-two, '54, '56; finally in '58 I decided I was ready. I was just beginning the law practice, and I wanted to get certain things done there. [telephone interruption]

Morris: So you had already established a good issue to take with you into the legislature.

Petris: Oh, yes. The housing thing, I was very concerned about for a long time. I remember that one of the worst public housing managers, who should have had some empathy with the poor people with whom he was dealing, with a high percentage of black people as tenants, was a black guy himself. They would come to me with complaints, dictatorial, he's this, he's that, he won't--he was the one responsible, without even knowing about it, for my carrying these bills to help the tenants, because he was so mean. They'd come to me in a little small group, and I'd say, "Why don't you get together with the other tenants and do this and that?"

Morris: This was the man who was manager of a public housing--

Petris: Yes, managed public housing. And they'd say, "Are you kidding? We'd get in big trouble if we tried that. We've tried that. He absolutely will not permit us to form a tenants' group, or to have meetings on the premises." They had a community hall or something like that. Absolutely prohibited.

So later on, when I carried the legislation, I had the first bill in the legislature that required every housing board--the local housing authority has boards--every one of them to have at least two members who were tenants.

Morris: Was that a new idea at that time?

Petris: Oh, yes. That didn't go over too well. The biggest opponent of that idea were the real estate people, who had real estate members on every board in the state. They had to have their hand in it. they didn't want tenants on the boards at all, and they thought, Well, maybe we can contain it somehow. They opposed having a tenant on the ground it's a conflict of interest. But it wasn't a conflict for the real estate guy who is competing with public housing for the space, preferring to have private housing that he can handle and sell and so forth. So that was part of the ongoing battle at that time.

Other areas of housing, I also carried a lot of bills to provide housing for the farm workers in particular. I had housing bills for the elderly, specifically for the elderly, for people at certain income levels and so forth, but I also had housing for the farm worker. Year after year, and I never got any of that passed, I don't think.

Farm Worker Housing

Morris: To be provided by the big farmers?

Petris: It varied. Yes. One of them was a great loan program to the farmer. In some areas, the farmer didn't have to worry about it, but in many areas, he couldn't get any help if he didn't have housing accommodations for them. So I had a program to provide low-interest loans, like 3 percent, in a revolving pool. It would be funded by the state, but the farmer would borrow the money and pay it back. So the money kept revolving, and it was always there.

Morris: Like Cal Vet loans?

Petrisa: Same idea. The Farm Bureau supported it.

Morris: Really?!

Petris: Yes. The biggest farmers group, the most powerful farmers group, supported it, because they saw it as help to the farmer. But [Governor George] Deukmejian vetoed it. He said, "We don't want the state to get into the housing business." Well, the state actually owned, at that time, owned and operated dormitories for farm workers up and down the Valley. I said, "You're in the housing business. I'm trying to get you out of it. Let the private sector do it, we can fund it, and we get paid back." He vetoed it. That was the end of that. [laughs]

I also had bills that beefed up the powers of the county, not only the powers but the mandate for the county to keep a better eye on the conditions of farm worker housing. The local county officials in the farm areas just turned their heads; they didn't care. So they lived in hovels, and in some places they lived in holes in the ground. It was horrible. In San Diego County--

Morris: Because they were going to be gone when the crop was picked?

Petris: Yes. In San Diego County, we had pictures. I had pictures blown up this big when I was carrying these bills. We had pictures showing a piece of tin covering a hole. You moved the tin, and there's a hole where people are living, for God's sake.

Morris: Like Mexico City.

Petris: Yes. Just horrible conditions.

Morris: Did you get interested in this from people in Oakland? I've understood that Oakland was one of the places where migrant workers came in the winter when there was no work to be done.

Petris: I don't know; I never had any contact with migrant workers. I just--

Morris: But the Hispanic community in Oakland?

Petris: No. Nobody came to me and said, "This is a problem," from that community. It's just the general picture I got from reading about these things in the newspaper. After I put in the legislation, then people would come in to support it. In later years--

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Petris: One of the reasons I put in these bills relating to farm workers is that I was a city boy, and I wasn't threatened by the powerful farmer groups. If I had lived in the Valley in a farm area, I probably wouldn't even dream of putting in a bill like that, because it wouldn't get to first base. And of course, they opposed all that stuff, except as I say, the housing thing they supported. The farmers supported it. The governor, I guess, thought he was protecting their interests, and I told him. I said, "For God's sake, check with them." I sent him a letter that they had sent me supporting it. He still thought it was a bad idea.

So you know, the people who represented that area had too many problems if they tried this kind of legislation, with the most powerful people in their district. So it wasn't very practical for them to try it. All that would do would be to alienate the most powerful people in the area, and give the local assemblymen a terribly bad time without accomplishing anything. A city boy, they didn't have any jurisdiction over or any power over, so I just went ahead with a lot of legislation relating to improving the conditions of farm workers in this state.

Morris: Did you, or have somebody on your staff, check out some of these things with the assemblymen and later senators from down around Fresno and the other agri-big-farm areas?

Petris: No, I never did much with them. I just didn't want to put them on the spot. They could honestly say, "Well, I don't know anything about this, it's not my idea." Because they'd be accused of making an end run and saying, "Well, I represent this area, but I don't dare do it, because I'm going to have a run-in with all the farmers, so I'll have Petris do it." So I deliberately stayed away from those guys. Actually, to protect them.

Morris: Did they ever say, "Why don't you introduce a bill about thus-and-so?"

Petris: Oh, yes, a lot of times, because they were under a lot of heat from their people. They had to vote against my bills.

Morris: That makes it kind of complicated.

Petris: Yes, it does.

Housing and Urban Affairs Committees

Morris: Then coming up into the seventies, you were involved in--I don't know if mainstream housing is what you'd call it--there was the Committee on Housing and Urban Affairs that you were chairman of.

Petris: Yes, that was a select committee. It didn't become a standing committee until later. But it was my interest in the overall housing thing that prompted me to do that.

Morris: What about the urban homesteading? You had a committee to study that?

Petris: Yes. I don't remember much about it, to tell you the truth.

Morris: Okay. That was '75; there was also a big struggle about creating the California Housing Finance Agency--

Petris: Oh, yes, I was very active in that. I carried the original legislation, but I was spread a little too thin at the time, as I recall. So some others introduced similar legislation. George Zenovich was one of the key actors there. He was from Fresno. His legislation led to the creation of the Housing and Finance Agency. There was a Housing Agency dealing with state housing, state and local housing; then there was a Housing Finance Agency which provided the money.

Oh, yes, there were a lot of battles there, even after it was created. I worked very hard to help Zenovich get the bill passed. I think before it was over, there were two or three bills merged into his, and one of them was mine. The first thing that happened, right off the bat, the agency at its very first meeting on allocation of money gave priority to people who weren't so much in need at all, and totally ignored the poor.

For example, one of the purposes of that was to create new housing. Our housing stock was low statewide. We needed enormous additional housing, especially affordable. And what they did was provide money for the middle-class families to buy existing homes. That wasn't adding to the stock at all, and it was a terrible misdirection of the funds.

That was the very first board meeting. Then I went into the second meeting and pounded the table and raised all kinds of Cain and said, "What are you guys doing here? This is not in keeping with the letter or the spirit of the law that we worked so hard for. What's going on?" I kept after them for quite a while after that.

So the disputes went on, even after legislation was enacted that we thought was going to help solve the problems.

Morris: How did you know what had gone on at their first meeting? Did you have your staff people--

Petris: Oh, I was very much interested. Yes, very much interested. I don't remember whether I sent somebody in to see the meeting, but there were newspaper accounts of it, because it was new, and it was controversial, so it got pretty good publicity. I don't remember the exact source. I think I may well have sent somebody over to see how they did in their first meeting.

Morris: That was one of the cases where it was reported that part of the problem of getting that agency started was that [Governor Edmund G.] Jerry Brown [,Jr.] took a long time appointing the members of the board.

Petris: Yes, that's right.

Morris: What was that all about?

Petris: I don't remember that.

XI DAY-TO-DAY POLITICAL REALITIES

Thoughts on Gubernatorial Appointments

Morris: Well, you used to hear that a lot, that Jerry took a long time making appointments.

Petris: He took a long time, that's true. But it wasn't unique with him. Every governor does that, for some reason or other, when they first come in. There are just hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of appointments that they are required to make, and they drag their feet. Every one of them drags his feet. If not overall, then in certain areas. Deukmejian really took his time appointing judges, and they were desperately needed. I remember I wasn't pushing him to do the appointments, because all he wanted on the bench were throw-the-key-away judges. He drew largely on prosecuting attorneys to become judges. I just felt [that] to maintain a proper balance he should have others also.

I didn't object to the fact that a prosecuting attorney would be a judge; we've had some excellent judges here in town, like Cecil Mosbacher, going back many years. She was one of the leading prosecutors in Alameda County, and she went on the bench. I've tried a case or two before her a long time ago. She was an excellent judge. But there were others who just had a very narrow view of the world--good guys and bad guys. And you put them in a civil case, and they're lost.

They didn't have the benefit of well-rounded experience and a view of the world that an individual attorney in private practice would have who handles all kinds of things. He does some criminal law, he does business law, he does domestic things, he does everything. He has a much more, I think, keen knowledge of what goes on in our society, because his clientele was a cross-section of everybody in town.

I always felt that's the kind of attorney that ought to be appointed, as opposed to one who comes out of a district attorney's office, or one who comes out of an insurance company representing only the insurance companies in personal injury cases, and not ever seeing the other side of it.

Morris: You could almost say such a person maybe ought to be disqualified from hearing personal injury cases.

Petris: Well, that's true, yes.

Morris: Did you get anywhere talking about these ideas with the different governors over the years?

Petris: No. I'd make recommendations, and had some people appointed, especially under Pat Brown. Jerry Brown, I didn't get anything.

Morris: Really, either judges or other appointments?

Petris: Nothing. In fact, after he left office, I ran into him somewhere or other and he took me aside and he told me, "I really want you to know, I feel bad about the fact that I never gave you any appointment, and I should have responded to you." Because I was pulling his chestnuts out of the fire time after time in the Rules Committee. The Republicans mounted a severe attack on just about anybody he appointed to anything. They were very partisan. They like to accuse us of being partisan, but they are a hundred times more partisan than the Democrats; always have been.

Partisanship, Candidacy, and Reapportionment

Petris: When I was growing up in Alameda County, a little kid, I was standing on the corner of Washington or Clay Street and Twelfth or Thirteenth, the shops along there, and I heard these two well-dressed ladies talking. One of them says to the other, "Oh, my, that's a beautiful hat--" or coat, whatever it was. "Where did you get it?" "Oh, I just bought it the other day over here at this store." I don't remember which one it was.

She said, "My God, do you shop there?" [The other one] said, "Yeah, they have good things. What's the matter?" She said, "I never go into that place; it's owned by a Democrat."

And the attitude, as I was growing up, was that the Republicans were all the nice people. If you were a Democrat, you were dirty. Made you feel dirty.

Morris: Oh, dear.

Petris: Oh, yes, it was horrible. And they were powerful. All through the Depression, all through the New Deal period, when Roosevelt was president, all the public programs in this county were run by Republicans. Even the WPA [Works Progress Administration], they had so much power. And of course, all the partisan offices were held by Republicans, and all the nonpartisan offices--city council, county supervisors, and of course Assembly and the Senate and the Congress. It wasn't until later that the tide was turned and then it went the other way, and all of them were Democrats. Today, they're all Democrats. There's no Republican legislator from this county, actually, unless I'm mistaken.

Morris: I think you're right. But is that because the numbers have changed, or just because nobody wants to run against the incumbents? You know, going up against [Alameda County Assemblyman] Tom Bates and Nick Petris is very hard--

Petris: Well, the basic thing is the registration. They're outnumbered in the registration.

Morris: But the three of you, Congress, the state Senate, and the Assembly, are people with a tremendous amount of experience and--

Petris: Well, yes, that would tend to discourage opponents, of course. But I got a letter from a woman a year or two ago in Berkeley. I never met her, I haven't met her; my only contact was this one letter. She said, "I'm a Republican, and sometime I would like to run for the state Senate. Now, I would not run against you, I think you're doing a good job. But I'd like to run, and I'm writing for you to give me some pointers on how does a person go about doing this, so that when I'm ready to do it, I will have some help." [laughs]

I wrote back and I said, "The first thing you need to do is go talk to your governor [Republican Pete Wilson], and ask him why he skewered the balance in this area. When he came into office, he was persuaded by the president to leave the best job in this country politically, which I think is the U.S. Senate, persuaded to give up his seat, which he could have held for many, many years, to become governor. The main reason was to control the Democratic reapportionment. He did that very well."

Morris: Democratic reapportionment, or just reapportionment--?

Petris: Reapportionment by the Democrats, which was lopsided, according to them, and never gave the Republicans a chance to get elected in certain districts, including this area. So the governor's plan,

he dusted off an old Republican plan that had come out of the Claremont [Colleges] cluster of so-called public policy people, but they're all conservative Republicans down there, and they have a partisan viewpoint. Which is fine; it's just that they parade as being neutral and nonpartisan.

So that plan was to make Contra Costa a Republican county. When I first went up there, the senator from Contra Costa was George Miller [Jr.], who was very powerful and very popular and so forth. But his successor was a Republican; the district attorney ran for that office, John Nejedly, and he won it. Nejedly in turn was succeeded by another Democrat when he stepped down. He wasn't defeated; he stepped down.

Now, Wilson campaigned on fairness in reapportionment. "We want to make every district competitive, not this lopsided stuff that the Democrats have been giving us for the last few decades." So what did he do? My district was 62 percent Democratic, maybe 63--hovered around there somewhere, and usually, I run 10 to 12 points ahead of my registration. So I would get 74 or 75 percent of the vote.

Along comes Wilson, and in trying to make Contra Costa solidly Republican, he takes the gold mine of Richmond down to Oakland, the western end, solid Democratic thing, and drops them into my district. He vetoed the bill that did not have that corridor shifted over to my district, and he did it on the basis that I don't have enough black people in my district.

Morris: In Oakland?

Petris: Well, that's what he said. And he said, "There's never been a black person elected from this district." Well, when it was over, a reporter came to see me from San Francisco and said, "What about this?" I laughed. He said, "Why is it so funny?" I said, "I don't know how much you know about this area. Apparently you haven't done any studying. Have you ever heard of a guy named Ron Dellums? He's been in the Congress for many, many years. His district is almost identical to mine. Mine's just a little bit bigger. So where does anybody get off saying no black has ever been elected in this area? No black person has ever run for that office. It's not that they've never been elected; they've just never tried. And probably because they identify me as a strong ally who goes for the same programs they do, and is very much interested in the plight of the poor people in general, and the black poor in particular. That's how you explain that."

So anyway, the percentage of Democrats as a result of that change in my district went from 62 to 74. Then, when you add my

margin of 10 to 12 points ahead of the party, the very first election after Wilson's reapportionment, I got 86 percent of the vote.

Morris: That's pretty good.

Petris: Yeah, that's not bad. So I said to this lady, "How can you talk about running for the Senate as a Republican when your registration of your party is now down to 16 percent? I don't care who you are, you don't have a fighting chance. The one you want to complain to about that is the governor." I don't know if she ever wrote to him.

[knock on door, Martin Huff enters]

Hello, Mr. Huff! [tape interruption]

Morris: ...I had never thought of reapportionment that way.

Petris: So I said, "My advice to you, if you want to run for the Senate, is move out of the district and go somewhere where you have a better chance." This woman had asked me for pointers on how to run, a Republican, because she wanted to run for the Senate. She said, "I'm not going to run against you, but in the future I plan to run." So I said, "How are you going to run when you only have 16 percent of the registration, thanks to Wilson's 'balancing' each district and making them all competitive?"

So my registration went from 62 to 74 [Huff laughs], and my vote was 86 percent the first time out of the box. "Forget it," I said, "move to another district." I never heard back from her, but I did tell her, "Go talk to the governor, or write him a letter, and ask him why did he do this." [laughs]

Huff: My most infamous recommendation was to March Fong [later Eu] when she wanted to run for the Assembly, she was on some Alameda County commission. I recommended against it.

Morris: Really?

Huff: She ran and won [in 1966].

Petris: Yes, that was the county board of education, wasn't it?

Morris: Yes.

Huff: I told her it was a little too premature. [laughter]

Petris: Well, you can't always get these things right, you know.

Remembering Tom Chavalas

- Huff: I'm going to butt out, except Tom Chavalas--[He is the oldest of two sons of James Chavalas, the candy store owner who was so active in the Democratic party. See above. --NCP]
- Petris: Did he call you?
- Huff: He came over yesterday. We had a nice chat.
- Petris: I've been meaning to tell you [Morris] about him.
- Huff: When his brother died, he apparently got all the stuff from his father--
- Petris: Yes, he sent me some of it.
- Huff: [to Morris] This is a classmate of Nick's from grammar school. His father was very active in Democratic politics back in the Roosevelt era, and Tom has now inherited from his brother this stuff, this memorabilia--
- Petris: Yes, it's a gold mine.
- Huff: Which includes letters from Roosevelt. He maintains that his father's influence statewide was like close to half a million votes.
- Petris: Oh, yes, he was amazing. He had a little candy store next to the T & D Theater, and that was his headquarters. He operated out of there. He formed a group called the Solon Democratic Club in the Greek community. One of the pictures that Tom sent me was of the float that he and my father put together in some parade, Fourth of July, I guess. My dad is on the float, and his brother, and my father-in-law--
- Huff: Sam--
- Petris: Yes, my father-in-law. It was a Greek community float, but it was a Democratic float with a capital D. [laughs] He was quite a guy.
- Huff: Yes. Tom's dad ran the candy store, and Nick's father-in-law owned a candy store in San Leandro.
- Morris: That's wonderful. Everybody in town goes to the candy store. Like Byron Rumford's pharmacy--everybody in that area on the

Berkeley-Oakland border went down to the pharmacy when they wanted a little advice on any political--

Petris: Pharmacy, yes, right.

[Tape interruption. Huff departs]

Ethical Considerations

Morris: I guess your eleven o'clock appointment is going to be descending upon us.

Petris: My goodness, look at the time! Well, that's all right, we can take a little bit more time.

Morris: Since we got onto the subject [a few minutes ago], maybe we could finish up on reapportionment. Is the approach that Governor Wilson has taken worse or different, or has anybody ever approached it in a balanced fashion, from your point of view?

Petris: No. We've had battles over the years, and the Republicans complain. My answer to them has been, "What do you want us to do? Fall on our own swords? What you overlook is the fact that for a hundred years, you ran this state. In the last century, the Democrats had one governor, maybe two. In this century, they've had two, father and son, plus Olson. That's three governors. This is 1994. We've had three governors. And you're complaining about the partisan lineup for God's sake?"

There was a time when I first started being active, the Republicans were so dominating that a lot of--we had to change the law after Pat Brown got elected and I got elected. There were a lot of Democratic central committees in this state who endorsed Republican candidates for partisan office in the legislature. So we finally passed a law that says, "Hey, you can't do that. If you're a Democrat, you've got to represent the Democratic side of the electorate."

We had to pass a law prohibiting it, because that's how powerful the Republicans were. They also had cross-filing, and they had most of the incumbents. They had two-thirds or three-fourths of each house. Total domination for decades. So when they start complaining about this or that, that's peanuts compared to what kind of power they exercised all those years.

Morris: From the point of view of your experience in government, can you envision an apportionment system that would be representative, considering the fact that the population numbers and registration can change pretty fast. What would be an equitable way of selecting the boundaries for electoral districts?

Petris: I haven't seen a system that would guarantee it. Other states have tried it. For example, in Oklahoma, they had the supreme court do it. Not long after they did it, three or four of them were sent to jail for corruption--not related to reapportionment, but supposed to be the pinnacle of virtue and so forth in our society. They'd come up with different plans. This last time around--not this time, but before--there was a lot of talk about having the state bar participate in the process and help appoint judges to do the reapportioning. Or have a blue-ribbon committee of citizens who were nonpartisan and not active at all in politics. [Morris laughs]

I said to myself, "If you've got a person who is living in the community, no matter what the age--thirty years old, forty, fifty, sixty--and is totally nonpartisan, I'll show you a guy who doesn't have any blood in his veins and doesn't know what's going on in our society, because he isn't interested. I don't want that kind of guy drawing lines that determine the districts for ten years. It doesn't make sense." So instead of trying to look for a bunch of eunuchs, political eunuchs, get people who have a good reputation for fairness and honesty and so forth, and have them do it. But it's very difficult to find. If you're going to look for a strictly nonpartisan person, you're going to get an uninformed person in most cases. It doesn't make sense.

Morris: What's the dividing line between a person who has an informed interest in apportionment, or whatever the issue is, and somebody who is never going to make a compromise or listen to the other side?

Petris: What's the difference? Well, if he's informed and interested and is not an active partisan, is not a politician in office, you maybe get lucky and get somebody that has no strong passionate feeling about Democrats or Republicans, but that's a rare bird to find. I remember Oliver Wendell Holmes, who gave advice to young people and said, "You should get involved in the actions and passions of your time." If you're a good citizen, that's what you're going to do, and if you take it seriously, you're going to get into some scraps.

Holmes, of course, practiced what he preached. The greatest passion of his time was the Civil War. He was wounded seven times in that war. He was a youngster from Boston, and he joined as a

volunteer, and he was wounded seven times. So he's not just a preacher or somebody from Mount Olympus laying down the rules for the ideal citizen; he went through it.

Morris: I should say.

Petris: I've never forgotten that phrase of his: "the actions and passions of your time."

Morris: Yes. It's very compelling. Well, the other side of that is that it's said that a good--an effective senator or assemblyman is one who can argue a matter through with the representative on the other side of the aisle and come out with something that pleases both sides. But then you get into the area of the media and the public saying, "Well, those guys are trading favors and then they're getting into conflict of interest." How do you resolve those points of view?

Petris: I find the media analysis is inaccurate a lot more than it's accurate, even though they sit there. The ones in Sacramento, they sit on the floor with us. They have their own desks, and they see the operation.

Morris: Really? On the floor?

Petris: Yes. They're the only ones allowed to do that. The press has that much power. And I find some terrible misreadings of what actually goes on. It's often characterized as horsetrading, and that's illegal. I can't say to you as a fellow legislator, "I'm sick and tired of you carrying this bill year after year, and here you want me to vote for it again. But doggone it, I'll do it this time if you vote for my bill that does this and that, that you have been opposing in the past." That's a felony; that's a felony.

Now, there are other ways that you can bend and compromise in order to get your half-loaf. I don't think there is anything sinister about that, or corrupt, or I don't think it's a conflict of interest. But there are a lot of things that make up these decisions. For example, I'm sitting in a committee, and--
[interruption]

--a guy comes in with a horrible bill, and I jump all over him. I just think it's terrible, and I'm not bashful about it, so I give him my opinion and I vote against it. Later in the day, I go before a committee with one of my bills, and he's sitting on it. What's his attitude going to be? This is a pet bill of his that I took on. Maybe it was defeated by one vote; that's mine.

He's not going to be very friendly towards my bill. So this isn't in the trading area; this is the opposite. This is retaliation--

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Petris: --because of my making a lot of noise about it, I didn't just quietly vote against it. I made a lot of noise about it and maybe persuaded two or three others to vote against his bill, and he loses it.

So then I appear before him, what's his attitude? Human nature says, well, he's going to do the same thing to me. So what should the rule be? Are you going to think of him and vote the author, or are you going to give an objective evaluation of his bill, which might be a darn good bill that helps a lot of people that haven't been helped, maybe in the field of education or whatever. That happens a lot.

So the point is, you have to be sensitive about the feelings and the possible conduct of your colleague. And it's not only in a positive way where you help each other, it's in a negative way where you're bombing each other. Now, do you lose your objectivity when you take that into account? You could be very tough and do what I described on every bill, and be just as vociferous. You might as well quit, because you're never going to get a bill of yours through if you take on every author that way because of some bill of his you don't like.

Now, what do the folks at home want you to do? If they want you to be effective, they should understand that every issue is not black and white, where you're right and he's wrong. There's a lot of in-between grey area, and when you sort it out, you meet each other at some point, and like you say, you each get something out of it.

Morris: But again and again, in the cycle of California political history, we've had corruption investigations and scandals. In the last year, we've had several people who have been indicted for conduct unbecoming--¹

Petris: Yes, that's right, that's very bad.

¹ A federal investigation begun in 1985 led to convictions of four state senators, an assemblyman, a former county sheriff, and a prominent lobbyist in California by 1993.

Morris: If that recurs, if you follow the adage that where there's smoke, there's fire, there are some people who are not upholding the principles--

Petris: Oh, there's no doubt. But you have bank embezzlers, you have crooked lawyers, you have crooked judges. In every walk of life you have a certain small number that are going to go sour on you. You shouldn't condemn the whole institution nor the whole profession.

I find that in the voting up there [in Sacramento], it comes in categories, you might say. There are certain issues that people feel very, very strongly about, and there isn't anything you can do to change their mind, and money isn't going to do it either. Let's take an oversimplified case: the First Amendment. Anybody tries to get rid of the First Amendment is going to run into big trouble with me. I am just automatically opposed to it. I don't even want to hear the arguments, okay?

A better issue is labor relations, labor-management. I've always been strongly pro-union since I was a little boy. My father was a union member. [telephone interruption] Let's take the--I'm on the Industrial Relations Committee. It's dominated by Democrats, by one vote. You look over the bills. If you're on the scene, you can call the vote on just about any bill that comes in there. They're usually either pro-labor or they're pro-management. So you can tell exactly how I'm going to vote, no matter what.

On the other side, there's very conservative members, Republicans. They're never going to vote for a bill that helps labor. In a Republican administration, you have [the head of the] Department of Employment and the head of the Industrial Relations Department, which is established to help balance things on the side of the worker--it's biased toward the worker--[those department heads] come in and oppose bills that help the worker, because [they were appointed by] it's a Republican administration.

All right. So my point is this: I'm going to vote that way [to help the workers] no matter what. Now, the critics say, "Well, look at that. Sure, you're always voting for labor, because they give you a lot of money in the election." If labor never contributed a dime--and most of their contribution is in manpower, rather than money; they help you get out the vote and do this and that--if they didn't contribute a dime and didn't support me in the election, I would still vote the same way, because that's the way I believe. It's very deep. And the same is true of the Republicans. If they didn't get a nickel out of the Chamber of Commerce people and the Manufacturers Association, and

all these business types that are strongly in their favor, they wouldn't change their vote. It wouldn't change.

Now, there are other issues they don't give a damn about. Some guy comes along and says, "Hey, we've got this little problem over here in your district, and we've got to do this and that," he [the legislator] never heard of it, it's no big deal. And "Furthermore, we haven't been active, but that's a big mistake, and now that this problem has come up, we realize that we have to be active. So we're going to be active in the future." That's a code word for saying, "We're going to help you in your campaign."

So the guy helps them, because it sounds okay, it doesn't violate his principles at all, it's not a basic thing that he went up there to do, you see what I mean? So there are a lot of areas that aren't as clear as labor-management, and there are a lot of areas that are new that we never heard of before. But people oversimplify, and they look at the campaign contributions, and they see a tremendous amount of money from certain industries to a certain member. And then they see a lot of money for somebody else on the other side. So they conclude, "Well, he sold out to them, he's totally beholden to them, he's been bought out." And the fact is, if those guys never showed up, the voting pattern wouldn't change one bit, on the fundamental issues. You know what I mean?

Morris: The issues that are important to that legislator?

Petris: Yes, right.

Morris: How often does somebody who makes a large contribution call and say, "This is really important to us, we need some help on this issue, we hope we can count on your vote"?

Petris: I don't know. I'm sure that varies from member to member. I rarely get calls like that. They have their lobbyists who come in, sure. They say, "We're very much interested in this."

And if you accept contributions from people, you have to be certainly aware of where they stand. But a good legislator is not going to change his vote because of that, no matter what.

Morris: Would a difference be between a person saying, "This is the information on this issue that my association is interested in," and calling up and saying, "We gave you \$100,000, we expect you to vote this way"?

Petris: Yes. Well, I don't think they'd be that crude. They'd get around it some other way. They wouldn't mention the money; they'd

probably say, "We've been in your corner for a long time," or "Unlike other years, we really helped you this time, and we'd like to get your support on this." I don't think any of them are that crass. Because that would invite a flat rejection on the part of a lot of people. "What do you mean? You gave me money for what, so I could vote for your bill anytime you told me to? Forget it." That would alienate a legislator.

But it's underlying anyway. It just goes contrary to human nature, if you totally ignore what somebody [stands for]--suppose instead of giving you money, he went around the neighborhood and rang doorbells and did a lot of that [volunteer work]. And then a year or so later, he comes to your office and he says, "You know, I belong to this [business group] that is very concerned about this bill, and they've asked me to talk to you." All right.

Or, the example I often give is, suppose your time is very short, and you've got a committee meeting to go to, and you have to present a bill. You've got three or four people in the waiting room, and all of them want to see you. Okay? One of them is a volunteer who has never given you any money, but he's given you time. Another one is a big contributor. Another one is somebody who supported your opponent. And the fourth one is your mother. [laughter] You've got two minutes. Who are you going to talk to?

Morris: Mom?

Petris: Mom; you're damn right. That supersedes everything. All right, suppose your mother isn't there, and you've got these others. You've got the volunteer and the contributor. Naturally, you're going to go to the guy who helped you, at least to hear what he has to say. I don't know how you finally make your decision, but you're going to hear what he has to say.

Morris: Thank you, that's really helpful. I appreciate that.

Petris: Okay, my pleasure. Thank you. I've got to make some calls, all right?

XII PATRIARCHS OF POLITICAL PROGRESS

[Interview 4: March 25, 1994] ##

Problems with Vice President Spiro Agnew

Petris: Did we talk about my visits to Greece?

Morris: The early ones.

Petris: The early ones, where I was going every year?

Morris: Yes, right.

Petris: Okay. And the election mission to Greece run by an Episcopalian from UC?

Morris: Well, one of the things I would like to talk about at some point, and today is fine if you're thinking in terms of the Greek connection, is other people who've gone into politics and what advice and counsel you've given them. Like when George Christopher was going to run for lieutenant governor and then governor, did you work with him at all?

Petris: Oh, yes, we had a couple of interesting conversations. He was running with Nixon. Nixon's two running mates, for governor of California and president of the United States, were both Greek Americans, which is kind of strange.

Morris: That's right, Spiro Agnew was Nixon's first vice president.

Petris: Christopher and Agnew. Of course, they're poles apart. I'd go for Christopher any time, but I wouldn't touch Agnew. [laughs] Agnew is--

Morris: Even before he got into trouble?

Petris: Oh, yes, even before, because--

Morris: When he was at Maryland--

Petris: When he was governor of Maryland, he got a lot of national publicity for some good things, and then the story got out that he was part of that same old boys' circle that wasn't very good. And then later, it was when he was in the vice presidency, people learned about kickbacks and bribes and all that while he was governor. Pretty bad. But it wasn't only that, it was his style of attacking us Democrats.

Morris: Was that something that he was doing anyhow, or was that something that he was coached in by some of the Nixon people who were known for what used to be called "dirty tricks"?

Petris: Well, I'm sure that had something to do with it. I really don't know what the origin was, but I'm sure that--yes. He wanted to be a good soldier, and follow the party, but I think he embraced that eagerly. He did that so enthusiastically, I don't think he was speaking under protest. [laughs]

Morris: He's from a small state. You wonder how Nixon happened to choose him as a running mate.

Petris: Well, one story in the Greek community is that Tom Pappas was responsible for that. Tom Pappas was a very wealthy Bostonian who had a very successful export-import business, mostly importing stuff from Greece. His family had a big grocery supermarket, and he expanded beyond that into a lot of other investments. He became very, very wealthy. The story goes that he was very close to Nixon, and he's the one who persuaded Nixon to pick Agnew.

Morris: Was Pappas a big figure nationally in the Greek--?

Petris: Oh, yes, he was well known nationally in the Greek community, but he was also very active--I think he owned a racetrack in Boston, and he owned other things. He got into the hotel business in Greece.

Morris: International businessman.

Petris: Didn't do too well over there in Greece. I used to see him from time to time. We were friendly adversaries, because he was always a very strong conservative Republican. One time I ran into him at the airport, either in Athens or New York, for five minutes. It was election time, and we were arguing about the election. He made a bet. He said, "I'll tell you what. Nixon's gonna win, and I'll make you a little bet. If Nixon loses, I will buy your wife

a terrific dress. And if he loses, you can buy me a necktie." So I sent him a necktie. [laughter] Nixon won that year.

Later he went over to Greece and invested in a hotel and some other things. But anyway, he was well known in the Greek community, especially in the Massachusetts area, but he was known nationally too.

Morris: Did he have any interest in California politics?

Petris: Not that I know of. It was mostly at the national level.

S.F. Mayor George Christopher; New England Heroes

Morris: Well, let's go back to George Christopher. Had you worked with him on anything when he was mayor of San Francisco?

Petris: No, I hadn't. I was an early admirer of his, and he kind of broke the ice for Greek Americans in California, and a good part of the country for that matter; although they were way ahead of us in Massachusetts. There were a lot of officeholders in the state of Massachusetts before us. In more recent times, there was a United States Senator, there's a governor. That was U.S. Senator Paul Tsongas and Governor Michael Dukakis, who later ran for president.

Morris: Of course.

Petris: And there are a lot of local elected officials in Massachusetts, Lowell especially. Lowell had a very big Greek population. As a matter of fact, after World War I, there was a Congressional Medal of Honor winner who came from New England. I don't remember which state, Maine or New Hampshire, one of the two. The Greek community got together with, I guess, some veterans' groups and erected a statue in his memory, as a Congressional Medal of Honor winner. He was the only one of Greek descent, as far as we knew. His name was George Dilboy, he must have changed his name. And the statue is still there, of course. It's in the small town where he was born, in the center of the town in the square.

In World War II, as far as I know, there was only one from the Greek community who was a Congressional Medal winner. I've been thinking recently that I have wanted for years to have something similar done for him. He was from New England, too. I met him during the war, and we became close friends. Later he moved to California. My wife and I were godparents of his daughter, and I've written to his daughter and asked her--because

his daughter has his memorabilia, and she doesn't know what to do with it. I have some suggestions to give her, and I also asked her to send me a copy of his citation for the Congressional Medal so I could send it to one of the national organizations in the Greek community and have them do something in his memory too, in his honor.

Morris: What was his name?

Petris: Chris, for Christos, Chris Karaberis [spells]. He fought in Italy, and he wiped out about fifty or sixty Germans, including a machine gun nest that was really giving the American troops a terrible time. Singlehanded, he went after that machine gun nest and wiped it out and captured and killed a whole bunch of Germans. I don't know, he was a little short guy, I don't know how in the world he did it. He ultimately died of his wounds, because his body was full of lead that they hadn't pulled out. He had a lot of lead in him from the bullets.

Morris: So he didn't survive to come home after the war?

Petris: Oh, he came home. He came home, and he moved to Oakland. He lived in Oakland for--in fact, he died here in Oakland.

Morris: Christos makes me think of the artist who's done the big fences and--

Petris: Right.

Morris: --he put a necklace around some islands in the Caribbean--

Petris: I know, he's still at it.

Morris: Is he also of Greek descent?

Petris: No, I don't think so, I think he's French. I'm not sure. But this fellow's name ends in an "s," it's Christos. That was my father's name, as a matter of fact.

Morris: So your middle name is Christos rather than Christopher?

Petris: Yes. With Christopher, when he ran for lieutenant governor, a lot of people in the Greek community supported him, and a lot of them changed their registration so they could vote for him in the primary. Those who were Democrats changed just for that election. The Democrats came to me and asked me if I would get on a brochure with my picture and my name, hitting Christopher on something or other, I don't know what the heck it was, as part of their campaign--

Morris: Had the Christopher Dairy's troubles with milk-pricing regulations surfaced yet?

Petris: Oh, yes, that surfaced several times. That was old hat by then. I don't think they included that. It was part of a campaign against Nixon, but they also hit the running mate. They [wanted to] single me out [in] a separate statement in opposition to Christopher, and I said, "Absolutely not."

I never told Christopher that, but others told him, and he smiled because on another occasion, he said the same thing to the Republicans who went to help them in a campaign against me, it was my first run for the Senate, where I was number one on their list statewide. They were targeting people, and they had ten candidates they wanted to defeat. I was number one on the list. So they wanted to get a statement from Christopher, and he turned them down cold. He said, "Absolutely not."

So both of us rejected requests from our own party to publicly oppose the other person.

Morris: Somebody on the other side.

Petris: Yes. [laughs] And I never regretted saying no, and I'm sure he hasn't either.

Morris: Did he come to you for some advice on that '62 campaign?

Petris: Oh, no, no. He was a seasoned campaigner by then. He didn't need any help from me.

Morris: But that was his first run for statewide office, wasn't it?

Petris: Yes. I think that's the only one. There was a time he was thinking of running for governor. Well, he did [in 1966], he ran for governor, but, unfortunately, he was defeated by Reagan in the primary.

Morris: Did you work on his campaign at all?

Petris: No.

Morris: Your loyalty to the Greek community didn't extend that far across the party line?

Petris: Not quite. Well, I went to meetings in his support. We had meetings in the Greek community to raise money and I did that, and I contributed money. But I didn't actually get into the campaign itself, as part of that structure. I was helpful wherever I

could, but I didn't go beyond that to actually be part of the campaign committee or team.

Morris: Well, in the beginning, in that primary, a lot of old Democratic hands thought that Christopher was more of a threat to Democratic officeholders than Reagan was.

Petris: Well, that was a very serious miscalculation by Pat Brown. That's what Pat Brown's advisors told him, a fellow named Bradley was his campaign manager--old friend of mine. I forget his first name--Don, Don Bradley. He was convinced, and he convinced Pat Brown, that they would be far better to take out Christopher than Reagan, Reagan didn't have a prayer. And boy, that was one of the great miscalculations of the century. [laughs]

Morris: I should say, I should say. Was that because Bradley was a northern Californian primarily, and he misjudged the strength of southern California?

Petris: That was the common theme in the whole party. It wasn't just Bradley. I remember a lot of Democrats were delighted that this guy Reagan was going to run, they could beat him any time. They were completely wrong on that one, of course.

Morris: Interesting. You said you and Christopher had a couple of conversations over the years about matters relating to government?

Petris: Oh, from time to time, but the two incidents I had in mind, we were each being approached to attack the other one. But we didn't talk about that among ourselves until years later. In other words, when he told the Republicans to go fly a kite, he didn't call me and say, "This is what I did." The word got to me through third parties. And similarly with me, I didn't call him and say, "I want you to know the Democrats came in and really leaned on me, they want to do this and that, and I have nothing to do with it." I never called him to tell him that either. He learned about it the same way, through other parties. [laughs]

Morris: He's a good, sturdy fellow. He still is--

Petris: Oh, yes, he looks--yes, and he's active, he travels a lot, and he looks far younger than his age. He's very loyal to the community. He comes over to Oakland from time to time as a speaker at gatherings at our church on special days that we have, and goes to other organizations as well. In other words, he didn't hang up his gloves when he left office. He's been gone from the mayor's office and from other campaigns for a long, long time. He stayed active. And I'll tell you, I get letters from him from time to

time. The man writes beautifully. Just a beautiful expression. He knows that language.

Morris: He writes you in Greek or in English?

Petris: No, in English. But he came here as a little boy. He wasn't an adult when he left Greece. I don't know for sure, but I don't think he was more than seven or eight years old. Maybe ten at the most, I'm not sure. So he grew up like the rest of the American kids, but he really learned the language. He writes beautiful letters.

Morris: And what does he write to you about?

Petris: Well, something that comes up. He sees my name that I've done this or that, and he writes and congratulates me and encourages me, usually when I'm in a minority position and fighting like heck for this or that. He says, "Good for you, keep it up." On several occasions where I've received some kind of honor from some organization and he learns about it, he writes me a very beautiful letter congratulating me, and pointing out that it's well deserved, and "I've known you for years and I've followed your career with a great deal of pride, I'm very happy to see that this happened," and it's done in very beautiful language.

Morris: That's great.

Petris: He really writes very well. And he's very compassionate. I remember when one of my parents died, he was in Australia. Somehow or other, he got the word down there, and he wrote me a note all the way from Australia saying, "I'm traveling and I've just learned about your father's death," or "your mother's," whichever it was--I think it was my father, and he expressed his condolences very eloquently.

Morris: Would he have gotten more involved more actively when Tsongas and Dukakis were both running for the presidential nomination?

Petris: Oh, if that had happened earlier, he would have been much more involved, but he was active, he helped both of them. I don't know what role he played, but he was supportive of both of them.

Morris: Did Paul Tsongas come through California at all?

Petris: Oh, yes, we had fundraisers for him here. I was very active in doing that, being part of the committee that would have a fundraiser for him. You know, the Greek community is very small nationally. We're among the latest of the immigrants. I'm one step removed from the farm. My father's the one who came over

here, he lived in a small community, and they had fruit trees and other things.

Morris: Back home.

Petris: Back home. Most of the people that are my parents' generation came here off the farm, for economic reasons, to seek a better life and raise money to pay off the family mortgage, or pay the sister's dowries. It was the duty of the older brothers, they couldn't get married until they got their sisters taken care of.

Morris: In your parents' generation, dowries were still part of the culture?

Petris: Oh, yes, a very strong part of the culture. In fact, my father came to Idaho to be with his older brother who came ahead of him, and they had cousins there, all from this one little village. One of their very best friends worked with them on the railroad, and they got to admire him so much that they picked him to marry the sister. They saved money and gave him a chunk of money to pay for the dowry when he went back home to marry the sister.

Morris: Had he known her before he came out to--?

Petris: Oh, yes, he had known her, because they all came from the same village. So it wasn't like two strangers. But that's how that worked, and that's not an uncommon story.

The reason I mention this is, number one, we're a small group, and number two, very new, especially on the West Coast. In Massachusetts, they go back more. Like you take Dukakis, his mother was a schoolteacher. Well, there weren't any immigrant schoolteachers here on the West Coast. A lot of Greek Americans became teachers, but you don't hear in those days of an immigrant being a teacher. His father was a doctor, Harvard Medical School, I believe. Well, that was unheard-of when I was a kid, and I'm older than Dukakis--considerably. [laughs]

So when we hear about a man running for governor of a state, we get all excited. We think it's an honor, reflects great honor on the community regardless of their party, and we want to help. Right now, we're raising money out here for Nick Theodore, who's running for governor of South Carolina. He's been lieutenant governor for two terms. I've met him personally. I wrote to him the first time he ran and sent him some money, stone cold, stranger. I didn't know him at all. But I had read about him as being active in politics. I think he might have been in the legislature before, state legislature.

Morris: Is it a small enough community in the U.S. that you know somebody who knows Theodore and can tell you personally what he's like?

Petris: Yes, the network is pretty good. If you don't know him yourself, you can find somebody who does.

Let's see, Olympia Snowe has announced that she's running for U.S. Senate in Maine for Mitchell's seat. George Mitchell has announced he's stepping down. She's of Greek descent.

Morris: You read that those little New England states are so conservative, and yet they're constantly turning up a lot of women in public office.

Petris: Yes. She's married to the governor of Maine. They're both Republicans, and they've only been married a few years. She's been in Congress for some time, and now she's going for the senate seat.

Morris: For Mitchell's seat.

Petris: Yes. So we know about that, and there are going to be efforts around the country to help her. There have been several others.

Dukakis and Tsongas in 1984

Morris: What about two guys from Massachusetts running for the presidential nomination at the same time? Did that cause any soul-searching, whether to support Tsongas or Dukakis?

Petris: Well, they weren't running against each other, actually. When Dukakis made his run, Tsongas wasn't running.

Morris: He was already out of it?

Petris: No, I think Tsongas ran later. Tsongas--It was Dukakis first, and then Tsongas. And then he got sick, of course, with cancer and the question was, is he going to make it? And the reluctance of a lot of people to vote for somebody who might be president coming down with cancer and not even being able to serve out one term, and so forth. So that illness hurt him pretty badly politically, although it was announced sometime during the campaign that the doctors said he had a clean bill of health. Yet later on, it came back. You never know.

So they weren't competing at all with each other. They were helping each other, actually.

Morris: What was your view about the Dukakis campaign? At one point, he had the lead--

Petris: Very poorly managed. Really a bad--. I was very active in that campaign, and I got to know him very well. The first time he came to San Francisco, we had a luncheon for him. It was a very well attended luncheon at the Fairmont. I introduced him at that luncheon, and I described him as the new Pericles from the Parthenon. [laughs] I introduced him that way. It was a good fundraiser, and then we had several others later. Later, it became a Democratic party thing, but that first one was--

Morris: It was still in the primary?

Petris: Local, yes, it was still in the primary--local citizens interested in supporting him. He had a lot of friends out here who knew him back at school, who went to school back there, several lawyers and others. So we did very well on the fundraisers. But every time he came out, I was always asked to introduce him to a rally or the luncheon or the dinner, or whatever it was, so I got to know him pretty well.

But the campaign overall was just terribly managed. In fact, he came back for a reunion the year after the election to meet with people who had helped him. It was in a beautiful home over in San Mateo County. There were quite a few people there, all of whom had been very active in his campaign from around the Bay Area, and as far as Sacramento for that matter. Made a nice speech. He was still governor. And they were telling him, "You ought to run again." He kept saying, "Nope, I think I owe it to the people of Massachusetts, I was absent quite a bit during the campaign, and I want to stick [close] to home and finish out my term."

I raised my hand and I said, "Well, just in case you decide to run, next time around I'd like to see you show in your own personality a lot more Zorba and a lot less Socrates." The common criticism that I made was that he ran it like a Harvard graduate seminar. He wasn't pitching it to the people with his feet on the ground and getting those messages across in simple language. I think he could have won it if the whole approach had been different.

And then structurally, they had problems. They sent people out here from Massachusetts to run things when they should have picked local people who knew the territory, and had the national

ones just come in from time to time to see how we were doing. And that was a common complaint from people who were active, they say, "Who the hell is this guy? He doesn't know the Bay Area, he doesn't know this, he doesn't know that. How's he going to run the details day-to-day of the campaign?" And that was a legitimate criticism, too.

Morris: Did you try and get this point across during the campaign?

Petris: Oh, yes, but it was hard to reach him. [laughs] I tried for a couple of weeks to reach him on information I got from a woman in San Jose following the Irangate stuff, I guess it was, because [George] Bush had been in the office, vice president. There was some very damaging stuff. I had read about it in a magazine article, and there was this woman from San Jose who worked in the White House under Reagan. She said that when they had some of the meetings with the Iranians--during the hostage crisis, that's what it was--that Bush actually went to Paris. He was seen in Paris, and the purpose of being there was to have further meetings and negotiations with the Iranians, and that they made a deal. He met with them in Miami, he met with them in New York. They had witnesses on that. But they couldn't nail down the Parisian part.

And this woman says, "Absolutely. You talk to so-and-so, he was CIA. He piloted the plane. He didn't know who his passenger was, but when he landed, he saw him on the tarmac, at the critical date when the key negotiations were supposed to be going on." We know that the Iranians postponed--

Morris: Releasing the hostages.

Petris: Releasing the hostages until they [Republicans] won [the election], and then they would release a lot of money. And sure enough, within the second week of being in office, Ronald Reagan shipped tremendous amounts of money back to the Iranians that had been frozen here. I mean, that was direct. That wasn't so difficult to prove. But the few people who tried it just didn't put it together properly. But I talked to this woman.

Morris: And she was willing to talk--

Petris: She wrote a book on it, for God's sake. I called her and I talked to her, and she said, "I can supply you with all the evidence you need. I have documents, I have this, I have that." I said, "Why don't you tell [people]?" "I'm going on a bunch of talk shows." But some things just don't stick.

Morris: The media didn't pick it up?

Petris: The media didn't really pay much attention to it. Well, just as a Democrat, I feel that we've often missed the boat, and we've often been exploited in those situations and haven't had our voice heard. Sometimes we show some statesmanship and restraint. The latest is George Bush when he defeated Dukakis, when he was elected the first time. Well, he was only elected once.

Campaign Statesmanship and Skullduggery; Postmortem Advice

Petris: I was reminded of it with all this flap about Whitewater, which happened back in Arkansas long before [William] Clinton became president, okay? All right. So the Republicans are so convinced that they can't beat us on the issues, they can't beat us on health care. They know that people are dying to get a good national health insurance program, and they don't want it because their buddies in the insurance industry are totally opposed to it, okay?

So what are they doing? They're doing everything they can to discredit the president so they can defeat his health program and distract him from it by keeping him busy on this Whitewater stuff. And they're going for the jugular, they smell blood.

Now, it so happens that two weeks before, and I would invite people doing research to check on it--probably do it at UC library--two weeks before election, there was a front page story in *Barron's Weekly*, which I got, I spotted on the news stand and I bought it. I lost it in the fire, unfortunately. It was a story of Bush's activities in the oil business, in Texas and in Mexico.

##

Petris: They did business in Mexico. They did something in which they ran afoul of the law in Mexico which resulted in the imprisonment of George Bush's partner. Now--

Morris: I don't remember hearing that on the six o'clock news.

Petris: Oh, it was in *Barron's Weekly*. That's not the *New Republic* or the *Daily Worker*, that's *Barron's Weekly*, for God's sake, front page. The implication was that if Bush had been the one operating in Mexico with his partner, he'd have wound up in jail too. But he wasn't in Mexico, he was in Texas, so he was safe, so to speak.

Now, the Democrats knew that. Number one, they didn't talk about it during the campaign, which they should have. That's a

legitimate question to raise: "Hey, what kind of shenanigans are you involved in right now? Right now during the campaign?" And secondly, after he's elected, let's have congressional hearings on this, and ask the question, "Is he out of jail only because his partner's the guy who went to Mexico to do the dirty work? Did they toss a coin to see which one's going to Mexico?" Nothing. Nothing. That's either from stupidity or noble statesmanship on the part of the Democrats.

Morris: Well, what do the Democrats do in California when you've got an election campaign going? You mentioned that the Republicans had targeted you, amongst other people, sometimes. Doesn't the Democratic campaign committee do the same?

Petris: Oh, there's nothing wrong with that. See, under this fellow, I forget his name, he was a dentist or a doctor, he was chairman of the Republican party--

Morris: Gaylord Parkinson.

Petris: Yes, Parkinson. He was very conservative. He was very disappointed that Republicans weren't doing well in California, especially in the legislative races, so he came up with this program. One [of its commandments] said, "Thou shalt not criticize a fellow Republican," remember?

Morris: Yes. That was known as the Eleventh Commandment, I think.

Petris: Part of the Ten Commandments was, "Make up a list of Democrats that you're going to mark for defeat and concentrate on them, instead of spreading your resources all over the place." And I was number one on the list that year.

Morris: That was way back there--

Petris: That was in the sixties, 1966, yes. I was running for the Senate the first time, I believe. No, there's nothing wrong with that. That's not the kind of thing I'm talking about. I think that's perfectly legitimate, you want to win the election, you see some strong candidates out there against you, and you target them. You raise money to beat them. Nothing wrong with that, unless you use a lot of fraudulent tactics, but I don't think that was involved at all. I think the Republicans did the conventional thing and tried to defeat their opponents by marshalling as many resources as they could to get the advertising and so on and so forth, whatever it takes to win the election.

Now, that's different from this Whitewater thing. They're just out to discredit and humiliate and embarrass the president,

first of all, and secondly in the process, distract him from his agenda. Now, the Democrats never laid a hand on Bush. That Barron's thing, from what I remember, is ten times worse than anything they've brought up so far in Whitewater. And nobody laid a glove on him.

Now, during the campaign, I tried to reach Dukakis to ask him to have his people research some information that I had received, which I sent to them, from this woman, relating to the hostage situation. Now, they've always denied it and nobody's been able to prove it, but I personally, on the basis of what I heard and saw, am absolutely convinced that they were persuaded to hang on to those hostages no matter what until after the elections, because they'd get a better deal out of Reagan, who will release that money right away, than they would out of [President Jimmy] Carter.

[Henry] Kissinger did it during the Vietnam War. It's nothing new in Republican tactics. They're scurrilous. During the Vietnam War, Kissinger is advising Republicans--I don't know what his official capacity was--but when [Vice President Hubert] Humphrey was meeting with the Vietnamese in Paris to bring an end to the Vietnamese War, Kissinger [went over there and] told them [the Vietnamese] to hang on, don't agree to end the war, because you'll get a better deal from us.

Morris: Oh, my goodness.

Petris: Yes. That's no secret. That's been highly publicized.

Morris: Were there things you thought could have been done for Dukakis to help him keep his lead in 1984?

Petris: Yes, I think the Democratic party could have done a much better job. They could have had a lot of other spokesmen, like the United States senators. We have some great senators with a lot of credibility, and they could have had the senators speaking out in different parts of the country, pointing out Dukakis' strengths and attacking the other side for these kind of things that I'm talking about. This thing about wait, keep the hostages until later, that borders on treason in my book.

Morris: It's pretty shocking, when you think what those folks went through for that two-year period.

Petris: Yes.

Morris: Well, and continuing with the story of Greeks in politics, we now have Mr. [Phil] Angelides running for--

Petris: Yes, he's running for treasurer.

Morris: Is this his first foray into elected politics?

Petris: Yes. Well, no, he ran for local office. He ran for city council years ago in Sacramento. He was young, he'd been working in the legislature. He was one of the bright stars on the Assembly side, Assembly staff. He worked for the majority leader, and I think he worked for the speaker for a while, and he was on one of the major committees. He ran for city council. But he didn't make it.

There is a member of the council there from the Greek community, Terry Kastanis, who is now running for supervisor in Sacramento County. He's had a good record, and his wife was elected at least twice to the county board of education.

Local Officeholders: Mayors and Sheriffs

Petris: In Sacramento. We've had a lot of people at the local level, but not enough at the state level. When Mayor Christopher was in City Hall in San Francisco, Oakland had a vice mayor who was born in Greece, and like Christopher, came over as a child, Peter Tripp. Richmond's mayor was a Greek fellow, Gus Allen. He was also the postmaster there for many years. He was born in Greece. The oddity is that all the guys holding office were immigrants. The native-born Greeks hadn't stirred yet. And my father-in-law was vice mayor in San Leandro during that same time, and he was acting mayor for a while.

Morris: That's interesting. You think sometimes that the old, old residents in America can be really tough on immigrants, and they didn't object to people who were immigrants running for office?

Petris: Oh, some of them did. If you talk to the Christopher people, they'll tell you that the reason he lost to Ronald Reagan was a very negative, scurrilous brochure that had been mailed in southern California about this immigrant who's trying to be governor, and is saying very negative things about Christopher because he wasn't born here, he's not a real American. It was horrible stuff. Orange County, L.A. County, San Diego, and it worked.

So Christopher's great service to the Greek community and to the community as a whole was to lead the way and prove to Greek Americans that they could run for office and win. He used to talk about his experiences with the Democratic party machine in San

Francisco. He was a Democrat, I forget the guy's name--Malone. He was Mr. Big in San Francisco.

Morris: There were two, there was a Tommy Maloney who was in the Assembly for years, and then there was the Malone who was the Democratic Party Central Committee chairman for years.

Petris: Yes, it's the central committee guy that I have in mind. Christopher went to see him to tell him he wanted to run as a Democrat for some office or other, and the guy laughed at him. He said, "You've got to be crazy. You think a Greek will ever get elected in San Francisco?"

Morris: This is an Irishman speaking, who's only one more generation--

Petris: Yes, an Irishman, like me one step removed [from the old country] probably. [laughs]

Morris: Bill Malone.

Petris: Bill Malone. Christopher told that story many times at different gatherings.

Morris: So he switched parties?

Petris: And he switched to Republican, yes. But he did it, see, he bucked Malone and he made it. He got elected supervisor, and then he got elected mayor, and was a very popular mayor and did very well. And that encouraged a lot of us to make the run. That was very helpful to us. I've often introduced him as the patriarch of our community, not in the standpoint of age, but in being the leader, political progress.

Morris: Standard-bearer.

Petris: And at that time, [in addition to] all these guys [who] were mayors, we had in Marin County a Greek fellow who was elected sheriff. I think he was a native. He was a native, yes, Bill, I think his name was, Mountanos [spells]. San Joaquin County had a Greek-American sheriff, Canlis [spells], and of course, L.A. had a Greek-American sheriff, Peter Pitches, who was sheriff for years, former FBI--

Morris: Oh, yes. He was a pretty tough lawman, wasn't he?

Petris: Oh, yes, he certainly was. But you know, he was always opposed to the death penalty, and he always came up to Sacramento when I was in the Assembly, and that was a big, hot issue in those days. We

had those bills every year when Pat Brown was governor to repeal the death penalty, and he always came up in support of the repeal.

He argued that number one, it's never been proved that it's a deterrent, and number two, it falls unevenly on people depending on their background. You never see a wealthy person executed for murder. Doesn't mean wealthy people don't murder; they murder, but they don't get the chair. And so forth. All the traditional arguments that were used, he embraced.

Morris: That's interesting, because I thought generally the law enforcement community was in support of the death penalty.

Petris: Well, they were generally. That's right. He's kind of like this chief of police of San Jose, Tom McNamara, something like that--

Morris: Right, the one who writes detective stories?

Petris: Yes. He's kind of the same stripe. He's like Pitches, he's different from the mainstream.

Morris: On other subjects, wasn't Mr. Pitches pretty conservative?

Petris: Oh, yes, he was a good Republican. [laughs]

Morris: Yes, his name seems to have turned up on some of the law and order issues in the 1970s.

Petris: Yes.

Supporting Young Candidates

Morris: Did you officeholders get together sometimes and look for young people to encourage?

Petris: No, unfortunately we never did. I wish we were doing it now. We have an organization now that's supposed to encourage young Greek Americans to run for office. It's called Dynamis. It's officially a PAC, as a matter of fact, under both state and federal law, political action committee.

Dynamis is a Greek word meaning strength, like strength in unity. We've sent money to Nick Theodore in South Carolina and to Olympia Snowe. Regardless of party, we encourage Greek Americans to run for office, the theme being we owe this country a lot, and we ought to be giving back to it. So we support people running from the congressional level up, not for local city races around the country, but people to run for Congress, no matter where they

are in the country. Of course, we have others check them out, people that we know. If we find a guy that's absolutely--

Morris: A scumball--

Petris: Yes, we're not going to support him. So far, everybody's been okay.

Morris: It's a sense of obligation rather than a sense of, this is a way to do well in the business world?

Petris: Yes, a sense of obligation, that's it. Last year we contributed a nice sum to Angelides when he announced he was going statewide. The members are supposed to be on the lookout to encourage young people to run, but we haven't done much in the way of candidate development. We've done help after the fact, but we haven't really flushed out people who should be running.

Morris: What would you look for in a young man or woman that would signal that they might be a good candidate?

Petris: First of all, we rely on individual members. This organization covers all of northern California, so we have somebody living in Redding who knows a young guy who might be an attorney, might be a businessman, but he's active in the community, and is a natural to run for mayor or something. Then we get in touch with him. We say, "We understand it's possible you might--" after some local guy tells us about him, recommends him. Now, we haven't contributed money for mayor's races outside of California. We have for mayor's races in California, but when we go beyond California, it's congressional level and up. We contributed to Art Agnos when he ran for mayor, and a few other locals up and down the state. I don't remember who they were now. There's one down in Los Altos, Laliotis, who's mayor; he's a scientist in the high-tech area. So there have been a few here and there. But mostly we've concentrated on statewide candidates in other parts of the country as well, mostly in other parts.

George Marcus is very active in the Democratic party, big fundraiser for Jerry Brown. He's one of our past presidents. He's very big in real estate.

Morris: Northern California or southern?

Petris: Northern. He's in the Bay Area. He was on the Cal State University Board of Trustees and served as president. Was a darn good president. He's a graduate of Cal State San Francisco, so he took a great deal of interest in the CSU system and worked very hard to improve it, and was a very, very good chairman.



Young Nick in traditional Greek costume.

Photograph courtesy of Anna Petris



Petris family gathering, May 1942. From Left: Brother Gus, Mother Mary, Father Christos, Sister Katherine, and Nick. The occasion was Katherine's election as president of the McClymonds High School student body, the first young woman to hold the office. Both her brothers had preceded her in the job.



Gus Petris, Chuck Frank, and Nick Petris at the Parthenon, April 1946

Photograph courtesy of Gus Petris



Democratic State Central Committee chairman Roger Kent's energy and enthusiasm played a crucial role in the numerous successes of party candidates in the sixties. Here, Kent (in flowered shirt) enjoys the company of University of California political science professor Eugene Lee, State Senate Finance Committee Chair George Miller, Jr., Democratic National Committee Woman Elizabeth Gatov, former ASUC president James Keene, Jr., campaign staffer Van Dempsey, and campaign consultant Don Bradley (front). At Ms. Gatov's home in Marin in the fifties.

Photograph courtesy of Martin Huff



Democratic photo opportunity, 1959. Former Oakland Mayor Joe Smith, left, with Senator Clair Engle and Assemblyman Petris.

Photograph by Albert Mayo Harris Associates, courtesy of Martin Huff



Nick Petris stepping off in traditional Greek dance, ca. 1960.

Photograph courtesy of Anna Petris



Senator Petris (rear) joins Governor Edmund G. (Pat) Brown, Sr. (seated) for signing of historic Knox-Petris tax legislation, A.B.80, July 1966. Center row, from left: Assemblyman John Knox, Senator James Cobey, Senate Finance Committee staff David Doerr, Assembly Local Government Committee staff Tom Willoughby, Franchise Tax Board executive Martin Huff, Judge Raymond Sullivan, (unknown).

Photograph by McCurry Foto Co., courtesy of Martin Huff



Anna and Nick Petris at home in 1976.

Photograph courtesy of Anna Petris

XIII OVERSEEING HIGHER EDUCATION

Confirming UC Regents and Cal State Trustees; Votes of Confidence

Morris: These are tough years to be on the board of either the Cal State University system or the UC system, I would imagine.

Petris: Oh, yes. Right now things are boiling in both of them. Especially UC. We took some votes this week on new members of the Cal State board, and we turned down one of them.

Morris: I read that's the first time that's ever happened at either the board of regents or the Cal State trustees.

Petris: No, I think it's happened before with the trustees, but the regents, this is the first time in a hundred years. The last one who was turned down to be a regent of UC was Leland Stanford. [laughter] Isn't that amazing? I didn't know that until this came up.

Morris: That's why he founded Stanford University, isn't that the mythology?

Petris: No, people--that's not true. The true story is the culprit there was Harvard. Leland Stanford, Jr., was in Italy, where he had been sent by his father to be educated.

Morris: Young Leland?

Petris: Young Leland, age sixteen. And he came down with a very serious illness, and he died, of I think some illness that today we handle routinely. The father went to Harvard and offered them a lot of money for a building that they might need, and on condition that they name the building after his son, and they turned him down. They said, "We don't do that. We'd be happy to accept your contribution, but we cannot have a condition on it."

Morris: My, things have changed, haven't they?

Petris: Yes. [laughter] So he said, "Okay," and he came back home and he founded the university. That's why it's called Leland Stanford, Jr., University. So that was our great gain out here when Harvard turned him down.

Morris: It's the Rules Committee, isn't it, that votes on appointments in higher education? What has changed to make them question the governor's choices?

Petris: Yes, the Rules Committee always has the first vote, but it can always be brought up on the floor by motion, which isn't done very often. If we recommend confirmation, then it goes to the floor, which can vote it up or down. They usually follow our recommendation, so the key vote really is in the Rules Committee.

The problem on the regents--[for example,] Dr. [Philip] Lee who was turned down [as head of the medical school in San Francisco]--there are so many problems over there at UC in the administration [that] among the regents, there are [some] members who feel there ought to be some changes in their attitude and their policy. I thought [Senate pro tem Bill] Lockyer explained that very, very well. He said, "We have all these problems that have brought disfavor on the university, including the flap over [UC President David] Gardner's retirement package, and the very high pay of some of the administrators, and money being spent like there's no limit to it, tremendous increases in pay for some of them, at the same time that they're raising the tuition," which we never called tuition before. In the last three years, there's been an enormous increase in the fees that students have to pay. Some professors have been let go.

In the midst of all that, they continue to raise the salaries to unreasonable amounts among certain administrative levels, and that brought a very negative reaction from the legislature. The only way we can express that is at confirmation time. We don't select the nominees, but when they come to us for a vote, it's usually--see, the nominee can serve for a year without confirmation. If he's not confirmed by the end of the year, he's out. That gives us a chance to look at the track record: What's he done in this year? How has he voted on the critical issues?

Lee was a new man. He's a very impressive person, who simply went along with the rest of them. The votes were almost unanimous. One or two votes the other way. We were looking for agents of change, as Lockyer called it. He was not an agent of change at a time when change is critical. The contrast is very

dramatic, because the person confirmed immediately before him (they were in the meeting at the same time, but they didn't finish both of them) was Ward Connerly from Sacramento, a wealthy real estate developer from the black community who stood up and tried very hard to get the regents to change. He voted against those things.

The contrast between him and Lee was like day and night. Connerly was very eloquent when we probed and asked him, "Well, what about this, and what about that?"

Morris: So you were talking to the two men at the same hearing of the Rules Committee?

Petris: I don't remember if we talked to both of them, but they were both scheduled for the same day, so they were both there. I think we may have taken the vote the same day, I'm not sure. But I know they were both there. In fact, when Lee was being interviewed, Connerly came back and supported him, because Connerly said, "Well, sure, our votes have been different, but on a lot of other things, they're the same, and I think he will develop this sense of independence." We were concerned that he'd just be another rubber stamp, which Connerly wasn't. So there was a very dramatic difference between the two. Maybe it's a matter of individual style, personality, whatever you call it, but to us, at a critical time, it was a serious flaw, and that's why we turned [Lee] down.

Dealing with Presidents and Budgets: Process and Substance

Morris: UC was one of the things that I thought we might spend a little time talking about, because they're one of your big constituents.

Petris: Oh, yes, sure.

Morris: So you, over the years, do you have a chance to talk about some of these policy issues with the presidents?

Petris: Oh, yes, over a period of time. I've met with all the presidents, because it's not only they're constituents, but I chair that subcommittee in the Senate which handles their budget, handles all of education from kindergarten through the highest graduate level, this one subcommittee. So we get an armful of stuff. In connection with making decisions on the budget, we have to talk about policy, too: "Why do you need this money? What are you going to do with it? How come you're not putting it over there instead of over here? Why are you spending so much on top-heavy

administrators when maybe it should be going to ease the burden on students," and so on and so forth. That's been kind of the spotlight in the last couple of years.

Morris: And what is the answer?

Petris: Well, the answer is--of course, you see, the problem is we don't talk to the regents. It's the regents' budget, but they're not the ones who come in to present the budget. It's the administrators, the president and the chancellors. So, well, they have a good defense. They say, as far as the salaries go, to maintain the standard of quality they have at UC, which many of us think is the finest public university in the country, they have to be competitive. When they go out to fill a slot for an administrator, this is what the market calls for. In fact, it probably should be more than they pay elsewhere, because living costs out here are much higher. Housing in particular.

I personally had a friend whom I met at Stanford when I was in law school, he taught physics there. Later he went to Yale. He was one of the top men in his field. But he married a girl from the Bay Area, and they lived here for quite a while before he went to Yale. He got an offer from UC Berkeley, and he jumped at it, because he wanted to come home. But when he checked out housing prices, he turned it down. He said, "I don't want to start out with another big mortgage." [laughs] They had a beautiful big home in Connecticut, but even after getting cash for that, it wouldn't be enough to pay for anything close to comparable out here, up there in those Berkeley hills.

Morris: Yes. You almost wonder if that becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy. It's like you hear about other categories of public servants, the police departments all get together and work out an arrangement whereby they convince the board of supervisors or the city council that their salaries should equal the highest of--

Petris: Oh, yes, that goes on all the time.

Morris: And you have to admire their ingenuity at maintaining the standard of living of their members. But it sometimes seems as if academics are not exempt from that same--

Petris: Oh, that's true, yes.

Morris: Because in the thirty years that you've been looking at university budgets, the pay scale has increased a lot, and the expenditures.

Petris: Oh, yes, certainly.

Morris: So who were the people from UC that first you dealt with? You go back to Clark Kerr's time, do you not?

Petris: Oh, yes, Clark Kerr, and after Clark Kerr, temporarily there was Professor [Ed] Strong, and after him--boy, I don't remember the names.

Morris: Charles Hitch.

Petris: Charles Hitch, who came from experience in the Department of Defense, as I remember. Yes, I dealt with all of them. After Hitch there was--oh, boy, that's terrible. Anyway, I dealt with all of them. But I didn't, see, meet them every day. They would come in to see me personally from time to time if there was a problem they thought I could help. I've always been regarded as a strong supporter and friend of the university, probably the best friend in the Senate, if not the whole legislature. [Alfred] Alquist, also. They always felt free to come and see me when they were looking for some help.

Traditionally, when we open our budget hearings, we start with the university. The first witness is the president of the university, who comes in and gives an overall view. Then as far as the detailed budget items, those are handled by administrators. The chancellors often come in for their respective campuses. The same is true of the other branches. Cal State is started by Chancellor [Barry] Munitz, he makes the first presentation, and the same with the community colleges. They have a board of governors, and their president comes in. But we also hear from the faculty associations, we hear from the students, we hear from the unions, who are employees, we hear from janitors, so it's a long, complicated process. It's a very big institution.

Morris: Yes.

Petris: In spite of all the flak that they're going through now, I haven't lost my admiration or confidence in the university. The problem is half process and half substance. For example, Gardner's [retirement] thing. The way they handled it, they really bungled it. First of all, they tried to do it in secret, and then they floundered when it was exposed--

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Petris: --Senator Art Torres was probably the leading critic. He's got a resolution he's going to offer Monday demanding [Jack] Peltason's resignation. Torres has been criticizing them for many years, he has recently filed a report with the Senate on the gender discrimination in tenure, and it's a pretty darn thorough report.

He's got a lot of evidence that women have been deliberately passed up when they ordinarily should have had tenure and been promoted. So the report is on the granting of tenure and the increase in salary and in level. That's a very common criticism, and I think it's a legitimate one.

Application Scores vs. Enrollment Openings

Morris: What about the admissions idea, that over the last ten years--twenty years now, I guess--as the population of California has changed and the number of minorities has increased, the student body should aim at reflecting similar percentages. Is this something that comes up for discussion with the legislative committees, too?

Petris: Oh, yes. Actually, I think UC has done very well on that one. They do have difficulty. I've challenged my friends in the Hispanic community--they show us the figures, and there's only this one tiny percentage of Hispanic [students]. I say, "Show us your candidates." Because I know universities really beat the bushes to try to find them, and there are very, very few out there. In spite of the cuts--we've taken a billion dollars away from the university. It's actually about \$900 million they have lost in the last three or four years. In spite of that, minority enrollment is up, both among blacks and Hispanic. They haven't cut the courses, as Cal State had to do--Cal State wiped out several thousand classes, and they fired a lot of professors. UC has managed to keep adjusting, dipping into whatever funds they could find from various sources, they haven't cut classes, they haven't reduced the quality, they've increased enrollment in the target areas, the minority classifications, and they've done remarkably well, considering the hammering they've taken fiscally, just an awful beating.

And of course, part of that is because they raised the fees to help offset the losses. Some of us are very strongly opposed to raising fees. I've always voted against the fee increases when I've had the opportunity. The problem is, you don't get a separate bill that says yes or no on fees. The fees are set by the regents; we don't have any say in it. So the only way we could say no is defeat the entire budget of the University of California. Well, hell, nobody wants to do that.

Morris: The legislature doesn't have a line-item veto?

Petris: No, we don't have a line item on that. I suppose in committee we could take that out, but you see, the other ally of the regents on fee increase is the governor. After we take it out, he puts it back in, we don't get a separate vote on that, and if we did, it would [require a] two-thirds [vote], and we never get two-thirds to override the veto. Republicans automatically vote with the governor, and that's the end of it. So that's what happens there.

So I think when you consider the beating they've been taking and the reduction of resources, tremendous drop in revenue, they've done very well in managing over there. I don't know how long they're going to be able to keep that up. Sooner or later, it's--.

Morris: Some of the reading I was doing on higher education, I was surprised to be reminded that, even though the Master Plan for Higher Education says that the top 12.5 percent of high school graduates each year should be eligible, should have a space at one of the university campuses, we've heard a lot in recent years about there aren't spaces, [that some applicants have] been shifted from one campus to another [or denied admission, even though they have high scholastic aptitude scores.]

Petris: Well, that's a misinterpretation of the plan. That's another thing the university will tell you: they have not turned away any eligible student. But there's never been a guarantee that the student gets his particular branch. Now, I live near Berkeley so I want to go to Berkeley, and they may say, "We can't take you in Berkeley, but you can go to Riverside," or Santa Cruz, or Davis. But they have placed everyone that's eligible and meets their standards among those top 12.5 percent.

Morris: In one of the campuses.

Petris: Yes, and it's a university-wide thing. So the Master Plan didn't say, so many at Berkeley and so many here and so many there. Some of the campuses--

Morris: Just that they should be eligible to go to a university campus?

Petris: Yes, right. Some of the campuses didn't even exist when they adopted the Master Plan, see? So that's another one of the things they've done: They have not rejected anyone that had the qualifications. But it's tough to get in. One time I asked a fellow to come over to discuss admissions, and he brought a stack of papers--

Morris: This is somebody from the admissions office?

Petris: Yes. Well, I don't know if he was out of the admissions office, but he came from the university. They were single-spaced, typewritten, page after page after page. He was looking through and going like this: one, two, three, just went on and on. I said, "What are you doing?" He said, "I'm trying to get past the straight A's." Down to page fifty, for example, and every student on that page had a straight-A grade average coming out of his high school, he wanted to get into Cal.

He said, "We can't take them all. We can't take them all, because we like to get a population mix. We want to make room for the A-minuses and the B-pluses and the B's, and so forth. We also take a look at, what are they doing with their lives? Are they spending eighteen hours a day in the library and can't find their way home? Or are they in extracurricular activities, are they interested in music, are they in athletics? What are they doing with their lives? Are they involved in some community work?"

They try to encourage the whole person, and they don't want to just take a bunch of bookworms, period, which I think is darn good policy. You've got to have more than that. That's just a beginning. So it's a tough thing, a very, very difficult thing. But if you just went on a straight academic thing, it would still be very tough. [laughs]

Financial Crunch and Compromise in the 1990s

Morris: What do you think is going to happen? How are the pressures for the children of alumni and the regional pressures and the ethnic pressures going to be resolved?

Petris: It's going to be resolved. I think they're doing quite well now. The bottom problem is the recession. If we didn't have a recession, we wouldn't have those problems, because we could build new campuses. We could enlarge current campuses, in the few areas where they have room. But where's the money going to come from? I think it should come from the people, should come from taxes. But the governor is absolutely opposed to any new taxes of any form. He didn't even want the extension of the sales tax, the half-cent thing, to continue.

Now, I'll say this for the governor: in his first year when he was looking at a \$14 billion shortfall, he met the Democrats halfway--I don't know, I may have told you this story--but anyway, the leadership got together with him and said, "Look, we suggest a fifty-fifty program to make up this deficit. We are willing to go

to our caucuses in both houses and persuade them that we've got to cut social services. Now, that's extremely difficult. Those are our programs, those are the poor. Our party traditionally has shown a lot of compassion and interest in caring for the poor."

Morris: Governor Wilson was willing to make that concession?

Petris: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. "But the other half has to come from taxes, and that's where we need your help. Now, if you'll agree to that, we'll go for it," and he did. And I think he was a hero in that first year. All his battles in the first year were with the Assembly Republicans. Matter of fact, he had some tussles with the Senate Republicans. See, we managed to get some things passed with two-thirds because we had twenty-four or twenty-five Democrats. We were at our peak. And the two independents voted with us, so we got twenty-seven [votes], our two-thirds. But it got killed over in the Assembly.

Morris: Does that mean Speaker Willie Brown was not willing to agree to the compromise?

Petris: No, he did not have two-thirds of the Assembly. The Democrats had a simple majority--not enough.

Wilson came to our Senate caucus twice, Democratic caucus, during that first year, and we had frank discussions, productive, as to how we were going to do all these things, and then when he left, he'd say, "Well, now I have to go over to the Assembly and do battle with the Republicans." I mean, he really had some fights over there, but he kept his word, we kept ours. We did the cuts, reluctantly. He signed the tax increases.

And then the following year, where the shortage fell to \$11 billion, from \$14 billion, still pretty darn big, we offered the same program, he turned it down. He said, "I can't do it. For one thing, taxes are not going to be on the table, no matter what. No new taxes." Why? Because in January [1993] at the state Republican convention, they read the riot act to him, and they said they would not support him for reelection because he signed the tax part of that package. They didn't give him credit for the cuts--

And of course, if you're governor, and your own party tells you they're going to go against you, what are you going to do? You're going to reassess. Now, I told him I understand that, and I made several speeches in public where I've praised the governor for being a hero in that first year. But I've also said, "I wish he had taken it to the public and gone over the heads of the

party, and said, 'We've got to have this tax for our children and their education in our higher education system.'

Morris: As a what, a special ballot measure?

Petris: No, just raise taxes. Like we did the first time. The legislature raises the taxes to make up whatever money is needed to make sure we can fund our higher education system.

Morris: But when you say go over the heads of the legislature--

Petris: Well, that's to create the climate. Among the Republicans--

Morris: Make a public announcement?

Petris: Yes, an appeal to all the people, especially the Republicans, to support this tax increase because it's going to benefit our state, which benefits directly from the University of California, it's the engine that drives the economy, and Cal State. We educate our kids, and they're still the envy of the whole nation, and we have to continue that tradition. That's what Pat Brown did. Of course, times were better then.

XIV THE CHANGING TONE OF STATE GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

Reagan Era Tax Packages

Morris: You were in an expanding economy when Pat Brown was governor.

Petris: We were in an expanding economy, but taxes never were popular. The more money people make, the less they're willing to pay. We know that. They don't want to pay taxes, they want to keep the money.

Morris: When you hear taxes are going up a half a percent, you think lots of money. People don't realize that if they're making \$5,000 more than they did last year, even at the old rates they're paying more dollars in taxes.

Petris: Yes, that's true. But relatively little overall. It's not all that much. Anyway. And of course, the Republicans painted themselves into that corner. They went for the garbage from Reagan and [Howard] Jarvis, that tax is the worst thing that can happen to you, the enemy of the people is government, and the way to fight the enemy is to starve it out by reducing the taxes. Although Reagan signed the two biggest tax increases in the history of the state when he was governor. Didn't ruin his career; he went on to be president.

Morris: Wasn't his second big tax bill the one that included a big increase in education for K-12 and money for child care, and didn't it include an increase in basic welfare benefits?

Petris: I don't know if they were all in the same bill, but he did all of those.

Morris: It was the package that went through in 1970--

- Petris: Yes, the package that was agreed on, the Beilenson bill, reformed welfare, but it also increased the benefits. And he signed it. It created Cal OSHA, and he signed it. When he got to the White House, he tried to destroy OSHA at the national level. But he signed it, Occupational Safety and Health Administration.
- Morris: Well, and he signed various other things in California--
- Petris: Yes, he signed the abortion bill, he signed the pay-as-you-go income tax [withholding]. I was the one who was the main proponent of that when I was chairman of the Rev and Tax Committee. That was discussed during the campaign, and he said, "I'm opposed to that, and if that bill comes to me as governor, I will veto it." The press asked him, "Now, are you sure, Governor? Circumstances change," and this and that. He said, "Let me tell you: on that issue, my feet are in concrete. I will not sign that bill." So we presented him with the bill and he signed it.
- Morris: What did you do?
- Petris: He said to the press, "That noise you hear around me is the concrete cracking around my feet." He had a good sense of humor. [laughs] He's good at the one-liners, yes.
- Morris: What was the nature of the conversation that got him to change his mind?
- Petris: Well, he finally saw the light, the overall condition of the state and the need. George Miller really worked on him. He was chairman of the budget on the Senate side, the current congressman's father.
- Morris: Did you guys take him out for lunch or something?
- Petris: No, I wasn't in on those talks. It was my basic bill that I'd had before, and it was a bill recommended by the [Assembly] Revenue and Taxation Committee when I was chairman. But when Reagan got elected, I moved over to the Senate, so I wasn't in that any more. So George Miller was the leading voice, and Unruh, and a few others.

Comparing Ronald Reagan and Pat Brown as Governors

- Morris: Generally, how did you find Reagan to deal with, when you did get to sit down with him over an issue or a bill?

Petris: Well, he's very amiable, and would listen. A lot smarter than people give him credit for being. A lot of my colleagues thought he was pretty dumb, but I think they're wrong. He was stubborn. He was very stubborn. He got an idea, you couldn't shake him. He wouldn't shake loose. He was often wrong, that was the problem. My battles with him were on fighting for the poor. I had bills on housing for the poor, housing for farm workers, and I had more of them later when Deukmejian vetoed them. I was strongly supported in my legislation by the CRLA, California Rural Legal Assistance.

When they saw my bills, they jumped on board and pushed to help. They filed lawsuits against the governor because of his policies, his decisions, and his own lawyers would tell him, "Governor, we can't win these lawsuits. They're absolutely right. They're based on the statutes of the United States, they're based on California statute, and they're based on Supreme Court decisions of the United States." [tape interruption]

So he lost 95 percent of those cases. I think Reagan's belief is, nice people don't send their kids to public schools. Nice people send their kids to private schools.

And you couldn't get any strong support. You compare him with Pat Brown? Now, when Pat Brown was running for governor the first time, some people were very nervous because they thought, as an Irish Catholic, prominent in his religion, that he would be very weak on public school policies. He was the greatest. I was with him one time when he was talking to some visiting businessmen, about a hundred businessmen. When they started asking him questions, the first question to Pat Brown was, "Well, what do you think your best achievement is as governor?" He said, "Education," bang, just like that.

They'd ask, "What do you mean?" He'd say, "Well, let me put it to you this way. At this very moment, as I am speaking to you, 40 percent of the population of this state is in school. Now, that means preschool, it means adult night classes in the high schools," which is Pat Brown's baby really. He really pushed that. He said, "I know I've been criticized because a lot of old-timers go back to school, and all they learn is basketweaving. So what? That's a beautiful art form. We have museums around the state with basketweaving of our Native Americans, and this and that. What's the difference? It's a wonderful thing to do, and we don't charge them a penny. We have our community college, junior college system: no tuition, no fees. Unlike any other state in the union."

And then he explained what he had done so far, which was expand the UC system with new law schools, new medical schools,

new campuses, entire new campuses being built, Cal State system enlarged enormously, and the junior college system even more than the rest, and he told them how many students were in each one, hundreds of thousands of students going to school right now. And that's all public stuff. That's not some Catholic that says, "Send your kids to the local diocese and put them in a Catholic school." They were way off base when they expressed those fears.

Morris: You kind of wonder where Mr. Reagan's idea came from, since he went to public school himself. Do you suppose maybe it was some of the people that were backing him in his kitchen cabinet?

Petris: Probably. He liked to identify with the wealthy. He was pretty well-off himself in later years. By the time he got to be governor and president, he was in the wealthy category. He belonged to their clubs. I remember a black fellow testifying before one of our committees many years ago. I think it was on some kind of civil rights stuff. A very learned man, and very eloquent. He was asked a question as to why he was up here and why he thought this and that, and why he felt that good policy wasn't going to emerge from all this.

He said, "Well, because our experiences are different. There aren't many of you up there who look like me, and you and I don't belong to the same clubs." Very basic.

Morris: And it's easier to listen to somebody who's like yourself.

Petris: Yes. And you don't feel as out of place if you're going to court if you're black, and the judge is black. At least you figure, well, this guy, he may be well educated and a professional, and now he's way up there as a judge, but somewhere along the line, he had the same problems I had.

Cesar Chavez, The Farm Workers, the Twenty-Year Pesticide Fight

Morris: You were mentioning the CRLA. Where and how had you gotten to know Cesar Chavez?

Petris: The first time I met Cesar Chavez, he came to Sacramento to support a bill of mine that protected farm workers from pesticides. It was a simple bill that required the farmers to post signs on their properties at the entrance points where the farm workers came to work warning them about any pesticide that might have been sprayed over the field, and explaining the clearance time. Some of them were safe after a matter of three or

four or five hours, others required two or three days. And giving them instructions on what to do if they felt certain symptoms, and telling them where the water was available. There's a fountain at such and such a place, and go there immediately and wash off your body, any part of your body that was exposed, and call this doctor. There's a phone number; you can get the phone here.

That's all it was, notification. Never passed. Took twenty-plus years to get that passed. I got it out of the Senate many times, [but] it was killed in the Assembly, believe it or not. It came back to the Senate for concurrence in Assembly amendments, [when it finally got through the Assembly] and the Senate, of course, approved them, because I recommended the bill. They gave me a standing ovation in the Senate. I've never seen that done before. Including the people that fought like anything against those bills, Republicans in the Valley, the farm area, the growers. They joined in the standing ovation, because they knew how hard I'd worked on that. [laughs] I've never forgotten that. That was a beautiful tribute.

Morris: I should say. You didn't know Chavez was coming to testify?

Petris: No, I didn't know he was coming, but he had heard about it. He came up, and he brought some farm workers, and had them take off their shirts to show the scars on their bodies from the pesticides.

Morris: Was there any contact between your staff and some of his organizers?

Petris: Later. Not at that time. That was my first meeting with him. After that, we became very close. I met with him a lot of times. He used to call me when they had those strikes, and his people would get beaten up.

Morris: This was when the United Farm Workers union was trying to organize--

Petris: Trying to organize, right. They called the local sheriff, and the sheriff either, number one, wouldn't do a damn thing or, number two, would join in beating up the workers. I would call the sheriffs. I mean, those sheriffs got more calls from me, they wondered who the hell this guy was. [laughs]

Morris: You didn't live in their county?

Petris: Chavez would call me and I would--yes, they didn't care about me. Chavez would call me and I would call the sheriff, and I'd threaten to bring the attorney general into the picture and this

and that, and this is against the law what you're doing. Some of them were pretty good, they cooperated, but most of the time we didn't get anywhere.

Well, that's how I met Chavez, and worked with him through the years after that. He always supported my bills, because they were always helpful to the farm workers, both on the physical side and the housing side.

The worst disappointment I had in the farm worker thing, one of the worst, was George Deukmejian. I had a bill that would provide money in a revolving fund to lend to growers who were willing to use it to build decent housing for farm workers. So they wouldn't have to put any of their own money up front. They'd borrow the money from the state, they'd pay it back with a low interest rate, way below the market, so ultimately that same money would be recycled, used over and over again.

Morris: Like the Cal Vet loans.

Petris: Yes. Deukmejian vetoed it, and he said, "I don't want the government to get into the housing business." So I went to see him and I said, "George, have you toured the camps in the Valley?" "What camps?" I said, "We have camps that are owned and operated by the state to house farm workers."

Morris: I didn't realize that.

Petris: Yes. "I'm trying to get you out of the housing business." Moreover, the Farm Bureau, which never supported any of my legislation, supported that one. They saw the wisdom of it.

Morris: But you didn't succeed in changing his mind.

Petris: No.

Morris: This was when he was governor?

Petris: Yes.

George Deukmejian as Governor and Attorney General; Law Enforcement and Coastal Protection Controversies

Morris: Did he change much when he moved from the Senate into the governor's office?

Petris: Well, that was a good question that we often discussed. We thought we knew him when he was in the Senate. When he became governor, we learned that we really didn't know him. He was very poor at negotiating. It was more like dictating: "This is it, take it or leave it." And then when we thought back, well, hell, he never did any negotiating on any of his legislation. He wasn't chair of a major committee that would bring him into that activity, and the bills he carried were straight "Put 'em in jail" stuff.

He carried death penalty legislation year after year. Every one of his bills, almost without exception, was "Crack down on people, punish more, raise the penalties," and there's no compromise. So he never developed the skill of the normal legislative give and take, and so when he became governor, he didn't have that experience.

Morris: Even though he had spent time in the attorney general's office?

Petris: Then from there, he went to the attorney general's office, and he was the czar of law enforcement there, before he went on to become governor.

Morris: Again, because of his own personal beliefs, or because the crime statistics were going up--

Petris: Well, that's his personal beliefs, but the increase in crime reinforced that. He did carry a bill that he fought very hard for, I don't know how much negotiating or concessions that he had to make, in a different field, and that was cleaning up the pension funds for retired workers in the labor movement. There was a lot of corruption, remember, especially in the Teamsters Union. The Teamsters were dipping into the pension fund in their partnership with organized crime, and a lot of that money found its way to Las Vegas in the clubs, which means that the funds lost a lot of money. So he wanted to tighten up the control of the pension funds. I supported the bill; it was a good bill. But that's the only one I can think of that he carried outside the crime field. I'm sure he had others, but I just don't [remember them], because all he talked about was crime.

Morris: If he was a one-issue person, that must have made it difficult in trying to work around the whole bunch of issues involved in putting together the state budget.

Petris: Yes. Well, he had other issues, but that was the dominant one. The other was on business. In his eyes, business could do no wrong, no matter who they were and what they did. He showed it as attorney general when his duty was to enforce the Coastal

Commission Act to protect the coast. We could never get it out of the legislature, so Tony Beilenson and I and a couple of others put together the initiative. We got it on the ballot, and the people overwhelmingly voted for it and created the Coastal Commission.

Now, that specifically requires the attorney general to be the enforcing power, and his predecessor--

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Petris: --with the Coastal Act, created a unit within the attorney general's office that was devoted exclusively to enforcing that statute; there were about five lawyers. Deukmejian comes in, he eliminates it. Now, there he is, the number-one law enforcement officer of the state, starting out with an illegal policy, which is, "I will not enforce this law, which I'm required to do." Why? Because most of the people who were being monitored and prosecuted were businesspeople, developers. And in his eye, a businessman can do no wrong, period.

Morris: Is that the philosophical thing that, "I own land and I have total control over it?"

Petris: "I can do whatever I want with it." Well, I guess that's part of it. He was never a big landowner.

Morris: No, but the people who supported him and funded his campaigns--

Petris: Yes, [I think many of them were for candidates who would] keep government out of their hair. [The people who feel they have a right to] do whatever they want, and he went along with that.

Morris: The Coastal Commission was kind of a focus for a lot of political controversy.

Petris: Yes, it was.

Morris: And environmental protection in general.

Petris: Yes, it had some stormy times during the legislative debates. That's why we couldn't get it passed. I don't remember whether that required a two-thirds vote or not. It might have, maybe because of appropriations to fund it. At any rate, we just couldn't get it passed. Alan Sieroty was active in that fight, Beilenson, and a few others. Anyway, that's the story of the enforcement of the Coastal Commission Act.

Morris: Did you feel like you'd really lost an ally when Beilenson went to Congress?

Petris: Oh, yes. Well, except he was--

Morris: Did it change things?

Petris: No, he was succeeded by Sieroty, so although we really did lose an ally, we gained another powerful ally, same general political philosophy.

Morris: Sieroty replaced Beilenson in his district?

Petris: Yes. He came over from the Assembly, just as Beilenson had come over. So that, from the philosophical, programmatic standpoint, it was a continuation of pretty much the same thing.

Morris: Was [David] Roberti pro tem by then?

Petris: No, that was before.

Morris: That was still when Jim Mills was pro tem?

Petris: Yes.

Self-Help Housing Programs; Public-Private Partnerships; Tenants Rights

Morris: I found Roberti's name on some of the housing legislation. He was carrying the financing package.

Petris: Oh, very active in housing. He carried bonds, hundreds of millions in bonds for the poor, and he's still doing it. Yes, he's carried a lot on housing.

Morris: Would the two of you work closely together on that?

Petris: Well, we'd support each other, but we weren't actively drafting things together. We touched base, and we supported each other. We carried similar kinds of legislation. I never carried bonds, but I had a lot of bills relating to housing, to encourage ownership. I had a self-help program which started, the first project was in Oakland out on 73rd Avenue. It's a great program, it's still going all over the state. I don't know how extensive it is. People were encouraged to build their own homes, and the state would provide--

Morris: Single family?

Petris: Yes. The state would provide the foreman to teach them how to do it. The banks would provide the money, savings and loans mostly. We all worked that out together. You drive down 73rd Avenue, you still see nice-looking homes that were built by the original owners.

Morris: Sweat equity?

Petris: Yes, that's what we call sweat equity, exactly. I had the farm workers legislation that I mentioned, the pool, the revolving fund. I had legislation tightening up county responsibilities for inspecting and monitoring farm worker housing in their counties, because they weren't doing a damn thing to enforce the code. This compelled them to do it. I had housing for the elderly--just a range of stuff on trying to open up the door to new housing. I also had a bill of rights for tenants, both in the private sector and in the public sector, at different times.

The law [that is on the books] today that prohibits a landlord from retaliatory eviction was my bill. If the tenant goes to city hall and says, "I'm living in a dangerous apartment, there's holes in the steps and there's this and there's that," and the landlord learns that you squealed on him and went to city hall, bounces you out. Can't do it any more. That's been on the books for years.

Another one is cutting off utilities. You have a dispute with the landlord, maybe you haven't paid your rent; cuts off your utilities. Against the law. Triple damages if that happens. Also another one was--well, utilities include water, electricity, gas, light, et cetera. Can't do that. So there's some good protections for the tenants against the abuses that a lot of them have suffered in the past.

Morris: Have you got any idea how many people have been able to build their own houses through this--

Petris: No, I don't know. I've never checked that to find out the number.

Morris: Did the funding on that tie in at all to any federal money?

Petris: I don't think so. Maybe HUD got into the picture, but I think it was arrangements with local savings and loans.

Morris: I have wondered how much money has come into Oakland from the federal government for various programs. There seem to be a lot of them.

Petris: Well, HUD's been very active in Oakland. There's all kinds of public housing in Oakland that's financed by the feds, by HUD in particular, over the years.

Morris: Does that require the state senator to lend a hand in working these out ever?

Petris: Well, it doesn't require it, but I'm in it. [laughs]

Another area in connection with that that I was active in is the successor--see, we had a lot of programs that HUD was involved in and the federal government in different ways, in either funding or guaranteeing the funding for low-income housing, and when the feds did that, to encourage private builders to expand our housing stock, particularly multiple housing, they offered an inducement of federal funding, with low interest, that they would pay back to the government. Sometimes there were grants involved as well.

But the condition on the owner was that the rents would have to be kept at a certain specified maximum. They couldn't charge more than so much. In the commercial market, they wouldn't make it, so the government subsidized it. It was subsidized housing, but it was built by private builders.

Now, those things expire after twenty years, twenty-five years, thirty years, and the property is put right back on the market, and the rents go sky-high. Well, I carried several bills that anticipated that and said, "As these things expire, we will require the owner to offer it to the city or certain nonprofit agencies for sale at the going price so they could take it over and continue the low-rent subsidy program." I worked with the city of Oakland on that, among others. All those passed, and it slowed down--put the brakes on the prospect of a large number of people, especially poor seniors, getting tossed out in the street. Because if they're used to subsidized housing at \$400 a month, and all of a sudden they have to pay \$800, they're out in the street. Can't do it.

Morris: So that's the federal government and city government and state government [working together.]

Petris: All three.

Morris: --and nonprofit organizations?

Petris: Yes. I also carried legislation which is going to be useful in the current new program to the private people. It's called Housing Partnership Corporation, something like that.

Morris: Is this the one for the low-income loans, 5 percent down payment?

Petris: Yes, that's part of it, but it also offers inducement to the private builder to come in and build to get certain tax benefits. It's a partnership of the private builder [with] the public entity that designates the need--

Morris: Are the local banks interested?

Petris: What's happening right now, as of last week, downstairs we have the World Savings and Loan. Herb Sandler is the president of that. A couple of weeks ago, he went to a dedication of a new public housing--low-cost housing, I should say--project in San Francisco built by Bridge. Don Turner, who used to be head of the housing agency in Sacramento under Jerry Brown, runs this nonprofit outfit called Bridge. It's the biggest nonprofit home builder in the country. They just had some tremendous--they've got them right here, three blocks from here. And they have them in Emeryville.

Anyway, Sandler was so overcome when he saw this project, and he saw the people who were benefitting, a lot of them who had been homeless, the very poor, he started crying. He's a hard-headed businessman banker, so impressed that he was crying.

Morris: He seems to have a heart of gold.

Petris: Oh, he's a wonderful guy, yes. He's been a leader in fighting housing finance discrimination, fair opportunity lender. Matter of fact, when Unruh was treasurer, I went to him and told him about Sandler. I said, "If there's some way you can reward people who are lenders and lending institutions who do not discriminate on the basis of race and do not automatically turn down people who are in the lower level who can still qualify, don't automatically just write them off, that's World Savings. They've done wonders in wherever they are. I know them in Oakland."

Unruh says, "Oh, let me check that out." He checked it out, he dumped a lot of state money--state treasurer has billions of dollars and he has to deposit it somewhere. He dumped a lot of state money into the World Savings, just to park it there and draw the interest on it.

So what Sander did, as a result of that one visit, he decided to get into a program for low-income housing, he put up \$15 million immediately for seed money at 1 percent--have it paid off eventually at 1 percent interest. He got hold of Bank of America and Wells Fargo. They're now up to \$350 million--

Morris: As a loan pool?

Petris: As a loan pool for low-income housing. And it's growing rapidly. And then, [not too long ago], [Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Henry] Cisneros announced nationally that he's come up with a program of combined public and private sources that's going to run into many, many millions of dollars on the same basis, similar to this.

Morris: Does this have an economic impact?

Petris: Yes. I have to go to Stockton, unfortunately. I have a few more minutes.

I have a dinner engagement there tonight, followed by speaking. It's Greek Independence Day today, and I'm going to speak on that subject up there to the Greek community in Stockton.

Morris: Does somebody tape these speeches?

Petris: No, I've never had my speeches taped. I've been asked many times --I tried it once, I had a little recorder myself, and it was the flattest speech I ever made. It made me so self-conscious. I put it on the podium there in front of me.

Morris: No, you shouldn't do it, but whoever drives for you should--

Petris: Well, I drive myself. Nobody else is driving me.

Morris: I understand most of the time you don't write your speeches.

Petris: No, I just make a few notes or an outline.

Morris: Well, just to end up, what I was asking about, these private-public partnerships, is there any evidence that this combination of money from the banks and work with the builders and the owners is creating new jobs?

Petris: Well, it's brand new. They've just announced it, so they haven't put it together yet. But I'm sure it will. That's one of the things they mentioned. They're going to try to go for 5,000 to 6,000 units.

Morris: Just here in the Oakland area?

Petris: With the money, yes, just here. And that, of course, that doesn't mean buying existing stock, it means building. So I'm sure that's going to result in jobs.

Morris: That sounds great. Why don't we end up there, if you have to go to Stockton. I don't want to wear you out.

Petris: Yes, right. Well, let me tell you: I haven't met a politician yet, including myself, who gets bored at the sound of his own voice. [laughter] We might get tired, but we don't get bored. [laughter] Isn't that true?

Funeral Legislation

[Interview 5: May 7, 1994] ##

Petris: You mentioned my interest in the funeral industry on your outline. I happened to see Jessica Mitford the other day. She reminded me of my bill on disposing of ashes.

Morris: Did her book on *The American Way of Death* give you some ideas that were helpful in preparing your legislation?

Petris: Oh, no, the bill was way before she wrote the book. In doing her research, she ran across a bill to permit scattering of ashes in California, which I could never get passed. The second and third year, I got some help from Senator Farr, Fred Farr, whose wife had died, and who wanted to have her ashes scattered. So he joined in with me. But even there, we restricted it to over the ocean [which is now legal]. What people do who feel that strong about it, they have their ashes sent to Reno and they're scattered up there. You can ship the ashes to a funeral home, but you can't ship them to a private individual. They're very restrictive.

So I had other things [I wrote bills on]. I reviewed the whole way that the funeral industry does business, and had some other reforms, too. Boy, they were all up in arms and came in and fought it like crazy. They're very strong up there. Okay, you have tea?

Morris: I have tea, thank you.

[Discussion of tapes of Greek music recently received by Senator Petris]

XV UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA CONSTITUENTS

Student Requests and Admissions

Petris: This one is from a young fellow who has been coming to see me about certain things that I've been helping him with. [About] school, I don't know just what it was. He sent me this music of Cyprus, and this, which I think is very thoughtful of him, and he didn't need to do. A very beautiful card thanking me for spending all that time with him.

Morris: How nice. A graduate student?

Petris: No, undergrad. I think he's trying for architecture at Cal. I'm not sure.

Morris: That's great that you can find time to work with students one-on-one.

Petris: Oh, it goes on all the time.

Morris: Really?

Petris: Yes. I have about four right now that are live and fresh. This is one. There's another one also in architecture. There's one who's a grandson of an old friend of mine who's trying to get into Berkeley. They always want me to write a letter. And I say, "You know, I'll be happy to write a letter--"

Sometimes I don't even know the youngsters, so I always ask them to come in and see me so I can interview them, so I can honestly say I know them. I've known the family for ages and ages in this case. But I always ask how are the grades. If you have good grades, you're going to make it. A letter isn't going to help you if the grades aren't there, and it won't help you anyway. They can do it totally independently.

It's a psychological thing. The family thinks, "If I get a letter from the senator, it will help." I tell them over and over again, "UC isn't that way." It's the toughest school in the country to get into right now, along with Stanford and Harvard, Berkeley especially.

Morris: Is that because of the numbers of applicants?

Petris: The numbers, yes. There's a standard thing I tell them. First thing, I have to meet them and know them, and--oh, yes. [I think I mentioned that], last year sometime, I was talking to one of the Berkeley [administrative] guys who came to the office. I had asked him what the situation was on admissions, so I could explain to families who were calling me on it, which happens a lot, asking for help. So he came over, and after we had the introductory comments, he pulled out this sheaf of papers, and he sat there turning the pages. [laughs] Turning the pages, turning the pages, eight and a half by eleven, letter size.

After a while, I said, "What are you looking for?" He said, "I'm trying to run out of the straight A's. So far, every page is full of names from top to bottom of applicants who have a 4.0 or better [grade point] average. After all this time, I still haven't run out of 4.0+." I said, "I get the message."

He said, "So the first thing we usually tell people, like legislators who inquire what's the situation, we tell them that there are an awful lot of straight-A students who don't get in. Because we don't want to admit only those with straight A's. We also want to look at the whole human being: what else do they do besides study? If it's a guy who's brilliant and all he does is have his nose in a book and he can't find his way to the local drug store for a headache pill, we don't want him. We want to have people that have a well-rounded approach to life and do other things. Are they in music, are they in sports, do they do social work, civic work, volunteers? We want to encourage them to be alive and do everything. So there are times when we reach down to B's, with all these other activities, because we think all around they'll be better citizens." Not bad, huh?

Morris: So what do you tell the guy who's the father of the boy with the 4.0?

Petris: I just tell him that there are a lot of 4.0's that don't make it, because the basis for judging is not on grades alone, but on other factors as well.

Morris: I don't understand how they get these pages and pages of 4.0 high school students, when you also read the reports about our high

schools are not doing as well as they used to, and students are not performing as well on the standardized tests.

Petris: Yes, that is contradictory and confusing. But that doesn't include every student in the school. And also at the same time we get these reports and grumbling from UC about having to give the Subject A to people that should have learned it in grammar school, should have learned how to read and write, the president--all the last three presidents have told me this: "These are the brightest kids we've ever seen in the history of the school." Speaking of the incoming class as a whole. But they're such a small percentage of the total that no matter how bad the rest of them do on tests, you still have the bright ones that are doing tremendously well.

Morris: And these 4.0 kids are all Californians, or are they from out of the state as well?

Petris: I didn't ask. I imagine they're from all over as well, not just ours.

Morris: Are there any regents that you meet with who are particularly interested in admissions or other student concerns at all?

Petris: No, I've never talked to any of the regents. Not even [William] Bagley, whom I knew better than the others, because he was a member of the Assembly, and I worked with him a lot. Served with him in the Assembly. No, I don't talk to the regents, I just talk with administrators when I have a question.

Morris: All over the state, or just the ones from the northern California area?

Petris: No, I get requests from all over the state. Friends of friends, a lot of them in the Greek community--I'm considered the representative of the whole community, because I'm the only one left now that is of Greek descent. We used to have three, now we have one, and in a couple of years there won't be any unless somebody gets elected in '96. So I have a large constituency.

In fact, I have one from New York that I received a couple of weeks ago. It's kind of embarrassing; apparently, a very good student referred to me by a very good friend of mine from the East Coast, who was applying at New York University. I don't know the girl. How can I write a letter when I don't even know her?

Morris: For her application at NYU?

Petris: Yes. She wanted me to help by writing a letter recommending her to NYU.

Morris: Oh, dear.

Petris: At Stanford, I don't ever write a letter to Stanford, because a professor friend of mine--[telephone interruption]

Aside on Commission on Legislative Salaries and the Press

Petris: Here's a call from the Tribune reporter who called earlier today because the Commission on Legislative Salaries met today, and decided to give us a raise, which is the first one in four years. Because of the crunch, we've told the commission, "Don't be raising our wages. We've been cutting people." So now he wants to know if I want to make a comment. I don't know if I want to comment. What can I do? Say, "You shouldn't have done it"? [laughs]

Morris: This is a commission made up of legislative--?

Petris: Oh, no. No, it's an independent body of citizens appointed by the governor. We don't have anything to do with it. That was because years ago, there was a big howl because we raised our own salaries.

Morris: I remember.

Petris: Which is not what happened. We were allowed, at that time an initiative passed, which the people put up, which allowed us to raise our salaries up to 5 percent and no more. I think if you take, I don't know how far back that was, but if it was ten years, I think we went up to 5 percent three or four times. And we've calculated that if we did the 5 percent every year, our salary would be twice what it is now. We just didn't do it, just didn't feel it was prudent. [laughs]

[Senator Petris takes the phone call and makes the following statement to the reporter:] Number one, I will accept it. I don't think we have a choice, actually. Even if you accept it and give it away, you pay a tax on it. Number two, I was hoping they would defer that once again until next year. The predictions are that the economy will be in much better shape. I don't feel comfortable having an increase when we've had to cut so many other things. Now, that's not a comment on the merits. On the merits, I think it's justified fully, and looking at the economy and the

slashing that we've done in our higher education system and increasing fees for students and so forth, I don't feel comfortable about that. [end of statement, end of phone call]

All right?

Morris: Sounds good, sounds good. Do the press usually quote you as you spoke?

Petris: Well, no. Most of the time, they try to be very careful and they write it down, but there are times they're way off the mark. You don't even recognize it as your own statement. Or, there are times when they pick and choose. I had a very embarrassing one last year or the year before on the business climate discussions. Everybody was upset about the fact that they claim we have a hostile business climate and we're losing a lot of companies that are going out of state, and some big company in L.A. announced it was going to Texas. So I was asked about it at a speech I had at a service club. There was a reporter there.

He said, "Would you comment on the fact that such-and-such a company is now going to leave L.A.?" I said, "Well, I heard about it. As I understand it, they're unhappy with the smog regulations." Now, when I'm asked to comment on the fact that some company left, with all its benefits and payroll and everything, my question always is, "What would it cost us to keep them here?" I think we should always ask that question. Now, in this case, they said, "We don't like California smog regulations. Texas has invited us to go to Texas, and they don't have those kind of regulations." I said, "It seems to me, then, the price of keeping them here is to let them poison our people. I don't want them to poison our people. If Texas wants to have them poisoned, let them poison the Texans."

Well, it comes out, "Petris said, 'Let them poison the Texans.'" That's all the reporter said in the story. [laughter] So I got a nasty letter from a guy who lives here who came from Texas, who says, "I have family in Texas. How can you be so cruel as to say, 'Let them poison the Texans?'" Well, I had to write back and give him the full story. I don't know whether that satisfied him or not, but that happens too, from time to time. Actually, I said, "Let them poison the Texans who are inviting them to come in." [laughs]

Host Communities

Morris: Oh, dear. We talked a little bit about the university last time we met, and I had a few more questions. One of the big questions in Berkeley and Santa Cruz and other communities that have university campuses has been that the university doesn't pay taxes, but they consume fire services and water and things like that. Have you worked with your local constituents to resolve that concern?

Petris: Oh, that's been an issue for many, many years, ever since I've been up there. I remember Byron Rumford when he represented that area spent a lot of time trying to resolve that problem. He appreciated the university, he was a graduate, went on to pharmacy school, and then he went back and got a degree in public administration while he was in office.

Morris: Wasn't that remarkable?

Petris: Oh, just great. And Diane Watson got a Ph.D. about three or four years ago. Martin Huff got a master's degree while he was working full-time as head of the Franchise Tax operation. I admire those people that do that.

Anyway, yes. But I don't give them any comfort or encouragement over the years. It's misleading to say the university doesn't pay any taxes. There are thousands of employees who own homes and live in Berkeley who wouldn't be there if they weren't working for the university. So they pay income taxes to the state, they pay the local property taxes and sales tax and whatever other, so the city still derives a lot of money from the fact that UC is located in that city.

You take sales taxes. We're just a collector for the counties. We don't keep the sales tax. The bulk of it goes back to the local governments. If you looked at all the money that we collect at the state level, and say it's \$100 a year, I think we keep \$10 or \$15 and all the rest goes back. We're just tax collectors for local agencies. So they get part of the sales tax, they get part of the income tax which goes into the general fund, which in turn supports the schools, including UC, and K through twelve. So it's not very realistic to say, "They don't pay taxes, therefore they're not paying their way." They more than pay their way.

Morris: Even though World Savings and Kaiser and people like that who do business in the city pay business taxes and things like that?

Petris: Yes, that's true. Yes, they pay business taxes. The university doesn't. I still think that the city comes out way ahead. As a matter of fact, when they were having--remember, they needed more space for the president's office and the statewide headquarters across the street from the campus? And they filed an application with the city to enlarge the building. I forget how they were going to do it, they were either going to go into the parking lot or put a couple more stories on it. Berkeley made them jump through so many hoops. I went to a couple of city-university staff planning commission kind of meeting, and they were giving them an awful bad time.

So finally I said--I guess it was the president--I said, "What are you putting up with this stuff for? Why don't you move out of here? Go to Oakland." They were actually considering the Kaiser location at that time. One of the [options] was, "Well, if we can have this done on a reasonable basis without jumping through too many hoops, we will enlarge our present quarters. Otherwise, we have an opportunity to move to Oakland." So I told them after [the meeting], "I don't know why you subject yourself to all this. Just get out of Berkeley, move to Oakland."

Well, when they announced that they were going to do it, the city came running to me asking me to send them a letter pleading with them not to leave Berkeley. I said, "You've got to be kidding." [laughs] "I just happened to be an eyewitness to the way they were treated, when they were asking for things that I thought were very reasonable, to get permits to do this or that." Anyway. So I've never bought that. I understand the problem: they say that they provide fire protection and this and that, which they do. And UC, after one of those go-arounds, bought a fire truck and donated it to the city. I think they've done that more than once. Stanford, which is private, has its own fire department, which they pay for. They've got fire engines on the campus. They don't rely on Palo Alto to come in and take care of it for them. They do it themselves.

Morris: No mutual aid in case of--

Petris: Oh, yes, I'm sure they have mutual aid, if it's big enough. But Stanford is an incorporated city. It's a city. People don't realize that. If you write a letter to somebody at the university, you don't just put Stanford University, Palo Alto; you say, "Stanford University, Stanford, California." They have their own post office, their own police department.

University Presidents; Foreign Students

Morris: Amazing. You have worked with, what, four presidents of the university now?

Petris: Yes, I guess so. Let's see. I worked with--I guess at least four, yes.

Morris: [Charles] Hitch--

Petris: Yes, I worked with Hitch. I don't remember all the names.

Morris: Well, Clark Kerr was there in the fifties, until '66.

Petris: Until when, '66? Yes, I worked with him, too.

Morris: Would he have called you for advice and assistance when People's Park was in--

Petris: No, he never did. Some others did, but not the president. And there was [Glenn] Seaborg, who was named chancellor for a while.

Morris: When Kerr decided he needed some chancellors on the different campuses to--

Petris: Right, decentralize.

Morris: Decentralize.

Petris: Yes, I don't think I ever met with Kerr on one-on-one. I met with subsequent presidents, probably because I was on the budget committee and dealing with university fiscal matters. So the presidents since then have always dropped by to see me to talk about the coming year and the budget and how things look and so forth. And of course, they're always testifying. When we open the hearings, which we just started Thursday, on the university budget, normally the first witness is the president, who gives us an overview. And they do it very well, too.

[David] Gardner was especially eloquent and moving. He gave us figures showing how grim the long-range picture is, because in the field of science, engineering, fewer and fewer American students are going for Ph.D.s. Berkeley puts out more Ph.D.s than anybody. But the foreign students, whose governments recognize the value of that training at UC, they get their Ph.D. Our people, after the fourth or fifth year, they are dazzled by such lucrative offers from the private sector to start immediately at \$50,000 a year, for example, so they're confronted with a major

dilemma. On the one hand, their original plan was to go on and get their Ph.D. On the other hand, they're so loaded with debt by the time they get to the end of the fifth year, they're facing a very big amount of money they have to pay. They either keep going and increase that debt for another three years, or they get this very lucrative job and wipe it out in fairly short time. And they opt for ridding themselves of the debt and getting their career started.

Now, a Japanese student, who's funded by his government, doesn't have to worry about that. Even with out-of-state fees and everything else. So they go for a Ph.D. Gardner told us over and over again how many foreign students are taking advantage of this magnificent institution--

Morris: And they're funded by their government.

Petris: And they're funded by their government, in many, many cases. Arabs, Middle Easterners, Japanese, Chinese. A lot of the students at UC from China, you know, and Stanford, too. Government puts up the money. I talked to a bunch of students in Shanghai; I visited China a few years ago. And oh, when they heard we were from California, boy, they wanted to know all about this or that. It seemed that every one of them had a relative currently at Stanford. There were some at Cal, too, but there were more of them at Stanford than there were from Cal. And I figured, this Communist government really knows the value, and they're putting up the money for it. They weren't there on their own.

Morris: I understand that Berkeley and probably other universities have programs in China for middle-managers, sort of a farm school for business students.

Petris: I'm not aware of that.

Morris: As part of the business school program.

Budget Crunch and Fee Increases in the 1990s

Morris: You were saying to the reporter that you regretted the cuts that have been required in the university budget and the increases in fees. What can the legislature do to mediate that difficulty?

Petris: Well, there are a lot of things we can do. Last year, we did a wonderful thing in the Senate that was approved by the Assembly.

The chairman of the subcommittee on corrections made a motion in the full committee meeting to transfer \$300 million from the Department of Corrections [to the UC budget]--

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Petris: --[I was] strongly in favor. It was approved on a straight party line vote. Every Republican voted no, and every Democrat voted yes. And we used that money to reduce the fee increase for all three of our higher education segments. It was a substantial drop at UC and Cal State and the community colleges. In fact, when we opened the budget of UC the other day, one of the speakers from the university referred to that when he came to the issue of student fees, and thanked us once again for having done that. I've never seen that done before in all the years I've been up there.

Morris: Really? Did the transfer come from prison construction?

Petris: No, it came out of their operating budget. We can't take it out of construction, that's bond money. We can't use that for operations. So it wasn't out of capital outlay, it was out of their current operating--. For one thing, they're the only state agency that has had a fat increase in its budget every year throughout the recession, minimum 10 percent. And we literally are taking money away from schools and giving it to prisons. We finally got tired of it.

Now, the other thing we could do, which we have done in the Senate, is raise taxes. We had a bill two or three years ago that Alquist carried that raised the top level of personal income tax back to the Reagan level, and another bill which eliminated a lot of loopholes. Now, if you eliminate all the loopholes, you get about \$27 billion. Well, the bill only eliminated a few, because we didn't need \$27 billion, we needed a lot less.

The governor immediately put out a statement when those two bills were introduced that he was going to veto them. That automatically excludes any Republican who might have thought of voting for them, not that they would have. They probably wouldn't anyway. But we had enough Democrats at that point, plus the two independents, we got our twenty-seven votes and we put out both of those bills. But of course, in the Assembly, the Assembly minority killed them pretty fast. They didn't get anywhere in the Assembly.

Morris: Really?

Petris: Oh, yes, the Republicans in the Assembly. There's no way the Democrats over there could pick up enough from the Republicans to get it passed. We didn't get any Republican votes either, but we got enough--we had twenty-five Democrats plus two independents, and that did it. Now we're down to about twenty-two Democrats, so we can't even come close.

Morris: Is that because of changing demographics in the state, or changing voting patterns, or are there other factors?

Petris: Well, it goes up and down. When we reached our peak, we were at twenty-five, which is very, very solid. The problem is, it doesn't give you the votes you need for budget or any appropriation, which calls for two-thirds. And there were some Republican victories along the way, a couple of them replacing a Democrat. So our numbers went down and theirs came up. Right now, I think we're at twenty-two, I'm not sure. When we had twenty-five, we were able to do it.

XVI SENATE LEADERSHIP CHANGES

Bill Lockyer Becomes Pro Tem, 1994

Morris: So is Mr. Lockyer more directed towards raising those numbers--?

Petris: Oh, yes, that's his number-one priority. He says this year--half the house is elected in each election. This year, there's twenty seats up for election. It goes by even numbers and odd numbers. So this year, the even numbers are up. Out of the twenty, fourteen are Democrats, so there's a large number of Democrats at risk, because the Republicans are really raising tons of money to change the make-up, to get a majority. There's one guy doing it out of his own pocket, Hurtt, Rob Hurtt of Orange County, enormously wealthy. He's been writing checks like crazy in these campaigns out of his own pocket--\$100,000, \$200,000, \$300,000, all kinds of money.

Morris: This is for his own campaign?

Petris: No, no, he's funding others. He's got a double program there. One is to get a Republican majority, and the other is to get the right wing in control of the Republican members.

Morris: Nowadays, with most of the population in southern California, how did Mr. Lockyer manage to be the first pro tem in three to be from northern California?

Petris: Well, I don't think that the pro tem contest is divided along geographic lines. It's just the way the leadership happens to evolve. His predecessor, Roberti, was from L.A., but I doubt that he was elected on a southern California platform. He got universal support, and so did Lockyer. Lockyer had that sewed up pretty early; he worked pretty hard at it. Prior to Roberti, Mills was from San Diego, and prior to him, it was Howard Way, who was from central California, Visalia. And then before him was

[Hugh] Burns, who was also a northerner. He was a northern Californian, from Fresno.

Morris: Fresno, sort of the borderline.

Petris: Well, yes. We consider the Tehachapi Mountains the border, so anything--there's only eight southern counties. All the rest are northern, by that reckoning. It's more on population than geography. Most of the people are below that mountain. So I don't think it's done on a geographical basis. Now, if we had been in the midst of one of the recurring water wars, where the south is trying like everything to get our water from the north, then it could be a north-south kind of thing. But there was nothing in his efforts that had to focus on any geographical factors.

We do it in other ways in our committee assignments and the Rules Committee appoints members to various committees. We try to get a geographical distribution that's fair.

Morris: On each committee?

Petris: On each committee, yes. And it's not always easy, because some committees aren't that popular. Take Agriculture. There are some people from the agricultural areas that love to be on it. Others don't want to get on it, because there's so many issues their own constituents would bug them about that they'd prefer to stay off.

Morris: Yes, it occurred to me that I've not seen you on any water committees.

Petris: No, I've never served, I've never been interested in that. That's run by a southerner for some time now, Ruben Ayala. I've carried some legislation about water, but I've never been on a committee. Or on Agriculture, either. I've shied away from both. Actually, the present committee is ag and water. It used to be two different committees, but we consolidated some.

Morris: That's a pretty potent combination.

Petris: Oh, yes.

Morris: As somebody with a pretty long view of how the legislature works, would Lockyer come and talk to you for advice or approval or anything like that when he started putting things together?

Petris: Oh, yes. He talked to a lot of members, especially the older ones. Sure. And Roberti did that, too. Oh, yes, you don't just wait for election day and put your name up. Lockyer worked

members very comprehensively, assiduously. Did it on a social basis as well as in the shop. He would invite a Republican member and wife to just have a dinner with him. And in the course of the evening, they were bound to talk shop sooner or later. He'd get better acquainted with them, and that gave them a chance to look him over. So he worked very hard at it, and he handled it very well. He never really got any challenge.

Morris: I noticed that.

Petris: There were two or three others that were rumored to be interested, [Robert] Presley was one, but Presley never made a move. [Art] Torres thought he would go for it for a while, but he didn't. He dropped out pretty early and endorsed Lockyer. Those are the only two I remember that might have made a run at it.

Morris: So it was sort of a peaceful transition.

Petris: Oh, yes.

Morris: No recriminations or fences to--

Petris: No, no. Not like the Assembly. The Assembly has all the big fights.

Psychological Warfare Ousts Hugh Burns, 1969

Petris: We had a revolution one time since I've been there. That's when Burns was defeated. That's the only one. The Assembly does it regularly. Although Willie Brown has been there a long, long time.

Morris: Well, and he tried two or three times before he made it.

Petris: Yes, he tried before, and then he backed off and said he wasn't going to do it. Then when that big fight came along with the succession [after Robert] Moretti, I think it was, and a split among the Democrats, the three-way fight there for a while, the Republicans went to Brown. They said if they could have certain things, change in the way they do things up there, they would support him. Like I believe that's when they got the vice chairmanship on each committee. Each vice chairman is a Republican, and that's true in our house also. We did that without a fight; we just did it.

So they're the ones who elected Willie Brown. They came in with a solid, 100 percent Republican vote, and that meant that he only had to pick up a few of the Democrats to get his majority, forty-one. So I get complaints from Republicans from time to time--often, as a matter of fact. They hate Willie Brown: "When are you going to get rid of that Willie Brown?" I mean citizens, not members of the legislature. I said, "I guess that means you're a Republican." He says, "Yeah."

I said, "Well, you should talk to your leadership. They're the ones who put him in. Democrats didn't have a majority for him, because they were all split up." [laughs]

Morris: What caused the revolution against Hugh Burns?

Petris: Well, times were changing. Burns was of the old school. He'd been there a long time, and when he was first elected as pro tem he was elected by the Republicans, as a matter of fact. The Democrats did not have a majority. That house had always been considered kind of nonpartisan. They didn't even have a caucus, they didn't have a Democratic caucus, or a Republican caucus in the Senate. We had one in the Assembly from the time I was there and long before.

He was highly respected and popular and well liked; everybody just loved Hugh Burns. But on the issues, they felt he was much too conservative. So he always found himself allied with the most powerful conservative forces in the state, and he came from an agricultural area, and that reinforced this. We had issues coming up dealing with labor and agriculture and things of that sort, and he was always on the other side.

And then they had the seniority system. There was a great big influx when I went in, in '67, there were a lot of Assembly members who came over same time I did. They became very unhappy. So there was a grumbling for quite some time, and then they finally decided to do something, and started having these meetings of the rebels. That went on over a period of time.

Morris: And created a caucus?

Petris: Yes, they created a caucus in the meantime. Burns wasn't for that, but he didn't try to block it. He said, "If you guys want it, it's okay. I don't think it's necessary." It was hard to go against Burns, because he was so well-liked. I liked him myself. And they were upset because he always seemed to be allied with these powerful special interests. My view was--

Morris: He seemed to be?

Petris: Yes, Burns seemed to be. My view was, if those interests weren't around at all in the capital trying to exert some influence, his voting wouldn't change and his policy wouldn't change, because he happened to believe the same things they believed. So it wasn't some corruption of his basic philosophy to accommodate them. His philosophy was the same as theirs. Which didn't match the majority of the Democrats at that time, the younger guys who came over.

Morris: So did he fight back, or did he see change coming and let things move ahead?

Petris: Well, he saw it coming. We did some rather effective psychological warfare. We really gave him the jitters. See, the way you change the leadership is, at any given moment when you're in session on the floor, you raise your mike to get recognition. So we decided to give him the jitters by having people raise their mikes, time after time, at a time that we didn't have a bill pending on the floor. Now, normally, you could say, "Well, he's got a bill, it's not his turn yet, but maybe it's urgent and he wants to speak on his bill, wants to bring up the bill." But that wasn't it at all. The message was--any one of these mikes could make the motion to clear the chair, declare the chair of the pro tem vacant.

And finally one day, there were several of us who had our mikes up, [laughing] and he said--poor guy, I'll never forget it; he looked at us, he looked at those mikes, and he said, "I've had enough of this." And nobody had said a word. He said, "It's time to bring this matter to a head." He walked off the podium, had somebody else preside, and said, "Let's bring this thing to a vote right now." So he forced the vote.

Morris: My goodness.

Petris: Yes. And he lost. [laughs]

Morris: Did he say, "I move to clear the chair"?

Petris: I don't recall just how he did it, whether he had somebody else make the motion, but he forced the vote. He said, "Let's get this over." Which proved to me that our psychological warfare was highly successful.

Morris: Had gotten to him.

Petris: Yes. So it was probably better that way, because nobody got up to tell the world that he was no longer the appropriate person to be the head, and nobody made a speech criticizing him or anything.

Just make the motion, you go to a vote. You don't have any speeches or anything.

Morris: Because everybody knows what this is all about. It's all been discussed in offices and in the corridors and things like that?

Petris: Yes, for a long time. In the meantime, we had had meetings, and of course, nothing is secret. For a long time, we met in a coffee shop a few blocks from the Capitol. It started with two or three, and then four, and then five, and then gradually grew. Word got around the Capitol: "What are those guys meeting for?" We met on a certain day each morning, and sometimes two or three mornings, to see how things were going and see if we got more people to go with us. The word up there is there are no secrets in the Capitol, no secrets in politics, so I'm sure he knew about all that. He knew what was happening. [telephone interruption]

Morris: So then a smooth transition is better, in the Senate view?

Petris: Oh, yes, much better. Let's see. We also got some Republicans to help us, and that included Howard Way. So we elected Howard Way as a pro tem, who was a wonderful man, good legislator, good solid conservative Republican. But he made a very big mistake. [laughs] He treated that office as a headquarters of the Republican party.

Morris: Oh, dear.

Petris: And he was 100 times more partisan than Burns ever thought of being. We finally had to call on him and say, "Howard, for goodness' sake, we didn't elect you to turn this whole house over to the Republican campaign committee, for goodness' sake." And he wouldn't back off. He just didn't seem to be able to back off. So we made another change. I think we brought in Jack Schrade as another Republican compromise.

Morris: That's right, very briefly.

Petris: Yes, briefly.

Morris: But he was even more conservative.

Petris: And then finally we went for Jim Mills, who served for quite a long time. The Democrat.

Morris: But you Democrats backed two Republicans?

Petris: Yes, we supported two Republicans. Part of the reason was, we didn't want the world to interpret that as a partisan revolution,

that it was [because of] these other issues. Just too conservative. Because Burns always went out of his way to accommodate any member that had a problem. If you didn't have enough staff, or if you had some complaints, whatever, you'd go talk to Burns and he would go to bat for you. He was really very good with the troops. It had nothing to do with partisanship, either.

And there were some pretty good fights in those days, that were not aimed at Burns. Randy Collier was part of the old school. He's called the father of the freeway system from up north. After Pat Brown got elected, he switched from Republican to the Democratic party.

Morris: Really?

Petris: Yes. He was very powerful. He was chairman of the Transportation Committee, and later was chairman of the Finance Committee.

Morris: I remember that.

Petris: He was a real autocrat.

Morris: As long as things went the way he wanted in highways, the rest of you could do what you wanted with the rest of the budget?

Petris: That's right. But if there was a bill in his committee he didn't like, he'd just kill it. He wouldn't take a vote or anything. He'd just say, "That bill's dead." Never called the roll. Other chairmen were doing that there.

Senate Reformers; Old Guard Holdouts

Petris: But the reforms that we brought in after Burns were really terrific. We opened up the process, we insisted on every chair calling the roll and doing it properly. Before that, there were a lot of them who had a quick gavel, up or down. But we changed that. We made some good reforms.

Morris: When you say "we changed that," is this the Rules Committee making these decisions?

Petris: Well, no, it's the Democratic reformers through the Rules Committee, yes. The Rules Committee changes the rules, but their changes have to be ratified by the full house, so it always goes to a vote.

Morris: Is it a brave man who defies the Rules Committee?

Petris: Well, depends on what the issue is, I suppose. We haven't had anything mean and nasty along those lines. The brave ones were the rebels who wanted to change the whole leadership. I remember in the case of Collier, they really feared Collier. He'd been around a long time, and he knew where all the skeletons were, and he knew the process, very crafty, very able.

Morris: The silver fox of Siskiyou.

Petris: Silver fox, yes, the Siskiyou. I used to call him--what did I call him?--I always called him the lovable scoundrel. [laughter] He didn't take kindly to losing, and he didn't take no for an answer. One time, I was still in the Assembly presiding over my committee, which was the Revenue and Taxation Committee, one of the two biggest committees in the house, and he had a bill up. He came up and talked to me there at the rostrum during the meeting. He said, "I have a bill up, number so-and-so." I said, "Yes, I know, you're on the agenda." He said, "I'd like you to let me take it up now." I said, "Well, you've got a problem? Some kind of emergency, you have to--?"

"No, no," he said, "I'd just like to do it now and get it over with." I said, "I can't do that. I've had other requests, and I told everybody we're going to go in the order of the file." He got very upset. He said, "Nick, I just want you to know that from this day forward, I do not consider you a friend."

Morris: Oh, my goodness.

Petris: "You and I are no longer good friends," and stalked out. I turned to my staff guy and I said, "I wasn't aware that we were ever friends. Have you ever seen him in our office?" He said, "No." I said, "Has he ever called my office?" He said, "No." I said, "You ever seen us socially together at dinner or something?" "No." I said, "Okay, I just wanted to make sure I remember correctly." [laughs]

We did another good psychology thing when he was just overbearing, even after the reform. We didn't change his very powerful position, whatever it was at the time. I don't remember whether it was Transportation or Finance.

Petris Goes on the Rules Committee

Petris: There was an opening on the Rules Committee, and I was asked to run. I had no desire to go on Rules. If you're on Rules, you can't be chairman of a committee. For many years, I was chairman of a committee, and I preferred to do that in order to help make policy. The chairman has a lot of effectiveness in making policy. So once you go on Rules, you take yourself out of the running for any chairmanship. So I resisted that.

But the way it was explained to me, the big issue was curbing Collier. And the pro tem could not get enough votes to do that on the Rules Committee. He needed three and all he could get was two. So he couldn't make the proper move to trim his sails. So I finally agreed to run, and when I went around soliciting support, they asked me, "Why do you want to run?" I said, "We've got to trim back Collier. He's just uncontrollable. It's got to be done through Rules."

Well, that got to him very quickly. [laughs] Now, that took a lot of guts. I was the one to bell the cat. I deliberately--

Morris: Did it get you the votes from your colleagues, when they heard what you were picked to do?

Petris: Oh, yes, they were delighted. But the word quickly got back to him. I kept it up. I didn't let up. And sure enough, the day before the vote, he went to see Mills, who was the pro tem, and said, "I understand this and this and that. I know what the game plan is. I'd like to make some kind of an agreement." He'd been there a long time, and he'd been very powerful, and he was trying to retain some of that and save face. He just knew that if I got elected, we were going to remove him from that chairmanship. He wanted to know what he could do to make amends. He made some kind of offer to Mills, I don't recall what it was. Mills said, "Let me think about it, and I'll talk to you later."

He promptly called me and I went over to see Mills. He said, "This is what's happened. What should we do?" I said, "Well, I learned as a lawyer years ago, when you're dealing with your adversaries, you always leave the door ajar for a graceful exit. I could be in litigation and have a tremendous case, and I know darn well I'm going to win it in court, but here's a good chance to settle it for a reasonable amount and avoid the anxieties and costs and so forth of litigation. So we always favor a fair and reasonable settlement which is a graceful way out for the other side."

He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Give him a chairmanship. But not the one he wants." I mean, the whole thing is to get him out of that spot. "So I think you should do two things. If you talk to him, I'll join you if you want, but just tell him, 'Well, you know why this is happening,' and this and that, and 'people are very unhappy with your tyrannical conduct with the gavel. That's got to stop. But we know you're a very knowledgeable and valuable member of the Senate, and you could do a lot of good things. So we're going to make you chairman of this other committee, but with absolute tight conditions that if you keep up the present antics, we're going to bounce you right out.'"

[So that's what we did. And Collier] said, "Okay," and he was a gem after that.

Actually, I think we switched him from Finance to Transportation, which was considered a very big one at the time anyway. And when he had been there before, before he went to Finance, as the guardian of the freeway system, he would not let any bill pass that apportioned some of the gas tax money to local transportation, publicly owned bus systems. He said, "Gas tax is for highways, and no other purpose."

Well, our highways were getting clogged, and it costs an enormous amount to keep expanding them. There were several of us who felt that we should pay more attention to public transportation, buses, trains, et cetera.

Morris: Yes. Mills was big on that, wasn't he?

Petris: He was very big on that. That was his main field. But his bills got buried in that committee just as mine did. I had two or three bills the prior year, Collier killed them all, without going through the full hearing and all that. He intimidated witnesses, and he was really a scoundrel in that chair spot. And Mills had several bills [defeated].

So right after Collier got appointed, the first bill comes up. Mills and I were the authors, again to apportion a gas tax for a certain percentage of money to go into local public transportation systems. We knew this was a test, he was on probation. [laughs] What an angel! He gave full time--

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Morris: Like, too bad somebody hadn't tried that technique with him earlier.

Petris: Yes. I guess the occasion didn't come to a head before that time. But I admired Mills for doing that, too, because Mills was a very soft-spoken and professorial type. But he could get real tough when he wants to. So when I offered, I said, "You know, if you need help, if you want somebody to be there with you when you talk to him, I'll be glad to come in." I felt I'm the guy that's running, and I'd put the word out. "Oh, no," he said, "that's okay. If I need help, I'll call for you." But he talked to him one on one, just the two of them, and laid it down. The old fox agreed to it, and that was it. After that, we got along very nicely.

Morris: That was quite an introduction to the Rules Committee.

Petris: Yes. Oh, yes. That was my first--that was my campaign. My platform was to dump Collier. [laughs]

Morris: Declaw--

Petris: Declaw Collier. But then again, I felt, you don't just dump him and send him down to the basement somewhere. So he was able to continue doing important work, and had a powerful role to continue to play, and did it much more constructively.

Morris: Were there others that needed that kind of approach, as the new leadership took hold in the Senate?

Petris: Oh, yes. I think there were two or three others that were in that category, but he was the biggest problem. And the others got the message pretty fast. We never had any problems after that.

Morris: And you never got off the Rules Committee?

Petris: No, I stayed right on. All these years, I'm still on it.

XVII THE PETRIS GAP: LEGISLATIVE POLICY AHEAD OF ITS TIME

Keeping up the Pressure for Pesticide Controls

Morris: Does [being on the Rules Committee] mean that you don't have any avenues in which to effect policy?

Petris: Oh, no, every member has the avenues by carrying legislation. But you don't have the power and the authority as a chairman to shape it. The chairman has an awful lot to do with, even if he doesn't say a word, a lot of committee members look to the chairman for leadership, because they figure he's studied these things a lot more than they have, and--I'm not saying it's true in all cases, but in many, many cases, the opinions of the chair are very important. You can get the message very quickly even though the chairman doesn't tell you, "I'm for this bill, or against it," in the way he questions the proponents and the opponents. Even today, some chairmen are accused of not giving the other side as much time as they should have, meaning the side opposite him.

But as a member, you have a lot to do with shaping policy just on a one-bill-at-a-time basis. I carried a lot of bills that became very good public policy, but usually through some long delay. I may have mentioned this before; it's immodest, but I call it the Petris Gap. Actually, somebody else coined that phrase, and explained it to me--that is, a lot of my legislation over the years has been very controversial, has been way ahead of its time. The rest of the folks aren't ready for it. So I spend a lot of time educating the public and my colleagues on the problem and why this particular solution is the best way to go. So I get turned down.

Take pesticides, [which we've talked about before]. I had a student in here earlier interviewing me. He's writing a paper on the pesticide, farm worker problems, and ran across my name in connection with that, came in to interview me. I told him that it

took me twenty years to get a very simple bill that did nothing but require the farmers to post a notice in the entrances to the property, so that the employees would be warned about the use of pesticides. It would say, "This field was sprayed yesterday at four a.m., Thursday at four a.m. Nobody is allowed to go in until twenty-four hours later. So don't go in there until Friday at four a.m."

"Now, if you happen to be in there, and you feel the following symptoms: nausea, headache, dizziness," whatever it happened to be, "immediately go to the nearest water, which is located at this place, and wash your body, whatever part of your body was exposed, and then call this doctor, here's the phone number." That's all it was, in two languages. Took twenty years to get that passed.

Smog Control in the Sixties; Educating Children

Morris: You were saying that a lot of this requires educating your colleagues and the public. Is this what you use staff for?

Petris: Well, yes, staff plays a role, when people call in to inquire about it or they drop into the office, or they invite me to meetings, where they're concerned about the problem, and I tell them why I put in the bill. For example, I carried a lot of stuff on smog in the sixties. I had a lot of bills fighting the smog problem, attributable to the automobile, motor vehicles. What happened there was this tremendous opposition from the manufacturers of automobiles, and the dealers. I thought I'd take it to an extreme point to get everybody's attention focused on it. I had read a report that came out of a group appointed by the Department of Commerce, at the request of Congress, to study the smog problem. I think it had nine members; three of them were from the automobile industry.

This report said that we don't have to have this poison, that the manufacturers can change something to do with the flow of the gasoline from the engine through the exhaust pipe that can clean it up considerably, and they can bring it down to so many milligrams of oxides of nitrogen, and so many milligrams of carbon this and that. I saw that report and I said, "Gee, why don't we do it?" Somebody brought it over to me--he was an engineer--I think he was from UC. I've forgotten his name. He said, "I want you to read this report, and I think you ought to put in some legislation."

So I did. The legislation said, "One year after this bill goes into effect, there will be no more internal combustion engines sold in California." No, five years--it was a five-year lead. [laughs] Do you remember that?

Morris: That's a pretty swashbuckling way to deal with it.

Petris: Well, that is. So that got a lot of attention. Matter of fact, I put it in January, at the beginning of the session, 1967, my first year in the Senate. My campaign manager called me, absolutely in a rage. He was a volunteer campaign manager, and he had worked very hard to get me elected, and I barely got elected that year. That was Reagan's big sweep where he got a majority in the Assembly, and I was in my first race in the Senate, in a district that covered the whole county of Alameda. I won by less than 25,000 votes, maybe 17,000 or 18,000. So I barely made it.

He said, "We did all this work, all these months, to pull you through that election, and now you've declared war on every motorist in the district, and the whole state of California. What's the matter with you?" That was Cliff Bachand, who later became a judge. But he was an attorney, was practicing law. In fact, when he went on the bench, he turned over whatever cases were still pending to me and my associates. There were three of us, and we kind of took over his office.

But he was very upset, so I said, "Well--" There was a big headline in the *Tribune*, "Petris Declares War on Motorists," something like that. I said, "Well, you know, I haven't been talking to you much on this lately, but I've done a lot of reading and talking on this. Let me tell you who's suggesting the bill." He said, "Yeah, I know, some consumer group." "Nope. Doctors. I've been talking to doctors in the Public Health Service and county health officers, and in private practice. They all tell me that the fastest rising health menace in this state today is smog. It kills the elderly, who have heart problems, much sooner than they would ordinarily die. It aggravates respiratory diseases. If you've got a kid in your family with asthma, your doctor is probably telling you to move to Arizona. It's a very, very bad situation, and it literally means life and death. In L.A. County, they're closing down schools several days a year to keep the kids out of that smog, keep them at home, and keep them off the playgrounds. They're doing this and this and this and this."

He said, "Well, I didn't realize that." I said, "Well, I know it. That information hasn't come out. When people start reading about this bill, you're going to get the same reaction, like you, until they run into somebody who knows about the problem." And I described a typical conversation which I used

many times later as I was fighting to get this bill passed. A couple of neighbors are talking to each other over the back fence. "Hey, do you see what this crazy guy Petris is trying to do? Get rid of our automobiles."

And the neighbor says, "That's not such a bad idea. He's not saying get rid of them. He's giving us five years to reach the level of safety of poison by reducing the nitrates, oxides of nitrogen, and this and that. Now, you know my little boy, he's twelve years old. You know his problem with asthma."

"Oh, yeah."

"Well, guess what the doctor's been telling me to do? Get the heck out of this area and go to a desert climate--Arizona, New Mexico--if I want him to reach a normal retirement age, normal life. Now, to me, that's damn serious, and Petris is trying to get rid of the problem that's aggravating his asthma. He could handle asthma; they have medicines and this and that. But this stuff won't let us handle it. So I'd like to see that bill passed."

Well, that's what I mean by public education, by focusing on it. It doesn't mean a speech for me in each case, but when they examine it, they learn what the seriousness of the problem is. I made a lot of speeches on it. I remember I got a telegram--I spoke to a lot of high schools. I went to the schools, and I talked to them when they came to Sacramento. One day, I got a telegram from an automobile dealer in San Mateo. He said--and all the auto dealers were very strongly against the bill. He said, "I will sell bicycles if I have to make a living. Good for you. You go get 'em," something like that.

Morris: Amazing.

Petris: Yes. So I called him. I said, "What's this all about?" He said, "My daughter heard you speak at one of those gatherings." Because I had told the kids, "First thing I want you to do, don't take my word for it, about how horrible this problem is. Go see your family doctor. They're all informed on these things. And ask him to describe to you what the impact of smog is on your respiratory system, and on other people, especially the elderly. I want you to do this for two reasons: one is to confirm what I'm telling you, and get much more detail and from a scientific source, and the other is, I want you to use that information to go out into the community, go to the local Rotary Club, Kiwanis, talk to the newspaper editor in your community, talk to the automobile dealers, write letters to the editor, and educate them. It's part of the process of educating. Most people don't know about this.

And that will help me create the climate that I need to get the bill passed."

Well, first year, second year, it didn't get anywhere in committee. Third year, I think it was the third year, the bill came out of committee, and hit the floor of the Senate. I made an impassioned plea, citing all this medical evidence. Two, three got up and opposed it, and then a fellow sitting to my right gets up, John Schmidt, the Bircher. The most reactionary guy that had ever served in the Senate up to that point. He starts out by saying, "I think I have established my credentials in this body as one who is strongly opposed to having government interfere with our lives. Too much trying to save us from ourselves, too much meddling, too many bureaucrats, too many this and that, too much regulation. I've always had two exceptions: one is where it's a question of life and death, and the other is the public health and safety of the population. This bill covers both. If we don't solve this problem, you're going to see the death rate continue to climb among certain segments of our population." And he went on and on.

I couldn't believe it! He had never talked to me, and I hadn't lobbied him. I figured I'd never get him. So there we had a very, very liberal author, and the most reactionary guy in the place is supporting me.

Morris: He was your seatmate?

Petris: He was not the seatmate, but he was in the aisle. I was in this seat, there were two senators like this, and there's two over here. So he was right over the aisle, almost a seatmate. I could reach out and touch him. And when he sat down, there was nothing else for anybody else to say. I don't remember the vote, but it was something like twenty-seven to eight in favor of the bill.

Morris: Wow.

Petris: Then Detroit went crazy, because they had laughed at this bill. Then they came flying out. They had to kill it. Now, the Senate, of course, is always considered to be the conservative house. Detroit came flying out, we had the hearing in the Assembly Transportation Committee. It started around four and went to midnight. The big wheels were there from all four manufacturers at that time, and the dealers, and all the people who were opposed. We lost the bill by one vote. One vote, in that committee. It was dead.

But the momentum was still there. Actually, we never did pass that bill in California. Senator [Edmund] Muskie picked it

up [in Washington]. I don't know, I didn't write to him, but somebody wrote to him and told him that this ought to be in his legislation. He was carrying the first Clean Air Act. So he took the formula that was in my bill, which in turn had come from this Department of Commerce study, which was requested by Congress, so it was a circuitous route. [laughs]

Morris: Full circle.

Petris: Yes. And that became the law of the land. Not the elimination of the internal combustion engine, but the standard of cleanliness and the reduction of the bad stuff was in the first Clean Air Act. So that was a great victory. And at that time, I had started going to other states. I had similar legislation introduced in three or four states on the same day. In Massachusetts and in New York, I met with authors of similar bills in places that had similar problems. I traveled around the state, I made a lot of speeches around the country, too. Arizona and Seattle and New York, I worked closely with a New York senator who carried a similar bill. So we had a lot of people concerned about it in the areas where smog--nobody had the smog as bad as we did.

But I had other bills, too. I had carrots as well as sticks. I had a bill that would give a reward to any city of 250,000 population or more in California that would draw a circle around the city and prevent any internal combustion engines from penetrating that circle, downtown principally, except for emergency vehicle and service, delivery trucks. But ordinary cars, no. And what they would do, they would buy a fleet of little golf carts, electric. People going to work would go on a bus so they could get in. If they wanted to drive their own cars, they'd drive to the perimeter, park the car there, pick up a golf cart, and take it into town, and park it in a designated place. Pick up another one on the way home, and actuate it with a credit card, and get a bill at the end of the month for the use of the golf cart.

Morris: Good idea.

Petris: Yes, just marvelous. But I didn't get anywhere with that.

I had another one, a \$25 million reward to any individual--

Morris: \$25 million?

Petris: Yes. To any individual or company which developed a safe car. The safe car idea I got from a senator in New York. He was carrying one with a strong roll-over bar in it, so if a car got hit and rolled over, there would be less likelihood of the

passengers getting hurt as they are in a conventional car. So I incorporated that, but I also had smog-free, the same standards. If you can develop a car to do that, and it's approved by a committee of scientists designated in the bill, you'd get \$25 million.

Morris: Did you think that was likely to pass in the near future?

Petris: No, I didn't, but I thought it would focus attention on it.

Morris: Did you write those bills in your office, or did they go through their--

Petris: No, no, I just always met with the legislative counsel staff and told them what I wanted, just talked to them. That's the way we usually do it. We rarely do any drafting of our own.

Morris: What did those sober fellows who write all the bills have to say about--

Petris: They thought it was pretty far out. A lot of the members used to come and say, "Where do you get all these screwy ideas?" I'd say, "Well, you know, we've got to be willing to be resourceful and innovative and try some new things."

I had another one that I had learned from *Popular Mechanics* when I was ten years old. I used to read *Popular Mechanics* in the Oakland library. I didn't have a subscription, but I'd go to the library and read it. There was one issue that showed a car going down the highway, very, very--now, mind you, I'm ten or twelve years old, so it's not like the cars of that day, but more like today, very sleek, streamlined. And that article advocated switching to electric cars, or having a magnet. The idea was that you embedded a magnet, and there would be like a strip on the highway, a magnetic strip. The car goes into this strip, and its motion is controlled, and the speed, by boosts at certain intervals, and that regulated the speed. It eliminated the need for gasoline. And just saved in so many different ways. I said, "Gee, I'd like a car that did that sometime," and I'd put that in a bill, too. They thought I was crazy, of course. I still think it's a good idea. It can be done. We have the technology to do it.

Morris: How did the high school kids like these ideas?

Petris: Oh, they thought they were great. I got a lot of help from the high school kids.

Morris: What did they think about going out and talking to the family doctor and explaining these ideas?

Petris: I never did a survey to find out how many of them did it, but they were very enthusiastic about that, too. I did get some feedback from some of them. They'd call me or I'd see them somewhere. They said, "You know, my parents, when I told them I wanted to talk to our doctor about this, they thought it was a great idea."

Morris: Amazing.

Petris: Some of them said, "Oh, don't bother the doctor," but I figured that would be the best source. The doctor is highly respected, and he didn't have to be an expert on lungs. It could just be any practitioner who reads the journals of medicine.

Need for More Kidney Dialysis Centers

Morris: Was that the beginning of your interest in children's legislation? You've done work on kidney dialysis and children's services.

Petris: No, that came later, actually. The kidney dialysis and the crippled children's program, and other things, they all came a little bit later.

Morris: How did you get into that area?

Petris: Well, I actually carried a lot of medical stuff. I carried immunization programs and things. The kidney dialysis, like so many other ideas, came out of my law office. You know, the lawyers, as much maligned as we are, the lawyers really have a handle on problems of the society from a day-to-day basis in dealing with a wide variety of clients than most other people do.

Morris: You see people in trouble, too, like doctors do.

Petris: Yes, exactly. Well, I was associated with Edward R. Fitzsimmons, one of the best trial lawyers I've ever seen or worked with. We practiced together for years. We weren't partners, but we shared the overhead and shared fees when we worked on things together. Otherwise, our practices were individual. He had a client that came to see him from time to time, and sometimes--we would do this a lot. We'd meet with a client, and then we'd say, "Do you mind if I bring in my associate? I want him to hear this, maybe he'll have some good ideas too." So he invited me in to see this client.

It was a hot summer day, and he was wearing short sleeves. He had a tube embedded in his forearm. It looked like a straw. This was a plastic tube. I kept staring at it. I didn't want to be impolite and ask him what the heck is that, but he saw my interest so he said, "I guess you want to know what this is." I said, "I sure do." He said, "I'm on kidney dialysis." I said, "What's that?" He said, "Well, I have very bad kidneys. My blood is contaminated. Periodically, I go to UC Medical in San Francisco and they hook me into this machine which purifies my blood. The blood runs through that machine, it's purified, and comes back. And it's hooked in from here."

"My God," I said, "I've never heard of such a thing. Are there a lot of people with this problem?" He said, "Oh, yeah, a large number. But it's very hard to get in. The only places that have it are UC San Francisco and UCLA."

Morris: On the West Coast?

Petris: On the West Coast. He said, "The only other times you'll see this done is in surgery. Some hospitals have it in surgery when they're doing certain kinds of surgery dealing with this problem, then they have it as part of the surgery, standby. The blood--you know. And that's it." So I said, "I guess there must be a need for more of this." "Oh, absolutely."

Morris: Because you die if your kidneys aren't functioning.

Petris: Yes, you die. You just die, period. So I said, "I'd like to learn more about it. Can you introduce me to your doctor and so forth?" He said, "Absolutely. The leading guy in my case is from UCLA. He's on the faculty. And then there's another one in Seattle. Now, the one in Seattle is a plumber."

Morris: [laughing] I beg your pardon?

Petris: I said, "Plumber?" He said, "Well, I call him a plumber. He's a high-class engineer, and he designs the machine." The machine is huge. They've got them now where you can--they're not much bigger than this, and they're thicker, and you can wear them on your back like a little pack while you're walking around. But originally, they were like the first computers. Computers filled the whole room; now they're down to this [the size of a lunchbox].

So we made arrangements for them to meet with me on a Saturday in the law office. We didn't have any district offices in those days. We didn't have any legislative office. You did your legislative business in whatever business you happened to be in. If you were an insurance broker, you did it there. If you

were a realtor--we had no staff. You were just on your own. Anyway, so we arranged it, and they came flying down. They flew in from Seattle and L.A., we spent the whole day with them.

The doctors told me all about the medical side of it, and the engineer explained this mechanism that he was still working on and trying to refine and improve all the time, and put the two together. So, wow, I put in a bill the very next session to create a program with \$5 million to get it started, so that it would be available in every community. If it's not in every hospital, it would be available in every community, so they could go to that particular hospital.

Morris: Not just children, though?

Petris: No, not just children, it was everybody. In fact, most of the victims were adults. It passed both houses. It went to Pat Brown and he vetoed it.

Morris: My goodness.

Petris: Yes. But he called me in. He was practically in tears. I said, "Governor, how can you veto this? Let me tell you about my witness. In all the committees, I had this fellow, and he's a deputy attorney general who is suffering from this. He looks terrible, I don't think he's going to last very long." He's one I happened to have met after I put in the bill; he heard about it and called and asked if he could help.

He said, "Don't make it tough on me. I'm the one who hired him in the attorney general's office when I was attorney general. But we don't have the money." It was a bad year. "I'll tell you what I will do. [When] I said I was going to veto it [the bill,] what I meant was the money. We just don't have \$5 million, that's all there is to it. I will sign the bill. We'll reduce the money to a token amount to keep it alive, like \$50,000 or \$100,000, and I promise you that when I make up next year's budget, I will put it ahead of many other things and you'll have the \$5 million to start out with right away." And he did it. So the program was created the following year.

Morris: This is when you're back in the Assembly?

Petris: That's right. When Pat left, when Reagan came in, I was in the Senate. So I was in the Assembly, that's right. That was early on. Very poignant, because you could see what Pat wanted to do. Such a warm, humane kind of person--

Morris: You would think it would be right in his bailiwick.

Petris: Oh, absolutely. He just raved about the bill, and he said, "This should have been done a long time ago." He knew a lot about it because of this young man that he had appointed, and he knew of the illness and all that. He said, "We should have done this ages ago. I promise you I'll make it a priority, and I'll get you the money. But right now, everything's been committed and allocated, and we just don't [have the money]."

Support for Hemophilia Treatments, Other Health Services ##

Morris: It's interesting too that you can pass the bill and have the funding come in the next year's budget.

Petris: Oh, yes, we do that all the time. You establish the policy and create the program, and you fund it later. We do that all the time.

Morris: What about the children's program? Did that start here at Children's Hospital?

Petris: No. The crippled children's program had to do with--boy, let's see. I think it was students, children suffering from a blood disorder, the thinning of the blood--what's that called?

Morris: Hemophilia?

Petris: Yes. It's what the royal Russian family had. The blood doesn't clot. Children who have that--the average life span was twenty or twenty-two years. They rarely lived beyond that age. It especially affected children, because you never got beyond childhood. I don't remember who in the heck brought it to my attention, but on that one I worked closely with the Orthopedic Hospital of Los Angeles. I'd never heard of it before; I didn't know there was a separate orthopedic hospital, and that a big portion of its patients were children. And of course, other hospitals came in and supported it very strongly. But I had not met with people at Oakland Children's at that time. I didn't get together with them until later. This is early in the Assembly also.

And what we did was do whatever we could to help provide money for research and treatment of this ailment, and we placed it under the--there was a separate branch within the Health Department for children, children's health problems. The word crippled children's thing comes to mind; I don't know whether that's what they called it, or whether that's what we called it,

in [writing] the bill. But it gave them a certain vitally needed status within the department, so they would be regularly budgeted each year instead of having a one-time thing.

Morris: So the money was administered by the State Department of Public Health to various private research institutions?

Petris: Right.

Morris: But the local Children's Hospital has a wing named after you.

Petris: Yes, that's true. It's more than a wing; it's two buildings, actually.

Morris: Really?

Petris: Yes. It's their ambulatory--it's called the Ambulatory Center. That hospital has four or five buildings, I guess.

Morris: It's expanded remarkably in recent years.

Petris: Yes, it has. And they're still doing some building on it now, as a matter of fact. Yes, they named two buildings which are their Ambulatory Center. I guess it means children that are outpatients, that come in, are treated there. I'm not sure.

Morris: Nowadays, you can be up and walking around, but you're still at the hospital--

Petris: You're still at the hospital, that's right.

Morris: Because you need therapy every day, or--

Petris: Yes, you need the medical attention all the time. I don't know how that came about, to tell you the truth. I don't remember how that came about. I think that Dr. Revels Cayton had a lot to do with it. He won't admit to it, but I think he did. He had followed some of the medical legislation, and I remember having some kind of get-together with him with a small group. This thing came up, and somebody asked me, "Tell me, how come this thing was named after you?" Well, I didn't answer it, but the doctor jumped in, and he rattled off a whole bunch of things that I had done that I didn't even remember. He mentioned AIDS--I had a bill on helping the Alameda County emergency public hospital [Highland Hospital] with their AIDS program that was about to go down the tubes, and I had a bill on this and that--he remembered every darn one of them, as if he were the author. I was amazed, I couldn't believe it. He knows more about my medical legislation than I do. [laughs]

So he wouldn't admit it to me, but I told him, "I think this thing has your fingerprints all over it." He just smiled; he wouldn't admit to it.

Let's see, I had a bunch of other medical stuff, too. Now I can't remember it all. One of them was immunization, one was--

Morris: This is like well-baby clinic stuff?

Petris: Partly. But some of it concentrating on particular diseases, like the German measles. I forgot the name of that. So I put in a bill to make sure that all children were inoculated. Started with measles, but it extended to other things.

And then, three or four years later, I got in touch with a health officers' organization. It's the statewide group of county health officers. I said, "How are we doing on the inoculation program? Seems to me that there ought to be some more legislation." He said, "Absolutely not. The effect of that bill was so good, we just knocked it out. We don't have that problem any more." Well, it surfaced many years later and made me feel bad, but not to the extent that they had before.

Freedom Bill Package

Petris: I don't remember the other legislation. I had one on the rights of doctors. Came out of Santa Monica. It was part of a package that I called the Freedom bills. There were about ten of them. They weren't all medical, but this was--

Morris: Is one bill called the Freedom bill?

Petris: No, [that's what] I called the package. There were ten different bills, all of them bringing freedom to people in their certain capacities. The medical one was the right of a doctor to have a written explanation as to why he is denied staff privileges at a hospital, or why he is expelled from a hospital, why the privileges are withdrawn. The way the medical people worked in those days, they worked like the Soviet Union. In the Soviet Union, if you applied for a permit to do something, building permit, they never turned you down, but they never answered you. And until you got something in writing saying it's okay, you couldn't do it. So they could always say, "Well, we didn't turn it down. We haven't gotten to it yet."

So at a lot of the hospitals, a doctor would apply for privileges, and they either wouldn't answer him, or when they turned him down, they wouldn't explain why. It was a very frustrating thing. There were doctors associated with St. John's, which is a Catholic hospital in Santa Monica. They're the ones who came to me originally and said, "You know, we've been excluded from staff privileges. We've got the credentials and this and that." So I put in a bill that required the explanation, but I couldn't get it passed without eliminating all the private hospitals. It applied only to public hospitals, and I never did follow through to make it apply to everybody.

Morris: Would that have some overtones of people being excluded from staff privileges because of their race or religion or--?

Petris: The first doctor who came to see me felt it was. He was Jewish, and he felt he was being excluded because he was Jewish.

Morris: The Catholic hospital didn't want him on the staff?

Petris: The Catholic hospital didn't want him on there was his contention. I don't know if that were true or not. He had personality problems. He was a brilliant doctor, but very abrasive, and I could see where he'd get people upset with him. But the cause was right. I thought he was right, because I talked to other doctors and they said, "Oh, yes, that's a very common thing."

Morris: I know privileges are guarded very jealously.

Petris: Oh, yes, absolutely. So I wandered into that field. Another one was the right to scatter your remains, which I justified on--in committees, I gave the example of how sacred the notion in our society, in our culture, has been to honor a person's dying wishes. And often they would write in their wills: "I want to be cremated and I want to have my remains scattered over this garden in the back yard," or whatever. So that was one of the Freedom bills, the right to do that. [from session 4] I had a tough time getting that passed. I finally made it with the help of Senator Farr, Sr., Fred Farr of Monterey.

Another one was about teachers. Teachers were being summarily fired. There was a celebrated case in Paradise. I even went up there and talked to the teacher, Paradise, California--way up north--who got fired because she wrote a letter to the editor criticizing the school board for some policy, saying, "This is wrong." They fired her, summarily.

Morris: Was that the same teacher who was fired because she taught evolution?

Petris: No, I don't think so. She taught American history, as I remember.

So then I started hearing about all kinds of other cases like that. So I was hearing from individual teachers and the teachers' organization, the AFT, American Federation of Teachers. The CTA [California Teachers' Association] opposed the bill, which made me wonder if they were really representing the teachers, or if they were too cozy with management. It surprised me.

So anyway, the bill required a certain process before you could be fired. You have to give notice, and a bill of particulars. That's what we called them in the army: a bill of particulars. I used that same phrase. And you had to be given a certain number of days' notice before you had the hearing so you could prepare your defense. I got it passed; there was a lot of opposition from the CTA, of all people, but it passed.

Then I did the same with the board of education. They were arbitrarily denying not tenure, but some kind of credentials for teachers without any factual basis, just arbitrarily doing it.

Morris: This is the state board?

Petris: Yes, the state board. Yes, the State Board of Education. So I had the same bill adopted relating to the state board's duties. So that's three. I had about ten.

Another one was on the Indians. I had a great bill dealing with the Indians' right to practice their religion. There were certain tribes in California who used peyote in their religious ceremonies. It creates visions, conjures up visions and whatever, by eating this [cactus]--

Morris: Clears your mind to see through to the spirit world?

Petris: Yes, exactly. Well, there was prosecution. Some of the Indians were prosecuted for doing that. I believe that the appellate court in that area upheld the judgment. One of the defenses was that this is a violation of the First Amendment. We're not hurting anybody, it's strictly controlled, it's used only during religious rituals, and only by the members of the tribe. So I put that in without any requests from them, but they heard about it, and they came up. Magnificent-looking old-timer who was the chief of his tribe came in and testified. I asked him to come in and explain just what this is and why it's done and how long it's been going on. Long before the Europeans ever came to California. And got it through the Assembly pretty well, and then the Senate gave me a bad time.

One of the senators was so bad. He made some comments that today wouldn't be accepted, made some comments about customs of the Indians. He talked about, "Well, I see the Indians really like the fire water, don't they?" You know, it's still against the law to sell liquor to the Indians because apparently they do have a problem with it, but that was so rude. I looked at that senator. I was kind of a freshman. I said, "Senator, that's totally uncalled for." Others looked at him kind of reprovably. He didn't say anything; he just kind of backed off. But that's the kind of stuff I was facing. I think we eventually got the bill passed. I think it did pass the Senate, too, allowing them to do it.

Morris: Would this be something that Mr. Reagan would have had trouble signing?

Petris: Oh, that was way before Reagan. I was in the Assembly. Yes, Reagan probably would.

Morris: Oh, it was in the Assembly, okay.

Petris: Yes, it was Brown, Pat Brown. I used to carry a list around of those ten basic bills, and now I don't even remember half of them. They'll probably come to mind.

Morris: Maybe I can find it. I've got some legislative summaries of bills that you carried. I'll look and see if I can spot the rest of them for you.

Petris: Okay. There were about ten all together. They weren't all at the same time. They were just maybe a couple [per year]. I called them the Freedom bills because in each case, they really brought freedom to people in their occupation or in their religion, some important part of their lives, which I felt was being arbitrarily impinged upon. I didn't introduce them as a package, all ten at the same time, but there were several in the same year. But not all of them.

Morris: That's pretty brave and fearless of you.

Petris: Well, either that or foolhardy. [laughs]

Assembly Floor Strategies; More Clean Air Efforts

Morris: Did you think of yourself as a boat-rocker, somebody who was trying to stir things up?

Petris: Yes. I didn't think of myself as a boat-rocker until others called me that. But yes, I was a very big boat-rocker, I don't mind telling you. And I used to have members come to me and say, "Jeez, that's a great bill." I said, "Well, I appreciate that. I would rather have your vote than the praise." Somebody who had already voted against it. He says, "In my district, I couldn't touch that with a ten-foot pole." And they were probably right. That distinguishes my district from the other districts.

In fact, I used to get a little upset with my own Democratic colleagues in the party and in the club movement who at some meetings of the club would say--they'd be very high on their praise of what I was doing. And then they'd say, "You've got a tremendous voting record and bills you carry and this and that. Why can't you work on so-and-so to be like that?" Who would be a Democrat from some other district.

I'd say, "Look, what you're looking at is two different senators with two very different voting records. That's only the surface. What you should be looking at is the district of each senator. Now, if the senator you're talking about even voted for one of my bills, let alone introduced it, he'd be in big trouble in his community. So you can't expect him to put in a bill like that." That's why in the pesticide bills, I never went to the Democrats that were up and down the Valley who represented those areas and leaned on them to even vote for my bill, let alone be a co-author, because I knew for them, it would be extremely difficult, and I recognized that.

Unruh was very good at doing that, too. He supported my bills, but he always protected the guys in the Valley. I've seen him walk around that room when the mikes are up, and there would be somebody from a district who wanted to speak on a bill, and he'd say, "What position are you taking?" He'd say, "Oh, I'm all in favor, I think this is a great bill." He'd say, "Sit down," and he'd pull the mike down. He'd say, "I agree with you, but this is not good for you in the district."

Morris: And we have the votes elsewhere?

Petris: And we've got the votes elsewhere. He would tell the authors, "Don't expose your friends from other areas by leaning on them to vote for a bill that's very bad in their area. Get the votes from the rest of us." Very good at that, and he taught me to be sensitive about that.

Morris: Does that mean that the Oakland, Berkeley, and later San Leandro area has a more broad-minded constituency?

Petris: Oh, absolutely. Oh, yes. My constituents, they read about all this stuff, and I've never had complaints, even from people opposed to me, that write in and say, "You're a terrible legislator. You carry these things that are so far out, nobody else is doing it, and this and that." They're very tolerant of a legislator who is willing to try to break new ground to solve a problem. Even on the internal combustion engine thing, I didn't get a lot of hassle from my constituents. That would have been the time that they should all have come down on me, interpreting it as a threat to their--"What do you mean, get rid of the internal combustion engine? How are you going to move your car?"

And I'd say, "Well, we go electric, or we'll get a giant rubber band and wind it up behind your car, and let it last the rest of your trip."

Morris: Or bring back the electric trains.

Petris: Yes, I hadn't thought of that. I thought of bringing back the steam car. I suggested electric car or a steam car. "Oh, electric is impractical." I said, "Oh, yeah?" A lot of guys told me that in my speeches, and I would tell them that when I was growing up in West Oakland, as far west as you could go, on Peralta Street--I think it was Tenth, maybe even Eighth, at Eighth and Peralta there was a movie house called the Peralta Theater. And at the other corner of that small block, there was a big garage that housed the Railway Express Agency. I guess they've disappeared.

Morris: Not so long ago.

Petris: In that garage, there was a big fleet of trucks with hard rubber wheels, no air, the solid rubber wheels, and they were all electric trucks. I never knew what the heck was the matter with them, because they made this whining, weird sound when they drove by. So finally one day I asked somebody, "Why does it make that kind of noise? What's the matter?" "That's an electric truck." I didn't even know it was electric. "That's an electric truck." I saw those for years and years when I was a kid, and I remembered it. When they'd say, "It's impractical," I said, "Well, they did it for a long time."

And then one time I went to England. I was invited to go to England to talk to--oh, to be on TV, if you can imagine, BBC in London on my smog-control legislation. I came back with a big poster that the host of that show gave me with a silhouette of the different kinds of vehicles that were in use in London that were all electric. There were milk delivery trucks, there were passenger cars, there were other kinds of delivery trucks, there were trucks with big cranes on them, moving heavy equipment stuff

--all electric. I hadn't seen any of those in the U.S., so I brought it back and used it in my hearings.

I said, "Hey, you guys think you can't do it? Lookit here. They're doing this in London. Why are they doing it? Because London had the worst smog problem in the world." We remember that. The fog and the smog combined, the coal smoke--worse than the automobile problem. And this is how they cleared it up. They not only changed their mechanisms and all that, but these are the kinds of vehicles they adopted. And it had no publicity over here in this country. I never knew about that until I went to England and did this interview for BBC. [laughs]

Coordination with Other Lawmakers

Morris: One other question on the children's legislation. Three or four years ago, Assemblyman [Bruce] Bronzan was involved in getting a bill passed that coordinated community-based children's services; they had a pilot program with health and welfare services located on school grounds. Is that something that you would have been involved in?

Petris: Yes, except that he did it. He did a lot of health stuff. He's over at UC now.

Morris: He's a consultant now?

Petris: Yes, at UC medical. But not in San Francisco; he is somewhere else. [He's in Fresno, I believe.] But he goes to UC San Francisco; that's where the base of his job is. Yes, that was a very good bill. In fact, when I heard about it, I wished I had put it in myself. [laughter]

Morris: Would he come to you for some help when it got to the Senate? Is that how things worked?

Petris: He did on his--he carried a lot of stuff on mental health, and I had carried a lot of it before.

Morris: I remember.

Petris: I had kind of drifted out of that field. He picked up on it. Yes, he and I used to meet often on mental health stuff. I still carried a little bit, and we always coordinated. I usually asked him to carry my mental health bills when they got over to his side, because he was chairman of the committee, and he was interested and very well informed.

XVIII MATTERS OF PRINCIPLE

Encouraging Women and Minority Staffmembers

Morris: Somebody mentioned that you were the first person to hire a woman staff member, Audrey Gordon.

Petris: Oh, I don't know if I was the first to hire a woman AA. I might have been. But I was known more for the fact that I didn't have any men on the staff. For years, all my staff in both offices were women. That became a source of conversation in the capital. Once in a while, I'd come in here, I remember the first time I did it, I did it on purpose. I came in, I guess we were in the state building. I looked around and said, "Is everybody here?" "Yes," and all the women would come in. I said, "How come we don't have any men on this staff?"

And you know, you'd think they had been rehearsing this for weeks or months, waiting for me to raise the question. In unison, they said, "Well, if we ever find one that's qualified, we'll hire him." [laughter] I thought that was a marvelous line, because women have been hearing that for generations.

Morris: Yes.

Petris: [in gruff voice] "Well, we don't have women here, Miss, because we haven't found any that are qualified." That's a lot of baloney that nobody believes today, but that was the standard response. [laughs]

Morris: Did you go out looking for women staff members, or it was just what turned up when you needed somebody?

Petris: I think when you start out with the head of your staff being a woman, that woman takes care of that. If we need another staff

member, she's going to look [for other women when we need more staff.]

Morris: Was that Alfreda Abbott or Felicia Tanenbaum?

Petris: No, it started with Audrey, actually. Audrey's the one who brought in Alfreda, as a matter of fact. I didn't know Alfreda before, just kind of vaguely around the community. I knew who she was and all, but Audrey's the one who talked her into coming in here. Alfreda had to think about it for a while. I'm sure glad she did, because she's a crackerjack. So I think that's where it comes from, if you have a woman running the show and responsible for interviewing and getting good people, they're going to turn to women first. I think it's natural. But they also knew that I wanted to make sure we gave every opportunity to women and minorities.

Look at the minorities here, it's pretty good. We have five people in this office; there are two black. We had a Mexican-American lady for quite a while; she moved down to Mexico. She was born and raised in West Oakland. We always had a good mix. And we had it in Sacramento, but recently we've lost it in Sacramento. We've had two or three African-American staff members, but they're no longer there.

Morris: Did they move on to other legislative jobs, or go to the private sector?

Petris: One of them moved to another legislative job. Another one moved back to Ohio. The third one just quit and went into private sector, actually has her own business.

Campaigning for Fair Housing, 1964

Morris: What had Audrey Gordon been doing that made her seem like a good person to bring in as staff?

Petris: Well, I first met her in the [John F.] Kennedy campaign for president. She ran the downtown office here on Thirteenth Street in Oakland. I was very active in that campaign, so I used to go into that headquarters a lot. I was impressed with the way she handled things at the time. Later, in '64--Kennedy was elected in '60--in '64, we had the Proposition 14 on the ballot to legalize racial discrimination in the sale of real property, and I was so outraged by that--

Morris: That was to repeal the act that Byron Rumford had gotten passed in the legislature?

Petris: Just a blatant racist thing, and I was very upset about it. So I decided that when I was up in '64 for reelection to the Assembly, I would spend all my time on this subject.

So I got hold of Audrey, having seen her in the Kennedy thing, and hired her to be my campaign manager. I said, "Audrey, I'm not going to be making the rounds as usual. I usually go around ringing doorbells and holding meetings and talking to a lot of people. I'm not going to do any of that. If you set up a speaking engagement for me, it's got to be on Prop. 14. Nothing else." I had San Leandro [in my district] at that time, as I recall. Because [I remember] I went to a meeting in San Leandro on Prop. 14 and got roughed up by some of the worthies there, verbally I mean. They chewed me out.

So what I did, I said, "We've got to get some volunteers in here to make up for that, and also send them out to speak to people." She did a marvelous job. She recruited a large number of high school kids and college kids. Of course, they were all very idealistic. She would bring a bunch of them in, and when they agreed to come in, she would tell them why I wasn't running the usual kind of campaign. I was out speaking against Prop. 14 and I needed their help in asking people to vote for me.

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Petris: --this is very rare.

Morris: The kids did the campaigning for you?

Petris: Yes, they did the campaigning for me. They covered the precincts, they rang the doorbells. They were marvelous, absolutely marvelous. So later on, when I went into the Senate and they started authorizing local offices, Senate offices, I asked Audrey to come in as administrative assistant. So it was based on those two experiences I had seeing her in action, and the way she dealt with people and so forth.

But that Prop. 14, I went all over the state, mostly northern California. I made about ninety speeches to groups ranging from maybe five to 500 or 1,000. I went on the radio. I did everything. I worked a lot, I worked very closely with the chairman of the No on 14 for northern California, and that was Bishop--oh, boy. The Episcopalian bishop in San Francisco.

Morris: Pike?

Petris: Yes, Pike, James Pike. He died in the desert at Sinai, remember?

Morris: He was quite a remarkable fellow.

Petris: Oh, he was fantastic.

Morris: Stockbroker turned preacher.

Petris: Oh, I didn't know that. He was a stockbroker?

Morris: Yes. Yale man.

Petris: I spent a lot of time with him. I remember the very first speech I had was on a platform in San Francisco, and he was part of that. And then the very last one, we went down to Monterey-Pacific Grove, and we drove together, he and another fellow who was a volunteer whose name I forget. Wonderful guy. And in between, I would see him a lot, too. He was a good reinforcer. He was marvelous.

So anyway, I made about ninety speeches on Prop. 14. At my own church, my congregation was pretty conservative. A high percentage of business people and property owners, and immigrants who had come in and worked very hard. A lot of them owned little places like a four-plex or a six-plex, and they interpreted this as a terrible threat to them: "Why don't I have the right to rent to anybody I want, regardless of the reason, or sell?"

So I asked the priest if he would invite them all to a meeting at the church. The priest was very strongly in support of [fair housing.] [Fourteen was one of those ballot measures where whether to vote] yes or no was confusing. He was against it. The Archbishop, who was the head of our church in North and South America, seated in New York, appointed me to be the official spokesman for the church opposing Prop. 14. I don't know who got him to do that, might have been the priest, I don't know.

So when I went before a Greek audience or church group of ours, I'd tell them the Archbishop was opposing 14--they didn't like it. They gave me an awful bad time at my own church. I've never seen people glare at me in such a hostile way. [laughs] Oh, my goodness. I didn't do any good in that particular meeting. The priest tried to help, but they were--seems to me the only ones who came out for that meeting were very strongly in support of 14. Some of them were brokers, and others were property owners.

Morris: That would be really hard, in front of your own closest--

Petris: Yes. Well, that happened to me on more than one occasion, when the Greeks were taken over by the dictators for seven years, the colonels who overthrew the government and put Papandreu senior in jail, and junior, who is now the current prime minister.

Morris: Did that have reverberations here in California?

Petris: Oh, yes, all over the country. The situation was so bad over there that there again, I devoted a lot of time to speaking out against it. I went on television, I was on the radio, I was in a group formed nationally called the Committee for the Restoration of Democracy in Greece. The national chairman was Don Edwards, the congressman who's now retiring, from Santa Clara.

Morris: Is he of Greek descent?

Petris: No, he isn't, but he was national chairman. Marvelous man. Former FBI agent, chairman of a very important subcommittee of the Judiciary Committee. And I met Melina Mercouri through him. She had been exiled by the dictators, because she defied them. They issued a decree confiscating all her property and banning her from coming back, and revoking her citizenship. That's when she made her very famous comment: "I was born a Greek, and I will die a Greek." They quoted that at her funeral when she died a couple of months ago. I spent a lot of time with her in New York, and out here. Whenever she came out here I spent time with her at these meetings and introducing her to groups. [interruption]

The point of the story is that the local Greek community, including people that had known me since I was this high as an altar boy, they thought I was a Communist. They just turned against me, and I got some hate mail. I was ostracized. Ninety percent or more of the community was supporting the dictators, including my own father. Even my father, and I had a lot of arguments with my father, who said, "I don't know what you're talking about. They saved my fatherland--" same as the German expression, "--saved my fatherland from communism." Well, that was a big phony lie. But a lot of them believed that if they hadn't stepped in, that Papandreu would have taken the country behind the iron curtain, which was absolutely false. The guy is a socialist, he's very liberal, he believes in nationalizing of property--

Morris: Ah.

Petris: You see?

Morris: Yes. Very hard if you've got ancestral land.

Petris: But on the question of the basic freedoms, freedom of political expression, political parties are of every stripe, a bill of rights kind of thing, he never wavered from that. But they were afraid of him, and they--

Morris: The colonels shut down on personal liberty--

Petris: Oh, they sure did. They did a lot to shut down on personal liberties. And then people would go over there and visit and come back and say, "You know, they're doing great." Real good, close friends of mine. I'd say, "Why? What is it they're doing that's so great?"

"Well," he says, "you can walk around Athens at two or three in the morning and nobody bothers you." I said, "You ever been there before?" "Yeah." I said, "Tell me a time when that wasn't true." I've been going to Greece since 1946, under all kinds of governments. My father, when I was a kid, my father used to get upset about hold-ups and things here. Even then, when I was young, the crime problem was very bad here compared to other places. He would pull out his wallet and he would say, "Some day, you'll go to Greece and you'll know what I mean. You can put this wallet on the curb in the middle of downtown Athens, and come back the next day, and it will still be there, or it will be at the police headquarters. That's the kind of society they have there. They don't do what they do here."

And these guys are telling me we can now walk around Athens without fear. You always could walk around Athens. That's not the dictators' policy. I said, "There's one big difference. You're still safe on the streets, but you're not safe in your home, because they come and knock on your door and haul you off to prison because you've spouted off against them during the day. Which would you prefer? Would you prefer to tangle with one robber, or burglar, or hold-up artist, or the whole damn government, with the army and all the armed forces backing them up? That's a simple choice for me. I'll take my chances with the individual."

But I'll tell you. In fact, I went to the State Department, and they referred me to somebody at the Greek desk who was a woman who'd been a consul general in Greece. I said, "I'm here as an American citizen. I think my country is making a grave mistake, supporting those dictators." And I explained why.

She said, "Well, who are you to tell us what our policy should be?" I said, "I'm an American citizen. It's in the interest of my country to help Greece restore the democracy." She said, "Well, for your information, 95 percent of the Greek-

American community supports our policy." I said, "That doesn't make it right. Who's the true patriot? The guy who has the guts to stand up and tell his father or his mother or his president that you're wrong, because this and this and this is going to happen--"

She said, "What's going to happen?" I said, "I'll tell you what's going to happen. If this policy that you're pursuing were created in Moscow, it couldn't be more effective in driving a wedge between the United States and Greece, which have had nothing but the friendliest relations since the American Revolution when the Greeks were still slaves, and the Greek Revolution in 1821, during which many Americans came over there and fought, and others, like Dr. Howe, Samuel Gridley Howe of Massachusetts, he was a doctor, he went to Greece, he treated people. He did this and that. Poems have been written by American poets. Daniel Webster made some great speeches on the floor of the Senate supporting the Greek cause for freedom. Jefferson had correspondence with some of the leaders of their revolution over there. Jefferson wrote to them in Greek; he was a great scholar. The ties have been strong ever since.

"But you know what's going to happen? For the first time in the modern history of Greece, you're going to have a tremendous backlash and tremendous dislike of the United States." And that's exactly what happened. And Papandreou, when he got elected, he was sent into exile. He left Greece, lived in Canada, and taught at McGill University up there. When he went back, he got elected with a landslide vote by exploiting the resentment against the United States for having supported the dictators.

And what I told them would happen is exactly what happened. It doesn't surprise me, though. My contacts with the State Department with respect to Greece have always been extremely disappointing. I was there before the junta took over, when his father was first elected, in 1963. Papandreou senior was elected, and he became the prime minister. I happened to be there during the election. I went to some rallies, I heard him make his speeches, I heard the opposition. He got elected overwhelmingly in that year, in '63.

I went to a dinner party at a friend's home, who invited me because he was entertaining some visiting professors of political science from the United States who were making a world-wide tour. One of them was from Berkeley, and her name escapes me now. Very attractive. She's not there now, but she was. Very attractive, tall, brunette lady. Doggone, I wish I could remember her name. She's the reason I was invited, because she knew I was in Greece. So he invited me over. I didn't know that guy before.

We had a discussion. One of the guests was a political advisor to the American ambassador, meaning on Greek domestic politics, apprising him of [current issues.] So they started talking about the upcoming Greek election. This man says, "Oh, Papandreou doesn't have a prayer. Mitsotakis is going to clobber him."

I said, "I'm curious. What do you base it on? Have you been out there talking to people?" He said, "Yes, I just came back from Salonika. I was up there for a week." Now, Salonika is a liberal stronghold in Greece, always has been. I said, "Well, who did you talk to?" "I talked to business people, I talked to some bankers." I said, "Oh, you mean chamber of commerce types?" He said, "Yeah. And they're all against Papandreou." Well, that shouldn't surprise anybody who knows anything about what's going on in Greece, for God's sake.

So then I said, "Well, let me tell you something. I just came back from a tour of the Peloponnesos," which is the southern part of Greece, the stronghold of conservatism. It's not the island; you know where Corinth is?

Morris: It's all the little peninsulas down at the bottom.

Petris: Yes, the fingers. That whole thing, you might call it a peninsula. I said, "That area is generally very conservative. It's mostly farmers, peasants, and they're close to the soil, and they're very conservative. You just came from the most liberal part of Greece, other than Athens, and you're telling me this. Well, let me tell you, I didn't do an extensive survey, but I picked up a lot of hitchhikers who were farmers, peasants. Always made a point to stop and pick them up as I drove around that area, for a few days. And I never mentioned the election. They always brought it up themselves. So in the course of the conversation I'd say, 'Well, who are you supporting?' 'Oh, I'm supporting Papandreou.' 'What about your neighbors? What about them?' He says, 'Everybody down here is supporting Papandreou.'" I thought that was unusual, because the farm areas normally there, Arcadia especially, is very conservative.

Well, Papandreou carried that area. He carried the election. And this man is advising our ambassador, for God's sake! It made me very unhappy about the level of quality of our people in sensitive areas who helped shape the policy, because the ambassador advises the president. He says, "Mr. President, I think you should do this or that. This is what's going on," and they're feeding him erroneous information.

Morris: Oh, dear. Tell me what you think attributed to your reelection in '64, because Prop. 14 won.

Petris: Won two to one.

Morris: Yes.

Petris: It was very humbling--

Morris: And there you were out arguing against it.

Petris: I learned humility over again, because my speeches didn't have any effect at all, I guess. Although to tell you the truth, I think if you look back, you might find that in Alameda County, the vote wasn't anywhere near two to one. It might have even gone the other way. See what I mean?

Morris: I can check the county figures.¹ That would be interesting.

Petris: It would be interesting. I don't remember, to tell you the truth. But based on what they've done since, they voted no on Prop. 13 [1978 tax limitation measure] in my district. Albany voted no. Alameda voted yes; Oakland voted no. Most of the communities in my district voted no on Prop. 13. They voted no on term limits. They voted no on four or five propositions that I felt were pretty bad. So that's the flavor of my district. That's one of the reasons I say it's probably the best district in the state.
[laughs]

Morris: Have you continued to campaign for propositions that you felt strongly about as part of your own campaigns?

Petris: Oh, yes, absolutely. I've done it in all of them. May not have covered as many bases as I used to, but in all my speaking engagements, when those campaigns are going on, I speak out on my position. Yes.

Morris: Rather than just talk about motherhood and the flag and the Democratic party.

Petris: Yes, right. That is a good question, though, how come I got elected at a time that I was clearly highly visible on opposing 14 when the population in general went for it two to one.

¹ In November 1964, the 15th Assembly District vote was 52,573 for Nicholas Petris and 32,728 for Republican Meda B. Soares and 7 for other candidates.

Speaking Out for Chief Justice Rose Bird, 1986

Morris: Yes. That takes a lot of intestinal fortitude.

Petris: Well, it's like the Rose Bird thing. I spent a lot of time on that. You're aware of that. Close to 100 speeches there, all the way from prime time TV in L.A. to--[tape interruption]

Morris: We were speaking of the campaign to oust Rose Bird from the state supreme court. Do you have time to talk about that for a few minutes?

Petris: Oh, yes, my God. Yes. I didn't count the number of appearances, but I think there were close to 100, between ninety and 100. I jumped at every [request.] Of course, the [pro] speakers were so rare that it was easy to get speaking engagements. [laughs] They had a committee in the Bay Area; they called me all the time, because they didn't have that many available to go out and speak in defense of the court and Rose Bird in particular. I wish I had a tape that I did with Ronn Owens. Are you familiar with his name?

Morris: Right, he's one of the network broadcasters in San Francisco.

Petris: San Francisco. He's not network; he's local. He has a talk show from nine to twelve. He was so bad. He hammered away at me, and he came up with--I like him. He's better than most of them on that station. He's a pretty moderate guy on most issues. But on that, he was just--. And he brought up stuff that made me feel he was on another planet. I kept answering each one. I had to give him a course on the Constitution, I had to give him a course on our system of justice, and on capital punishment. He would say things like, "Well, I don't understand why in this particular decision they overturned it," and he had a bunch of decisions there, "because the prosecution brought in evidence of this other crime that this guy had committed. And Rose Bird said, 'I don't care about the other crime, we're going to do this and that.'"

I said, "Do you think that's the Rose Bird doctrine?" He said, "Absolutely." I said, "I guess this is the first case and the last case you ever read." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "That doctrine has been embedded in the Anglo-Saxon law since before we became a country. We inherited that from the English system, which says you're not going to prejudice the jury or the judge by bringing in the fact that this fellow had committed some other crime. He's being tried for this crime. Now, there are exceptions. If he has a pattern of conduct in each case--he does the same thing every time--you can show the pattern.

But to bring in the fact that he was convicted of something else in order to convey the message to the jury, 'Well, this guy is a regular criminal, he does it all the time, therefore he must have done this,' that's a big leap there. That is very, very old in our system of jurisprudence. So on this case, Rose Bird is a conservative. You're the radical. You're trying to uproot our system." [laughing]

Anyway, this went on--I had the tape, he gave me the tape, and I lost it in the fire. I'd really like to call in and get a copy from him again.

Two friends of mine, one of them George Christopher, who is a Republican, you know. He ran for lieutenant governor when Nixon ran for governor. He had a distinguished record as mayor of San Francisco and as a member of the board of supervisors. We're good friends; I admired him, always have, for years. He told me one day, he said, "You know something?" [laughing] This is a great compliment. He said, "I heard you on KGO the other day. After listening to you a while, I found myself saying, 'By golly, he's right, he's right, he's right.'" Then I stopped, and I said, 'What am I doing? I can't agree with him! I can't agree with him on Rose Bird! This is terrible!'"

And another Republican friend of mine from the Greek community who served as vice mayor here in Oakland and member of the council and chairman of the board of port commissioners and all that, wonderful guy, also Republican, who got me started in politics--he's my benefactor in many ways--he happened to listen to [this radio show] and he told me exactly the same thing. He said, "I found myself agreeing with you on this issue. How could I do that? So I rejected it. But you really had me convinced there." [laughing]

Morris: So you think it was a party thing rather than that there were any merits to--

Petris: Oh, yes. The conservative Republicans just hated her guts. They used this--but it wasn't officially a partisan thing. I guess the Republican party went on record opposing her. But it was started by elements much more conservative than the average Republican mainstream. One of the chief antagonists was Ed Davis in the Senate, former chief of police of L.A. Wonderful man; we have become very close. But he and I debated that issue here in Oakland before a pretty big crowd.

But they drummed up this opposition because of the capital punishment issue. That's what they used, that they weren't executing anybody any more. They implied that all these criminals

were running around, murderers running around loose. But in every case they cited, the person involved was still in prison. Just that he wasn't executed. They said that this court is writing legislation, they're legislating, they're not judging. Well, that's been going on since *Marbury v. Madison*, where the concept of judicial review was first established. It's not in the Constitution. The Constitution doesn't give the courts the right to invalidate legislation. That was developed by a legislating court way back in the very first days of our republic, for God's sake.

Every time he'd bring something up, I'd cite an old precedent in our history. It really got frustrating. But I was happy to hear from other people who were conservative Republicans who said I convinced them until they woke up and realized that if they kept doing this, they'd be agreeing--

Morris: They'd be run out of the party.

Petris: Yes, they'd be agreeing on *Rose Bird*, and they couldn't do that. They couldn't stand that.

Morris: What about the more involved idea that there were people who were objecting to the judicial appointments that were being made? And since Warren's time had been complaining about all this going soft on crime and increasing the rights of defendants and things like that.

Petris: At the expense of the victims, yes. That's all part of the same pattern. On the capital punishment thing, for example, I'm convinced that the real opposition to the court was its very fierce protection of consumer rights in the marketplace. They made some decisions that jolted the insurance industry. There's one in particular, a motorcycle case, I've forgotten [the name of] that [Royal Oak]--on the question of good faith, in which they ruled that an insurance company has to deal in good faith with its own insured.

Morris: Really?

Petris: Yes. They have to deal in good faith with [their] own insured, and provide him the proper defense. The case came out of an accident in which their insured was at fault. And the question was, are they going to settle it or go to trial, and how much are they going to pay. The company just summarily dismissed the notion of doing any negotiating, they weren't going to pay a damn thing, or they made some very, very small offer. So the thing went to trial, and there was a big judgment rendered against this fellow, but his insurance company is supposed to pay it. But it

was beyond the policy limits, so the balance was chargeable to the individual.

Now, he came up with a defense. He sued the insurance company and he said, "I pleaded with you to settle this case in the amount that was offered," which was below the policy limit. "Now, you let it go and you lost, and now you're sticking me with this amount, in addition to what you're going to pay, solely because you didn't deal with it in good faith."

So the court said, "He's right." Well, but this court following Bird threw that doctrine out, right away. Royal Oak is the name of the case, the Royal Oak case. There have been a series of decisions by this court which are hostile to the rights of the consumer, to the rights of the patient, to the rights of the insured. In case after case, I don't have them catalogued, but--

Morris: This is since Rose Bird left the court?

Petris: Yes, after she left, and they appointed what's-his-name--

Morris: Malcolm Lucas?

Petris: Lucas, the current chief, and the others. They've been horrible. This court was looked on for many years as the greatest supreme court of any state in the union. When Warren was governor and he later went to the Supreme Court, and during Warren's time as governor, and before, and after. And this stuff about no experience--one of the greatest chiefs, [Roger] Traynor, came out of UC, Boalt. He'd never sat on a court for one day. But he was revered throughout the country as the best chief justice of any state in the union. He was a tax professor. But his decisions and the decisions of the court were scholarly and followed by other courts. The Supreme Court always checked to see what California had done in a similar situation. And they went from that to just very mediocre at best. They're just looked at with scorn and contempt by scholars nowadays.

Morris: Would it have made a difference if the chief justice had not been a woman, do you think? But one of the male justices who was also unseated in that election.

Petris: Yes, it would have made some difference. I think that kind of rankled them too. They found it easier to beat up on a woman. But they gave her no credit for a lot of great things she did, including being very frugal in the budget. She got rid of the limousine that they always had for the chief. Things she did in

her office, personal things, were always less expensive than her predecessors. All kinds of stuff.

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Morris: Were there any points when you thought that it was going to be possible to confirm the three justices? Was that a campaign that was winnable?

Petris: No. That looked to me very bleak from the very beginning, because of the misleading campaign of the opposition. They just lied like hell about the court and about her and what she did. It was very emotional. Every time somebody would get murdered, they'd jump on the court three years before that case might reach them, four years. They didn't give her any credit for a lot of terrific things she did that speeded up the process. Well, look at today. It's been since, what, 1982 that they threw her out.

They've put one person to death; that's it. Just one. And I always said that in my speeches. I said, "You've got 100 persons on Death Row today. You're not going to see those 100 executed in the first year, second year, third year. You're not going to see anybody executed for quite a while. We still have the same process. They're entitled to a [review]." Most people don't even know that in a murder case, there is an automatic, mandatory appeal to the supreme court. Now, they blamed Rose Bird for that, when you tell them. "Well, that's something that she ordered." No, it's not something she ordered. It's been in the Constitution for a long time.

Morris: Well, and it's automatically reviewed by the governor's office, too.

Petris: And it's reviewed there, too, for clemency purposes and stuff. But I find that the level of understanding of our system is so low that it's frightening. My very first speech on the Rose Bird thing was a business group in Oakland. I told them why I opposed the move, and the first question out of the box, the guy says, "Well, that supreme court needs cleaning up for a lot of reasons." I said, "Well, what do you mean?"

He said, "What the heck business is it of the supreme court whether the Raiders stay in Oakland or go to L.A.?" I mean, he was a businessman, supposedly educated. I said, "Let me ask you something. How do you think the supreme court gets its cases? I have the impression from what you say that you think they sit around every Monday morning reading the *Chronicle* and pointing to different stories. So one justice says, 'Look at what happened here over the weekend. Let's put out an order putting a stop to

it.' You know, there's a process in these lawsuits and has to be certain issues." [tape interruption]

[There was so much misinformation put out during that campaign.]--one example of the lying that went on. One of my appearances was prime time TV in L.A. on the six o'clock news. I only had three minutes or so, and my opponent was a former attorney general or deputy attorney general. Deukmejian appointed him--I guess there was a vacancy, and he was appointed to the L.A. District Attorney's office. Now, whether he was number one or two, I don't know. His name is [Robert] Philibosian.

So we debated back and forth. The guy asked us questions, the moderator, and we answered them. And then the last question I was asked was, "Well, you know, Mr. So-and-so says that Rose Bird isn't qualified because she never had any experience as a judge and so forth." So I said, "First of all, she belongs to a group of appellate attorneys in San Francisco, a very elitist group within the profession, which requires that in order to become a member, you have to have argued at least fifty cases before the supreme court or an appellate court before you can even join. And she had way more than that. She did all the appellate work for the County of Santa Clara," I guess the public defender's office. I'm not sure. But whatever capacity, she had a very large number of cases that she had argued before both the supreme court and the appellate court. I said, "More than just about any justice who's sitting now and who has ever sat before.

"Secondly, she taught law at Stanford University." And I cited two or three very famous supreme court justices in Washington who had never sat on the bench before, who came right out of a law school, law school professors. And I cited Traynor, who was considered to be the best in our history, who never sat on the bench. He went right from the faculty to the Supreme Court.

Morris: And the one who just retired a couple of years ago also went from Boalt to the bench.

Petris: Yes, who stepped down, actually, and went back to Boalt. So I said, "She's had plenty of experience and plenty of qualifications far superior to just about any person you can name that sits on the court, or has been on the court."

So he says to the other guy, "Well, that's pretty impressive. How do you answer that?" He said, "Before Rose Bird was appointed to the supreme court by Jerry Brown, she was his chauffeur." Period.

Morris: Oh, my goodness.

Petris: That ended the program. And I was screaming. I said, "That's an outrageous lie and you know it is." And I got cut off.

Morris: Talk about oversimplification of being secretary of Business and Transportation!

Petris: So I talked to him and I said, "Why in the hell did you say that? What's the matter with you? Why do you do things like that? Your case must be so weak that you're desperate." "Well," he says, "as a matter of fact, when he ran for governor, she drove him around to his speeches." I said, "That makes her a full-time chauffeur? What about being head of Business of Transportation all this time?" That's how low they stooped. I still think the whole fight was about consumers, consumer protection, and basic civil rights protections and things of that sort.

Morris: Well, the other one that I had heard is about judicial appointments in general, that the same people were concerned about control of the courts and appointments.

Petris: Yes.

Morris: Well, it certainly was a noble effort. She always seemed to me a very appealing person. It seemed one of the great pities that she did not get to serve out her term.

Petris: Yes, because she was a brilliant judge. Actually, I think Jerry Brown made a mistake in appointing her as chief. In fact, I went to see him, because Rose Bird used to work for me when I was in Revenue and Taxation, on that committee, she did some consulting work for me. That's when I first met her. I said, "I think it would be a great appointment, but politically, you're going to run into trouble. Why don't you appoint her to the court? Let [Stanley] Mosk move up as chief. Mosk has been there a long time, and he's brilliant. Let him serve out his last years on the court as chief, and when he steps down, you can move her up to chief. That way she will have had identity as a member of the supreme court for whatever number of years we're talking about."

He said, "No, no, I can't do that, I need somebody that's going to be innovative with new ideas." I said, "Have you talked to Mosk? I've talked to Mosk. He's got a lot of ideas on how to change things on the court and improve the process. Why don't you give it a try?" Well, he never did. He just had his mind made up, and that was it. If he had followed that advice, I think it would have taken the steam right out of the opposition. They certainly couldn't have talked about no experience, because she'd have been on the court. It's like some of the national appointments, where the Republicans have put a guy on a court for

six months or a year and then move him up to a big one and say he's got a lot of experience. At least he's had some.

But he just wouldn't even think of that. I think he made a terrible mistake there. I said, "It's a matter of timing, and it's a matter of political reaction. You've got to deal with that. And the first woman, a lot of guys are going to jump on her just because of that. They can't abide it."

Morris: And Cruz Reynoso had some baggage that caused some political difficulties, too.

Petris: Yes, that's right, he was very active in the civil rights movement in the Mexican-American community and all that. But I thought it was an injustice to her. I thought that if he had done that, Mosk would have been happy, and he would have been a great chief. He would have stepped down sooner, I think. He's still on there now. I'm glad to say he's still there; he's a voice in the wilderness. [laughter]

Morris: You have to admire his determination.

Petris: Yes.

Morris: Well, thank you very much. I'm sorry to keep you so late on a Friday--

Petris: It's all right.

XIX LEGAL AID PROGRAMS IN THE 1960s and 1970s

[Interview 6: September 14, 1994] ##

California Rural Legal Assistance

Morris: So you're back in your house?

Petris: Anna says it's like we never left. She says, "I feel like I'm coming back home." So it's very similar, but enough changes so you know there's changes. Plenty of space to fill up.

Morris: Well, I thought we'd use this session to catch up on things that we haven't talked about, and talk a little bit more about some of the things that we haven't talked about. Then any thoughts you may have about what's happened in the legislature in thirty years, and advice for those wishing to get their feet wet in politics.

Petris: Okay.

Morris: One of the things that we didn't really talk about that hasn't had too much look at the history of is California Rural Legal Assistance. I wondered to what extent you were involved in getting that organized, since you've been interested in farm workers over the years.

Petris: Yes. Well, theirs is a great story that's not very well known. I wish I could take some credit for helping organize it, but I didn't. After they were formed, they came to me and expressed support for the farm worker legislation I was carrying, particularly on pesticides, but they also supported my bills affecting them in other ways, such as the housing program for farm workers, and things of that sort.

That's how I met Cesar Chavez. He came to a committee to support one of my bills, and he brought some scarred farm workers with him, had them take off their shirts and show their scars from

pesticides. That's the first time I met him. We became good friends after that and worked together on a lot of this legislation. And of course, the CRLA strongly supported his efforts, and they supported my legislation.

We still work closely together. Ralph Lightstone, who represents the CRLA in Sacramento--he also goes to Washington a lot, to Congress and to the administrative agencies--he and I work closely together on legislation that affects the farm workers.

Governor Reagan's Opposition

Petris: The CRLA ran into tremendous opposition from Ronald Reagan. He declared war on them. It was a disgraceful episode in our history.

Morris: Why was Reagan opposed to them?

Petris: Because the big growers are his friends, and the big growers hated the CRLA. They didn't want them putting ideas in the heads of farm workers to raise their heads above the water. For a while, they were getting some kind of government help, like the War on Poverty lawyers were. [Reagan] also felt very strongly that it was terrible that the taxpayer would have to foot the bill for litigation in which the attorneys on both sides were compensated by tax money. So the CRLA, for example, would sue the governor, and he'd fight every case tooth and nail. His own lawyers would tell him, "Under the law, they're absolutely right, you shouldn't even fight this. There are United States Supreme Court decisions that have made it clear that what they're trying to do is absolutely right, so we can't win this case."

And sure enough, he'd fight, and they'd take it all the way to the California Supreme Court, which had some of his own appointees on it by that time, and he'd get dumped. About 96 percent of the cases he fought, he lost. And every time he'd lose, he'd get more angry at the CRLA, and he'd get more angry because of the federal funding of the War on Poverty lawyers. He never stopped to think that if he looked at the newspaper any given week, he would read about a city suing the state, the state suing a county for an accounting of funds that had been sent to the county, let's say welfare, where the state disagreed strongly on how the funds were disbursed, and the only way to resolve it is in court. So in every one of those cases--or a school district suing the state for being short-changed money. And in every one of those cases, you've got government lawyers on both sides.

That never seemed to bother him, because he was involved in a good many of those cases. It didn't bother him when the state, at his request, would sue a school district, for example, or a county because of its welfare misdeeds, according to him. You know what I mean?

Morris: I remember there were a lot of lawsuits over the governor's 1971 welfare reform act.

Petris: There were a lot of those suits, yes, particularly when he was governor. But in his speeches, he would say, "It's outrageous that you taxpayers are required to pay the attorneys and court costs on both sides of this case. That's unheard-of, it's outrageous." Well, it had been going on for 200 years.

Morris: There's no rationale for having some kind of a mediation procedure between governmental entities?

Petris: Well, they do have, sure. Under the law now, in many cases, you have to submit to mediation. The public agencies are not exempt from that. Other examples are CalTrans [State Department of Transportation]. Caltrans is in litigation all the time, and was when he was governor. They're always fighting cities and counties and other governmental agencies. It goes on and on. It's part of life.

But I'll tell you, I really think that his basic problem is that he really hates poor people. That's an unkind thing to say, but he really hates the poor. It's not a matter of being unsympathetic, it's not a matter of being disappointed in his dealings with him, because he never deals with them. He just hates them.

Morris: Even though he was a poor boy himself?

Petris: Yes. Well, that's the way it often turns out. Nixon, for example, when he was president, he terminated the War on Poverty, which had done so much good, and then he promptly declared war on the poor, slashing a lot of their programs and so on and so forth. Now, Nixon always bragged about the fact that he was poor, that his father had a little store, that he went broke twice, went through bankruptcy, and he knew what it was to be poor. And yet, when it came to dealing with the poor, he really gave them a terrible time. He was mean to them.

John Kennedy, on the other hand, was born with a silver spoon in his mouth, tremendous wealth since the time he was a baby, and his first act as president was to raise the food and clothing allowance from the federal government to the starving

people of Appalachia, the Appalachian Mountains in West Virginia, because he had seen them during the campaign and he vowed to do something about it. These are mostly former mine workers who worked in mines that had either been exhausted or had been closed down by the companies, and they were really destitute. They weren't getting enough to live on. He promptly took care of that.

It's a nice contrast. The poor boy dumping on the poor, and the very wealthy boy coming to their aid.

And Ronald Reagan carried on that fight, and [I am convinced that] the more he lost, the more angry he got. He tried to have all the War on Poverty programs in California eliminated, and during the height of that battle, Richard Nixon showed a lot more sense and compassion. He sent three people out here to conduct hearings. He appointed the former chief justices of the supreme court of three different states, all solid Republicans, as a committee to look into the situation here and report back to the president. And he asked them to hold hearings on this problem of the War on Poverty stuff, specifically CRLA, and other legal aid groups, and what was going on in California. Why was this warfare going on between the governor and them?

Well, Reagan issued an order prohibiting any of his agency heads from appearing before that committee. He wouldn't let them go in and testify. It got so bad that the chair of the three quit in disgust and wrote to Nixon and said, "We can't deal with this man. He's totally uncooperative." So if he goes that far, you know he doesn't have any love for the poor. A sorry descendent of a Republican president, Abraham Lincoln, who said, "God must have loved the poor people, He made so many of them." You'd never hear Ronald Reagan say that. Ronald Reagan would say, "God had a terrible off day when He created poor people."

Morris: Did the Senate Judiciary Committee take any action in regard to these hearings?

Petris: No, it was strictly executive. We weren't involved in that at all. Another thing he managed to do--see, they used to come to the Judiciary Committee and others and testify on legislation. He said, "That's wrong. It's an agency that's funded either by private contributions or the state, and they shouldn't be allowed to lobby." So he stopped them from lobbying. They couldn't come in and lobby any more after that. They would see a legislator in the hallway and talk to him, or send him a letter, but they couldn't appear before a committee. And he imposed the same rule when he became president in Washington.

- Morris: Really? And that isn't considered the executive branch interfering in the procedures of the legislative branch?
- Petris: Well, since part of the money came from the executive branch, they could dictate how that money was used. That's the whole story. It's not considered to be interfering in the legislative process. I think it is, but--. Fortunately, the CRLA has survived, and is doing well. But it was a terrible fight at that time. Not only Ronald Reagan but others that agreed with him jumped into it.
- Morris: Did the Senate get to confirm the appointees to the CRLA?
- Petris: No, it's a private organization, it's not a government agency. It got some state funding.
- Morris: The California Rural Legal Assistance is listed in the state roster of agencies.
- Petris: Well, it's not a government agency, I can tell you that. I don't know how it got in there. They certainly don't get any money from our budget. They did once upon a time.
- Morris: I see, so it was reorganized?
- Petris: The money part was reorganized.

Class Action Suits; Access for the Poor

- Petris: He was angry at them for a number of things. I remember another case in which there seemed to be a rash of problems that seniors had with milk. The milk they bought at the local store would turn sour very fast. So they went to one of the--I don't remember if that was CRLA or not; it might have been another legal aid group. They went to a legal aid group, complained, and the group filed a class action.

Ronald Reagan hit the roof. First of all, constitutionally, philosophically, he's against class actions, because that's a tremendous weapon to help the poor, among others. There are a lot of wealthy people involved in class action lawsuits, too. If you sign up for a tour around the world and it costs you \$12,000, and somehow the company defrauds you, and there are 800 people who have signed up for it and paid in their money, they all go into court under one lawsuit. They're all very wealthy. They wouldn't be signing up for that if they weren't. He doesn't like that, either. He doesn't like that. He doesn't like businesses being

pestered like that, you see? Let the marketplace take care of it. So if you get screwed in the marketplace, it's your own fault. If you were born poor, it's your own fault. If you're crippled, it's your own damn fault. That's his philosophy, I'm telling you.

Morris: So what happened with the milk?

Petris: Well, what he wanted to do was compel each senior to file his own separate lawsuit for a bottle of milk. Think how that would have cluttered up the small claims court, for example. Instead of having one case, he wanted to have thousands. So I don't know what happened eventually, but that was his philosophy.

What the CRLA did, their main contribution--there were many contributions, and I said this in the legislature many times. The CRLA demonstrated to the poor farm worker that the county courthouse was built for him as well as for the grower and anybody else in the county. Prior to that, they couldn't get into court. They couldn't get an attorney to represent them. Let's say you're in Modesto; that's the county seat. Big agricultural area. There wasn't a lawyer in town who would dare file a lawsuit against the growers. They'd snuff him out of business. They're very powerful. Especially representing a horde of people that were looked down upon, you see? Bottom of the economic scale, different ethnicity and all that stuff, all that prejudice.

It took the War on Poverty--Lyndon B. Johnson really got them started, and John Kennedy and Hubert Humphrey. John Kennedy really created it, but didn't get to do much on it. Lyndon Johnson gave it a tremendous boost, and as a result, there was [this] high calling to come in and help the poor, with a very low salary, and yet it attracted what you might call the best and the brightest among the Ivy League law school graduates. There were a lot of them who were at the top of their class in law school, and they had offers to go to work on Wall Street or many other kinds of corporate, very attractive salaries, and they said, "No, I'm going to California."

They came out here and fought for the farm workers. A magnificent chapter in our history that's very little known. They worked side by side with CRLA. Some of them joined CRLA on staff. Others were just independent lawyers helping the poor, individual lawyers working for the federal government. The War on Poverty was a magnificent thing.

Pro Bono Work; Finding More Funding

Morris: Before those bills were passed in the sixties encouraging legal assistance, were there things that a lawyer in private practice could do in terms of taking cases for people who were--?

Petris: Well, the state bar always had a program of pro bono work. The state bar has had a pretty good record on that. They've always encouraged lawyers to set aside a certain amount of their time to help people who couldn't pay, and they called it pro bono work. For example, the best program that I personally had is still in effect. It puts millions and millions of dollars every year into a trust fund for distribution through the bar to various qualified legal aid groups. It might be a county bar association, it might be any number--there's three or four or five here in town representing poor people in Alameda County. They have different names, but the qualifications are strict, and they have to stay within the guidelines. They can't pay their lawyers more than x dollars a year, and so forth.

[This] program that I got into was worked out by the state bar. I worked very closely with the president of the state bar, who was a member of one of the most prestigious and biggest firms in San Francisco, Morrison & Foerster. I'm sorry to tell you, I've forgotten his name; I never thought I'd forget it. He was one of the senior partners of that firm, and he was president of the state bar, and he and I had several meetings. I put in this bill that permitted the banks to pay interest on trust accounts.

Now, for some reason unknown to me, up to that time, if you had money in trust through your practice--for example, attorneys often collect money, in personal injury cases, for example. When the case is settled, or it's won, and the judgment is obtained, the check comes from the insurance company on the other side, and it's always made payable to the attorney who handled the case and to his client, so they sign it together and the attorney [puts] the funds in a trust account, because the first call on that money is bills outstanding, like the doctors who treated the person on credit, experts who came to court to testify--all kinds of costs. Those bills are paid first, off the top, and then the distribution for the rest is made between the client and the attorney.

Now, while that money is sitting in the bank, in trust, it never drew interest. And when you consider how many lawyers there are and how many cases--

Morris: And how long some of those cases take.

Petris: And how long it sits in some cases, there's a tremendous amount of money. I think in our second or third year, we got \$18 million from that account through this legislation. Now, if it weren't for the most prestigious firm, Morrison & Foerster, and the state bar president, it never would have happened. Because he had to go to the banks and persuade them to give up that money.

Morris: To pay interest.

Petris: Yes, because they weren't paying interest. So that means the banks were using the money all these years, since day one. And I thought, Oh, hell, you're never going to be able to do this. Well, one of his clients was Bank of America, and he represented other banks too, the firm did. And he went to them and he sat down and he laid this out. I thought there was going to be a big, big war, but there wasn't. They agreed, they informed the committee that they supported the bill, they got others banks to do it--the whole industry came in and said, "Okay." One of the most remarkable things.

And what was it for? To provide a legal aid fund for the poor, who are underrepresented. Even today, after all our efforts, only one out of five who apply for legal aid can get it, because there isn't enough money to help all of them. So it's rationed, even now. So they agreed to support a change in the law to permit the payment of interest, which was not permitted before --I have a hunch it was the banks who got the legislature to say, "No interest," in this situation, a long, long time before.
[laughs]

So it was a marvelous thing that that law firm did, the state bar did, and the banks. When you visit my office in Sacramento, you'll see in the reception room I have a big frame with a picture of a tremendous number of checks, and it looks so real, I think it might be the original checks. I'm still not sure. It's a collage. It looks like hundreds of checks. That was sent to me by the state bar. These represent checks that actually were paid out of that fund in the first year. They sent it to me as a kind of a tribute for the bill that I carried, and I have it on the wall in my reception office.

Morris: This is after they had cashed it?

Petris: Oh, yes, it was after.

Morris: Just checking.

Petris: Yes. [laughs]

Petris's Private Law Practice

Morris: When you were in private practice before you went into the legislature, did you do any pro bono work?

Petris: Oh, yes, I did a lot. I didn't have a very high income level clientele, so a good percentage of my clientele, even though I billed them, they couldn't pay, so that was the end of it. I did a certain amount for free. I don't know the percentage. Most of my friends did, too. They didn't get a lot of public credit for it, they didn't go around bragging about it. But yes, I did a lot of that when I was practicing.

Morris: How did you happen to set up your law office in San Francisco?

Petris: Well, I started in Oakland. I was here for a long time. After a lot of years, I met my future partner, John Vasil, who was practicing in San Jose. We decided to go into partnership, and we did in Fremont, which was between Oakland and San Jose. We practiced there for a while. My partner, John Vasil, had originally practiced in San Francisco before he moved down to San Jose. He always had kind of a yearning to go back to San Francisco. So for that reason, we opened an office over there. We also practiced in Oakland for a while. There were three of us together. Vasil and I were together; the other person had his own separate firm, but we shared office space right here in downtown Oakland. I don't remember how long we did that, maybe three or four years.

Then we all went to San Francisco. Vasil kept the office in San Jose as well. So I was active in San Francisco, and he ran the show in San Jose and from San Jose. He used to come up to San Francisco from time to time. But he was the manager of that operation.

Morris: Were there shared interests between San Jose and San Francisco? Did some of your clients do business in both places?

Petris: Yes, from time to time, but mostly it was pretty geographically located. He had a good business practice down there, and he had clients up there. I didn't have any in San Jose to speak of. Once in a while, somebody I knew would come in, and my partner would take care of them down there.

Morris: It sounds like it was a general practice.

Petris: Yes, it was general civil practice. I didn't do any criminal work, but he did. He was good, he handled some criminal cases as well.



XX UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA CHALLENGES; COMMUNITY IMPACT;
MORE THOUGHTS ON LEGISLATIVE DIVERSITY

Free Speech Movement and Anti-Vietnam Protests, 1964-1970

Morris: I have some more questions on the University of California. I was wondering if the students or administration asked for your advice or assistance at all when the Free Speech Movement erupted at Berkeley.

Petris: No, they never did. I used to go out and visit with the students. I remember that year my opponent was the chairman of the county board of supervisors, very conservative Republican, ex-marine. Very nice guy, Bob Hannon. We were always pretty friendly. During that campaign, he would criticize me at the various town hall [kind of meetings] that we had. [He would say], "I used to go out there at seven o'clock in the morning, to the Berkeley campus. I'd have coffee with the deputy sheriffs and the state police and the campus police and the Berkeley police. I never saw Petris there."

I'd get up and I'd say, "Well, you didn't look in the right place. When you were having coffee with the cops, I was with the students." And the crowd would usually erupt and say, "Hooray for you." Also, I drew an opponent out of that group. The leader of the Free Speech Movement was Mario Savio, and he ran against me that year on the--what was that ticket called? It was an independent group, of course.

Morris: Peace and Freedom?

Petris: Peace and Freedom party, yes. He was the candidate of the Peace and Freedom party for my seat. He was asked by the press one time, "Of all the people around here in the legislature, why in the world would you go after Petris? He's been a solid liberal all these years, very, very strong on higher education, a great

supporter of the students at the university as well as the institution itself."

He said, "Well, I'm not really running against him, I'm running against the system. As the system goes, Petris is about as good as you're going to get." Something like that. He gave me a big left-handed compliment. [laughs] He said, "I don't really have any quarrel with Petris; he's just part of this terrible system that I'm trying to change."

[tape interruption]##

Petris: Well, we were talking about the student uprisings and [Berkeley-Oakland Assemblyman] Don Mulford [was very visible and outspoken] during the Vietnam protests on more than one occasion on the Senate floor, when some of the senators would try to get Mulford's proposals enacted, approved, that came over from the Assembly. First of all, they objected to the obscene language that the more extreme students were doing, which was a way of getting people's attention. In one case, they even threw a typewriter through the window of the administration hall, which I thought was a terrible thing to do; but that was their purpose, to get attention. Otherwise, they felt the press didn't pay any attention to them.

So the criticism was, these are college students, they're the future of America, and here they are out there screaming these obscenities. I said, "We should thank the students for bringing these matters to our attention and forcing us to face the issues. The ultimate obscenity of our time is the president of the United States looking into the television camera and addressing the whole nation, and deliberately lying about the situation in Vietnam. Lying about the fact that we were attacked, when it was all fabricated. Lying about the role of the FBI," which the students were exposing. They were getting close to fascism in the way they operated under J. Edgar Hoover. The students opened our eyes to Hoover.

And I went down the list, a lot of things that the students were doing. And as far as the protesters who refused to serve in the army and go to Vietnam, and went to Canada, I said, "Stop and think about that. What takes more guts, to just go along with the crowd and join up, or stand up and say no, and maybe have your parents totally embarrassed and against you, and your friends, and the public, and insist that the old slogan, 'My country, right or wrong,' needs re-examination? Who's the best citizen? The one who just goes along even though he knows his country is absolutely wrong, or the one who stands up and says, 'Hey, that's not my country, you're going in the wrong direction. You shouldn't be

doing this, and I am here to oppose it.' So they packed up and went to Canada. That took more guts than just going along.

"How many times have we, right here in these chambers, hesitated to get up and say something negative because we feared the reaction of our peers? We didn't want to go against the grain. Every one of us in this room is guilty of that. And what's that? That's discussion. That's our job. We're expected to do that. Would any one of you do what these youngsters have done? I think they've performed a great service and I think they ought to be getting a decoration rather than being denounced."

Morris: What was the response of the Senate to that?

Petris: Well, I didn't win the fight. I didn't win on that particular debate, but I think in most cases, we shot down the Assembly proposals. I'm not sure. I think cooler heads prevailed.

Mass Trials; Bill of Rights Concerns

Morris: That was one of the first times--I guess it's a reverse of the class action--that the people who were arrested in the campus demonstrations were tried in large groups.

Petris: Yes.

Morris: Was that something that you thought was a help to the judicial process, or--?

Petris: Well, that's the way it was explained, that we had so many people, and they're deliberately doing it to jam up the courts, that that's an obstructionist thing and we shouldn't permit it, so we're going to try twenty-five or fifty or a hundred at one time. I think that might have been the first time that was done. It's been done since in other parts of the country.

Morris: Right. Ed Meese was reported to be the person who suggested that [for people arrested during the Free Speech Movement, while] he was still assistant district attorney.

Petris: He was high ranking in the Alameda County District Attorney's office, that's right. Yes, I believe that was his baby, all right.

Morris: Did you ever run into him in your visits to the campus?

Petris: No, I never did. I had known him for a long time, and we were always on friendly terms, but poles apart on philosophy. I debated him once later on in the--which issue was it? We had a debate at the Piedmont Community Center, on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon, and it was broadcast on a small local radio station. I don't remember what that issue was. Let me think. I should remember that. Had to do with a burning issue at the time. It was way after the student uprising things. In fact, he was attorney general then.

Morris: Okay, so this was during the Reagan presidential administration.

Petris: Yes. He was either attorney general or had just stepped down, had just--Reagan had left. It was some big issue on constitutional matters that were hot during the day. It's slipped my mind.

Morris: But he was not all that evident in Sacramento that you recall?

Petris: Oh, yes, he came up there a lot. Well, depends on the time period you're talking about. When Reagan was governor, he was up there a lot.

Morris: Yes, he was legal affairs officer.

Petris: Sure. He served on Reagan's staff, and he was his advisor. But prior to that, he did a lot of lobbying for the District Attorney's Association on criminal matters. Usually I disagreed with him on those things too. He liked to take short cuts. He wanted to speed up the trial process, short cuts here and there which some of us regarded as very serious undermining of the Constitution. And we had disagreements on a lot of issues.

Morris: How does taking short cuts undermine the Constitution, to the layman?

Petris: Well, to the layman, a defendant insists on the defense attacking the search and seizure that was made to gather evidence, because it didn't go through the normal legal process by getting a search warrant, and therefore the defendant's entitled to have the whole indictment thrown out. The problem was that Ed Meese and many of his supporters called that a technicality. "You're letting all these criminals go on technicalities." Well, technicality happens to be a very basic provision in the Bill of Rights. So on that issue, I was the conservative one. I was trying to preserve the Bill of Rights that came from Jefferson, for God's sake, and he was the radical, wanted to throw it out. He didn't say so in so many words, but that's where he was taking this.

Morris: [Were these] the same people who were questioning the rules on search and seizure and the Miranda decision?

Petris: Yes, all those things. The Miranda decisions, the self-incrimination, the Fifth Amendment, they would argue against it by showing that the ones who take advantage of the Fifth Amendment are guys like Al Capone and so forth. We had to try to educate the public to remember that we don't pick our heroes in that kind of thing. It's our duty to defend an Al Capone if the government is violating the Constitution, because if they can do it in one instance, they can do it in a lot of instances, and any one of us can be an innocent victim of their violation of the Constitution. So the ones you hold up as examples are liable to be the scum of the earth, but it doesn't matter. It's the process we're talking about, and the integrity of the Constitution.

Morris: It's a fascinating debate, and it certainly isn't over yet.

Petris: Oh, no. It goes on forever.

Morris: And, going back to the student demonstrations, they went on not steadily, but there were repeated ones?

Petris: Yes, over a long period of time.

Morris: The university took a lot of heat, a lot of people said that the university wasn't doing its job in letting these things happen. Did that involve you at all, or did you have to get called on to defend the university?

Petris: No, I didn't criticize the university for letting these things happen, I criticized them for provoking the incidents by not being faithful to the First Amendment. I felt they were panic-stricken because sometimes those demonstrations aren't the prettiest scenes, people shouting and hollering, and sometimes they'd pick up things and throw them at each other, stuff like that.

Changing Admissions Issues

Morris: On the broader scale, we talked a little bit about the selection process that has come to be an issue. How did the legislature respond to changing concerns about the admissions process--first, in the sixties, that there weren't enough minority students, and then, in the eighties, that there were too many Asians?

Petris: Oh, yes, that's been discussed many, many times over the years. It's interesting to watch, because the issue is always there, and the players change. For example, when we had the affirmative action program, the university, I thought, did a great job. They actually sent people out into the high schools all over the state. They even sent people into the South to recruit young black students who showed promise for the medical school, and I strongly supported that. They didn't have a prayer to go to medical school in any state in the South, unless they went to Howard University in Washington. So the University of California recruited some. I thought it was to their great credit.

At that time, when they really made a--I mean, not they, but we--made a special effort to open those doors of opportunity to black people in particular, we got severely criticized by people saying, "It should be on the merits. If they don't have the grades, they shouldn't be admitted." Well, they didn't have the grades because the whole climate and the whole atmosphere was bad. But once they were given some hope, they did very well. The first wave of students that went to UC on the affirmative action got better grades than the average, which proved they didn't have to have a special program.

I would tell people over and over again, "When I was at Cal, they always had a small percentage of slots available for athletes, athletic scholarships for athletes. The only reason they got them was because they didn't qualify to come in under their grades. Nobody complained about that. If you attracted a star quarterback from some big high school in California, and his grades weren't up to snuff, and UC gave him a scholarship, you didn't complain at all about that. Why are you complaining about this?"

Of course, later on when they woke up one morning and discovered a tremendous percentage of students at Cal were Chinese, they complained about that. "All those Chinese are getting in, and my son can't get in." Now, wait a minute. You were writing me letters about how horrible it is not to judge this thing on the merits of their grades. Your son ain't making it on the merits, because the Chinese student is beating him out. Now, make up your mind. Do you want it on the merits or don't you, or are you saying affirmative action is okay if it favors your son, who can't make it on his own? Very strange. But understandable; that's human nature.

Morris: What did you think the chances were for the request to add three campuses to the university?

Petris: Right now they're pretty bad. I think we're going to regret it, because the longer we wait, the more it's going to cost, and the more the pressure is going to be felt on overcrowding in the other campuses. I think we're going to need six or seven after a couple of decades, or less. But the money crunch is so bad that we can't even think about them, unfortunately.

Potential Business Community Input

Morris: Yes. Did you mediate or moderate at all in the discussions about whether the money should go to the Cal State campuses or the UC campuses, since you've got one of each in your district?

Petris: Well, I happen to be chairman of the subcommittee that has a lot to say about that. The only mediating I did was to try to make money available for all of them. Why are we making choices? Why are we making choices between sending our kids to the university and sending them to prison? That's what it amounts to, in some of the decisions we're making. So I didn't see that as an issue at all. I just said, "You don't have money? Go out and ask for it, like Pat Brown did." When Pat Brown went into office, of course the economy was different, but he was facing a half a billion dollar shortage--unheard-of in our history; even in the bottom of the Depression we didn't have that.

He called in the top businessmen of the state, and he went around the state, and he talked to a lot of people, and he said, "It's time to rebuild California, and we're going to need money to do it, and here's the program that I'm offering." X number of new campuses at UC, new medical schools, engineering schools, law schools, tremendous increase in the junior colleges, a lot more campuses, and Cal State. He went out and fought for all three, and the people responded. He showed that he had confidence in them, he explained what the problem was, he had a vision of the future, and people responded.

The insurance industry, for example--I had a little role in that, because I was [on] the rev and tax committee at that time, and later I chaired it. He brought in the insurance people and said--explained, talked to them man to man, treated them like adults, not a bunch of five-year-old kids. He said, "These are the needs, and we're not going to make it if we don't get the money, I want your help." "What do you want us to do?" "Well, your tax is paid periodically, every quarter--" I don't remember what. They had a different setup from the other corporations. I forget what the insurance tax is called. He said, "If you could

pay it a month early," or even sixty days in some cases, I don't remember, "if you could pay it early, it would get us over the hump."

They did it. They didn't storm out of there saying, "This guy's crazy. First of all, we didn't even want to pay the tax, now he's telling us to pay it early." They did it, because he took the time to deal with them as adults, explain the problem, and show them where we ought to be going and asking them for their ideas. They agreed with him, and that's remarkable. You don't hear about things like that happening very often.

You take a conservative governor, you take a Reagan or Deukmejian or Wilson, that's the last thing they'd ever try to do. They'd want to bring them in and brag to them how they'd cut the taxes, made life easier for them by cutting taxes. I think the top business people in this state have shown themselves to be far more informed and dedicated to education than the governors have. The California Round Table. A few years ago, they came up with a proposal to have businesses in every community adopt a local high school, and go in there and help that high school, financially and otherwise. Kaiser I know did that here in [Oakland], and other companies, Clorox. They weren't going to wait for some Republican governor to say, "Well, boys, I've saved you a lot of money." They were strong--they had periodic meetings of the Round Table on how they could help education in California. They knew the importance of it. They were wonderful.

Morris: Did they ask legislators to meet with them?

Petris: Yes, there were periodic meetings with legislators too. They'd come up and exchange ideas, and we encouraged them as much as we could. I thought they were marvelous. One of them I remember was a regent of the university, president of the board. He was head of--what's the parent company of Emporium Capwell's down in L.A.?

Morris: Then it was Carter Hawley Hale.

Petris: Well, Ed Carter was president of the board of regents, and he brought along a lot of his business colleagues.

Morris: Does that work as well in these days when a lot of California companies are part of larger companies whose headquarters are somewhere else?

Petris: Well, that's an additional problem. It depends on how enlightened the headquarters is. But there must have been some of those in those days, too. I think the local branches probably persuaded

the national headquarters to support that. But Carter was marvelous. I met with him a lot of times in Sacramento.

Academic Activities in Greece

Petris: In fact, I was in Greece with him. I'm pretty sure it was Carter. I went to Greece on the dedication of the UC study center at Delphi, and there was a drama center studying ancient Greek drama right there at Delphi, at that ancient setting. It was a graduate course, credit and everything. I was asked to go over there to represent Governor Brown at the dedication. I'm pretty sure there were two of them there. One was chancellor at Irvine, I forget his name now. I hear it from time to time. And the other one was Carter of the regents.

We had a beautiful dedication ceremony. The queen came down. They had a queen then. [laughs] And we had a luncheon at this magnificent setting at Delphi. I spoke representing the governor, and also the university. They asked me to kind of be a spokesman too. I spoke to that group in English, and I spoke to them in Greek, because there were a lot of local people, about this wonderful partnership of the youngest democracy and the oldest one, and the study of the classics, drama in particular. It was great.

And that program kept going until the damn dictators came in and threw it out, and I don't think it's ever been restored since.

Morris: There's a Cal program somewhere there that's doing excavations.

Petris: Oh, that's in Nemea. I've been very active in that with Professor Steve Miller.

Morris: As a person who loves Greece, or as a UC alum, or--?

Petris: Oh, all of the above. I've formed a Friends of Nemea committee and we raised some money. We're not active right now, but from time to time, when the university needs help, we respond to it. You see, it's a peculiar thing in our whole university family around the country, it's not peculiar to UC. When they go to a place like Greece to excavate, they get that because the American School of Classical Studies, which is funded by a lot of universities in the United States--I think it started at Princeton way, way back, started with some of the smaller Christian colleges, you might call them. Princeton started out as a Christian school, it didn't start out--

Morris: They all started to train ministers.

Petris: All of them did, yes. They were training ministers. The American School of Classical Studies is a very prestigious group that is supported by a large number of American universities, and it has offices in Athens, and I believe it has a school as well. But one of its roles is to negotiate with the Greek government and the minister of culture and antiquities on who does what in Greece. They guard that very jealously, because they've had some unhappy experiences in the past, people going in there and raiding the treasures and leaving, like Schliemann [laughs], although he was mostly over in Troy in what is now Turkey.

So UC can't just get up and say, "I'm going to go to Nemea and excavate." They've got to go through a long process. And they don't even deal directly with the Greek government on that, they deal with the American School of Classical Studies. That school apportions, based upon the history of the institution, its prestige, its competence in the field, who are the profs that are going to be doing it and how do they rank compared to Princeton and Harvard. It's a very tough process. The final step is that the American School says, "We recommend to the [Greek] government that UC be assigned to do our excavations at Nemea."

Now, Greece goes through that with other countries, too. They've got France in there, they've got Germany, and you'll find them in different parts of the country. For example, at Corinth, Temple of Zeus at Corinth, is an American excavation. We've been there for a long time, and we're still doing some digging there. And when they finish with all the digging, then they have to spend a lot of time classifying the artifacts that they've found, and building a museum.

The unique thing about Nemea, which is not far from Corinth, is that instead of taking all these wonderful artifacts to the classical archaeological museum in Athens, they've built a local museum right there on the site, thanks to a former president of the Bank of America [Rudolph Peterson] who donated the money to build this museum, quarter of a million dollars, I believe. He's a constituent of mine, lives in Piedmont. He went over there and was so impressed, he asked the professor, "What can I do to help this operation?" He said, "Well, we need a museum, if you could help us raise the money." He was thinking of him as a fundraiser. He said, "Oh, I'll do it myself."

So the university doesn't pay for that. It's not part of the university's budget. Even the professor's salary, when it comes to the excavation time that he puts in, is not paid by the university. He's paid as an archaeologist when he's teaching, but

if he takes a year off just to do excavating, that money comes from contributions. The university might administer it, but it's not normally the university funds. It's a screwy way to do things, but that's the way they all do it. Fortunately, in this country, there's always been people and institutions and foundations and so forth which come up with the money.

But Steve Miller, for example, is kind of in the same boat as a college president. The college president is expected to run the institution, he's got faculty on his hands to deal with, he has the student problems, and he has fundraising. He's expected to raise a ton of money for the university. If he doesn't do it, he's not considered a successful president. He might be the best in the world in guiding the faculty and doing the administrative work.

John Brademas, who was a member of Congress and a Phi Beta Kappa, I think, and a Rhodes scholar, distinguished scholar, he was in Congress for twenty-two years or more, he was appointed president of New York University. It's the largest private school in the country. Well, his very first year, he broke all records. His first year, he raised well over \$100 million for NYU from his position as president. He had all these contacts around the country, and he went out and did it. He did it every year. He's retired now, but he did a remarkable thing there. And it's kind of sad. It shouldn't be up to the president of the university to do that, but that's the way it is. Especially of a private school. They don't get a bunch of money from the state like a public school does.

Private vs. Public Funding; Bills to Ease Urban Problems

Morris: But contrarily, since the beginning, they've understood that they've had to raise money in order to keep going.

Petris: Well, that's true. I understand, like Stanford.

Morris: From sitting on the finance and budget subcommittees, how does the relationship work with the university now that private fundraising has become a larger part of the university's budget? It used to be that the legislature and the state budget provided 75-80 percent of the university's budget.

Petris: It's less than 15 now. I think it's terrible. That comes up every time we have our meetings on that issue. I think it's very sad. I think the university budget should be--I don't know about

a percentage, if we go back to 75, which I think [it was] from time immemorial. The most I remember is about 50, but I guess at [one] time it was [higher]. It should be 100, but it isn't.

Morris: That was probably 1868--

Petris: Yes, right at the beginning, when it was still in Oakland. Well, it's come back to Oakland now. They're right over there; we're neighbors.

Morris: How about some of the things where the university and the city of Oakland are working together? I understand that there's a Metropolitan Forum here and an East Bay Corridor project on job development and reducing crime--

Petris: That's been going on for several years. I haven't been active in that, but it's been a marvelous reaching out by the university to the nearest large urban center with all the problems attendant to the urban center, the low income level of many of the residents, particularly minorities, and they've done some great things with the city of Oakland over--

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Petris: They had a couple of departments from UC. The professor who headed the department went all over the country. He died recently, over the last year, I think. He was very good. He drew in the experts from UC, planning experts and people knowledgeable in solving urban center problems, and made them available to the city, gave them a lot of good help.

Morris: Am I right that you have been more actively involved in getting some health care programs going for children and families and things like that?

Petris: Yes, I don't remember what they are. I have a doctor friend who recites them very quickly, Dr. Cayton [Revels?]. [laughs] I think he was active in persuading the Children's Hospital board to name the ambulatory care center after me. I remember hearing him one time talking to some doctors and telling them--he recited a whole list of bills that I had carried that helped improve the health of children and others. I don't remember them all myself. I carried immunization programs for quite a while.

I carried a bill on German measles, when they had the terrible outbreak of deformities, and it created havoc. So I put in a bill to make sure we didn't have that problem, to regulate it and so forth. I had several immunization bills. I had a bill on expanding the crippled children's program. I worked closely with

the orthopedic hospital of Los Angeles, I learned a lot about hemophiliacs, learned what a short life span they have. Most of them don't live past twenty-five. We tried to get more help for them by bringing them under the crippled children's department. I had a whole host of medical things.

Another one was more recently on AIDS, a bill that was very helpful to Alameda County in tackling the AIDS problem. I had the bills on prevention, such as vaccination and things. I had bills on doctors' privileges, because some hospitals wouldn't let a doctor in, and I required that if you turn down a doctor, you ought to at least write him a letter and explain why you're turning him down. The method they used was, they just never answered. I apply for hospital privileges at Hospital X, and they'd never answer, which was their way of saying no. So my bill said, "Hey, [if] you're going to turn him down, he's entitled--or she--to a written explanation." They didn't want to do that, because that would be the basis for a lawsuit.

Morris: Was this a matter of ethnic discrimination or--?

Petris: No, just all kinds of things. Some of it was economic--a closely-knit bunch of doctors running that hospital.

Morris: Didn't want to let somebody else in.

Petris: Yes. I remember St. John's in Santa Monica was accused of doing this extensively. So I met with some doctors who wanted to get privileges at St. John's, and I couldn't get the bill passed, because the hospitals were just too darn strong. So I had to amend it to apply only to public hospitals, with the thought that eventually the others would do it anyway. And I think a lot of them have come around to establishing a more fair procedure.

More on Jobs for Women in Sacramento

Morris: Did you have somebody in particular on your staff working on health matters?

Petris: Well, usually somebody on the staff does the ground work. In recent years, it's been Felice Tannenbaum. She was an elected member of the hospital board at Mt. Eden District Hospital. She has a master's degree in mental health, I think psychiatric social worker maybe. I don't know what they called it.

Morris: Before she--

- Petris: Before she joined me, yes. Both she and her husband were in that field. So she studied the problem, some aspects of it, and she worked directly on it as a board member, spent a lot of time on that. So when she joined my staff, I asked her, along with many other duties, to be our health expert, and she has been. She's been marvelous.
- Morris: Were you in need of somebody additional on your staff, or did you get to know her and think she was so bright you wanted her on your staff?
- Petris: Well, she was a graduate student at Cal State. She had already graduated from Boston University, and then she got a master's back there too. She has about three master's degrees, I think. Because after she went to Sacramento, she went to night school there and got a master's degree in public administration, came out number-one student. They gave her special honors at the graduation. So she came in as an intern, and she was so good that I was eager to have her join the staff permanently. We managed to arrange it. I don't remember whether somebody left, or we were authorized another position. But after finishing her internship, she went on the staff in Oakland on a permanent basis. Later, I thought she was so effective that I thought she could do a lot more good being in Sacramento, so she has been for a long time. She commutes like I do. She goes up on Monday and comes back at the end of the week. She still lives here in Alameda.
- Morris: I gathered you've had a number of really talented women on your program. Lynn Suter was on your staff, wasn't she, before she became a lobbyist for Alameda County?
- Petris: No, she was with Tom Bates.
- Morris: Ah. I talked to her, and she sounded like she's a very strong member of the Nick Petris fan club.
- Petris: Well, she's kind of a member of the family, you might say. She's been very good, very helpful. Sunny Jones is another one. Sunny was on our staff in Oakland and then went to--
- Morris: And then Carolina Capistrano?
- Petris: Yes. She left to form her own business, legislative research, that helps lawyers dig up the legislative history of bills, among other things.
- Morris: She was the first woman of Hispanic background to be in the legislative staff?

Petris: To be an A.A., yes.

Morris: And Audrey Gordon?

Petris: Yes, she was on for quite a while, but she worked in Oakland, not in Sacramento.

Morris: Lynn recalled that Audrey Gordon was the first woman to have a staff job. Does that sound right?

Petris: It may be, I don't know. I know that for years, I didn't have any men on my staff at all. So women had great opportunities. I was trying to make up the imbalance.

Morris: That's interesting. I notice Willie Brown's staff at one point was 90 percent women.

Petris: Yes. Mine was 100 percent for a long time. When you have women running the shop, their tendency is to hire women.

Morris: Really? Now, was that seriously you were trying to restore the--

Petris: Oh, absolutely, yes. And when we got Carolina, we had a double minority. We had a Hispanic woman. We got Alfreda early on from the black community in Oakland. She's been absolutely wonderful in the work in the field as well as here, in the whole community, not just the black community. She does all my transportation stuff, she deals with Caltrans. She's my agent at the university.

Meetings with the Chancellor

Petris: There was a time when we would meet every Friday morning for breakfast with Chancellor [Chang-Lin] Tien. I couldn't always make it, but she always did. That went on for a long time, and I guess it's going to be resumed when we go back [in session].

Morris: This was something that Tien started that hadn't happened under Mike Heyman and some of the previous chancellors?

Petris: Not that frequently, that's right. We would meet with Heyman from time to time, but this was a regular weekly breakfast meeting. Tom Bates--all the local legislators would participate. It wasn't just my office.

Morris: Somebody from Ron Dellums' office, too?

Petris: Yes, from time to time. It was mostly state people.

Morris: Kind of keeping up with what's going on?

Petris: Yes, keeping up with what's going on, finding out what the needs of the university are beyond what I might have been dealing with, looking in the future, trying to anticipate problems.

Morris: Trying to see what's possible in this session of the legislature?

Petris: Yes.

Morris: Does that change as the session goes on?

Petris: Oh, yes. There are things that come up that are un[expected]. Unfortunately, you can't predict all the problems that are going to arise, so problems come up and we talk them over. Or he might express some interest in some legislation that's pending, either for or against, and we take a look at it. Yes, I think they have been good, productive sessions.

Morris: Does he have a corresponding person who is his Sacramento watcher, keeps up with all the education legislation?

Petris: Yes, he has Steve Arditti. Arditti is a systemwide staff person, but he keeps very close touch with Berkeley. Often when I need to communicate with Berkeley, as opposed to the whole system, I still call on Arditti.

XXI LEGISLATIVE ISSUES AND ELECTIONS IN THE 1980s AND '90s

More Women in Elective Office

Morris: Going back on the female issue, I came across a note that in 1984, you ran way ahead of--you won by 74 percent of the vote, even though the district was only 66 Democratic at that point. But that same year, two women were elected to the Senate, Rebecca Morgan and Marion Bergeson, which doubled the number of women in the Senate from two to four. Did that make an impact on how the Senate operated? Do women make any noticeable difference once they get into office?

Petris: Oh, sure, it always has an impact. Most of us welcomed it; some didn't. [laughs] We've had several more since then.

Morris: What kinds of things can you attribute pro or con to the fact that there are now enough women to be a women's caucus, if there is such a thing?

Petris: Yes, there is, there certainly is. It covers both parties, one caucus for all of them. They have their priorities. Since the women started getting elected, we would have a woman's day at the Capitol, which was started by Senator [Diane] Watson of L.A. We would each appoint a woman, name a woman of the year, and have her come to the Capitol and spend a day with the senator, have lunch with her, and she'd follow the proceedings. There would be a little ceremony right on the floor, and each woman would be escorted to the front of the room by the host senator. That's been only the last four years or so.

We always have a woman presiding on that day, and at other times during the year. Before, you never saw a woman up there presiding. See, the head of the Senate doesn't preside very often, oddly enough. He always picks other senators so that he can be free to--

Morris: The pro tem?

Petris: Yes, the pro tem. He doesn't go up there and preside very often.

Morris: Nor the lieutenant governor?

Petris: No, he's never around, except to break a tie. So it's done by rotation. There are two that have been doing it for quite some time, Senator [Ralph] Dills and Senator [Robert] Beverly. One's a Democrat and one's a Republican. But in addition to that, the pro tem asks others to come up and preside from time to time. [Daniel] Boatwright's been doing a good bit of it in the last year, and Senator Mike Thompson. And from time to time, they have a woman go up and preside, not because of some special occasion, just because she's a senator so that's the thing to do. They don't make any big fuss over it--like we did in the beginning! [laughs]

Morris: Right. I was thinking about when you first came to the Senate and then March Fong went to the Assembly. She got quite a lot of newspaper photography, not only because she had just been elected but because pant suits had just become fashionable, and there she was in pant suits.

Petris: Right, pant suits.

Morris: I was thinking about it in terms of, the idea that if you elected more women, you'd have more focus on family-oriented issues or--

Petris: Well, that was the hope and the theory. I'm not so sure that that's the case. The women do tend to be more sensitive to family issues. They're more sensitive, period. But I have to confess, at times we had a tough fight on the floor and I'd look around and say, "Now, why in the world isn't every woman on the floor voting for this bill? It's a natural." It didn't always happen. But many times, it did happen. The sociologists tell us that women are more prone to being kind and compassionate.

Morris: Is that true in practice?

Petris: Well, it's true of some of them that are in Sacramento, sure.

Morris: But on the other side, do they hold their own when the debate gets tough and hard-nosed?

Petris: Oh, yes, sure.

Morris: And trading harsh words and trading this piece of legislation for another?

Petris: Sure. Senator Watson, for example. She doesn't give quarter to anybody. She gets up there and hangs on to her position and battles it out, in committee and on the floor. She's very strong on that. You can see on some of those issues, the women's vote is unanimous. Especially in some of the--well, the domestic relations stuff, and more recently abuse of women by spouses. They're very strong on that. And Senator Watson serves on the Judiciary Committee, and she has an influence there, too. That's where all that legislation goes. She's carried a lot of it herself on domestic violence and on custody. We always have fights on spouses' rights to custody. Every year there's a bunch of bills.

Morris: The same bills?

Petris: No, the same subject, but they vary in their approach. Senator Gary Hart has carried a lot of those. He's left now. He won't be coming back. Senator Watson has carried a lot.

Judicial Reform Efforts

Morris: Was the Judiciary Committee the place of origin of the legislation this year that introduced some changes in the oversight of judges and setting up new procedures?

Petris: No, that came from Willie Brown. That came from the Assembly. We didn't have any such bill. And that followed on the heels of the long series of articles done by the *Chronicle* in which they studied the records and attended hearings of the Judicial Council, and they wrote some very critical articles that the Judicial Council, which is supposed to be, among other things, a body that disciplines the judges--

Morris: Impartial and above all the--

Petris: Yes. And they were very weak in the way they meted out their discipline to the judges, mostly just a tap on the wrist. In the *Chronicle*, I read some of those articles. They were very specific. They gave specific cases and names of judges around the state, and how the Judicial Council just seemed to almost ratify what they did, because the punishment was so mild.

So Willie Brown carried the bill. Of course, he probably felt a lot of the criticism, since he is in San Francisco and it's the *Chronicle* that did the series, and he is a lawyer. And he probably agreed with a lot of that, too, I'm sure. So he carried

a bill to change the whole makeup, put a lot more public members in it. [It's] the old problem of a group policing themselves, as opposed to having outsiders participate in the policing as well. So he changed the whole composition of it. I don't know if the governor has signed that yet. He may have; I don't know.

Morris: I understand that Senator Alquist carried it on the floor.

Petris: He carried it on the floor, right. It went out of both houses with a big margin.

Morris: I don't think of Alquist as being very much involved in judicial administration [issues].

Petris: No. He's not a lawyer, and he's not on that committee, although the Judiciary Committee is no longer represented by a majority of lawyers. We've had a majority of non-lawyers for quite a while.

Morris: On the Judiciary Committee?

Petris: Yes. Well, there are very few lawyers in the Senate. I don't think there's more than six.

Morris: Really? That's a real change.

Petris: And out of them, only two actually do any law practice. Quentin Kopp is one of them. But people have the impression that the overwhelming majority of both houses is made up of lawyers, and that hasn't been true for a long time. When I went up there, it wasn't a majority. It was a pretty big number, but it wasn't a majority, and that's been slipping ever since.

Morris: Why do you suppose that is?

Petris: I don't know. I haven't seen any studies of why. I can guess that lawyers have an opportunity to make a lot of money practicing law, why should they give it up to--they make so much more than the legislator that they have to have a real drive for sacrifice in the public interest. Because to all intents and purposes, once you go in there, it's very hard to maintain a law practice. Willie Brown does it. He's a master of organizing his time and the way he does it, and Quentin Kopp does it. I did it for years, but I just finally gave up. Just couldn't handle both and do justice to both. So the law is very demanding.

Morris: Do you think that this new piece of legislation was overdue? Are parts of it things that people have been trying to get passed for years?

Petris: No, there's never been any effort like that that I can recall. We'd get complaints from time to time, but I guess none of us realized the extent of the problem until the *Chronicle* did its study.

Seeking Objectivity; Demographic and Reapportionment Changes

Morris: Going back to the business about, to what do you attribute your success of running way ahead of the Democratic registration? What have you been doing right all these years?

Petris: Well, I've been afraid to examine that, because a lot of people consider me the most liberal Democrat in the Senate for many years now. And yet, I get a lot of Republican votes. I've had conservative Republicans say to me, "If the rest of the Democrats were like you, I'd support a bunch of them. But they're too far out. You're pretty moderate. In fact, sometimes you're conservative."

That comes as a great surprise to me every time I hear it. Because when you take the basic issues in which liberals and conservatives are concerned: civil rights, economic issues, fairness in the marketplace, consumer protection, I'm about as liberal as you can get. Constitution, the Bill of Rights, all that stuff. But I do from time to time--I think this is what happens, there are several times when I go in the other direction and I speak out against a particular thing, which kind of surprises the conservatives. So they take note of that, and it becomes a cumulative impression.

Morris: You speak out more on their side of an issue?

Petris: Yes. I guess it was early this year, we had a candidate for the board of regents, a very successful lawyer in San Francisco, who was a graduate of Boalt, very wealthy, and he was strongly opposed by some minority groups. In the confirmation hearing, there were some people from the Hispanic community who strongly opposed his appointment because he was "just another pale male, another rich pale male." White, wealthy, "he doesn't relate to us and he doesn't know our problems."

Well, I got very angry at them, and I really read the riot act to them in the committee. I said, "If this were a Hispanic and somebody came in and said, 'We don't like him because he's brown, and he speaks Spanish too much during the day, he doesn't speak English,' you would really raise Cain with us. That's a

very racist comment coming from you, and I'm disappointed in your conduct on this. Why don't you look at what the man has done? Look at his record. He's been very active in securing scholarships for the poorest of the poor, he's contributed a lot of money to scholarship programs, he administers some scholarship programs for wealthy clients, some of whom have set up foundations, he's contributed money to the university, he's done this and this and this and that. Now, what's pale and male got to do with it? And he knows the university, he's devoted to it, he'd be a terrific regent."

Well, he wrote me the most beautiful letter, because I repeated those comments on the Senate floor. And a lot of Republicans took note of that. I don't know whether he was a Republican or Democrat. I suppose if I had to guess, I'd say he would be a Republican. Wilson wouldn't appoint a Democrat to the regents.

So things like that happen from time to time, but I don't know. I can't explain, because I'm not in communication with that many people in the district. I usually run ten or twelve points ahead of the party, which I find very satisfying, because I've never felt that I got more conservative over the years. I get more liberal, actually. Some of the bills I carry over the years, people, my Democratic colleagues are afraid of. They won't have anything to do with them.

Morris: What do you think has made you more liberal over the years?

Petris: Oh, just reconfirmation of the notion that I think liberals are right. [laughs] And seeing that injustices in society have not diminished very much, if at all.

Morris: Does that discourage you?

Petris: No, no. I would have quit if it discouraged me. I just continue to be optimistic, try to move the world a little bit more. This last time [1992]--I might have told you this story, so if I have, you can stop me--I got 85 percent of the vote. Now, that's partly due to the trend that we just talked about, but it's mostly due to Governor Wilson, who tried to carve out a strong Republican district in Contra Costa County in the last reapportionment. After all, that's the main reason he ran for governor. The President of the United States asked him to abandon his Senate position and run for governor, because they didn't want the Democrats to have total control of reapportionment. With a Republican governor, he could do a lot to determine the shape of it [the legislature]. Otherwise, they'd have to compromise.

So he dusted off an old Republican plan that had been offered time and again which would have made Contra Costa a strong, safe Republican district by removing hordes of Democrats at the west end, from Richmond, El Cerrito, San Pablo, Oakland. There's a solid gold mine of Democratic registration from here to Richmond. Pull that out of Contra Costa and dump it in this district, which is what he managed to do. It left the Republican registration at something like 16 or 18 percent.

Morris: On the west side of the hills?

Petris: Well, for the whole county. That's the Republican registration. Oddly enough, I got a letter from a woman in Berkeley who said that she wanted to run for the Senate and she would appreciate it if I would give her some pointers. She's a Republican. She said, "I don't intend to run against you, but I would appreciate it. You've been a good senator, I would not oppose you. But I'd like to run some time as a Republican." So I said, "First thing you do is move out of the district." [laughs] "And the second thing you do is write Governor Wilson a letter and ask him why he reduced the Republican registration to a level where nobody could hope to win. You don't have a prayer, no matter who you are and no matter who your opponent is."

So the result was that first of all, Boatwright got reelected, the Democrat over there. Which didn't surprise them; I think they were looking beyond Boatwright. And my district went from--let's see, the registration hovered around 64, 65 percent, and then it went up to about 72, which is about where it was in the last election, but I still got 85 percent. So when the Republicans criticize reapportionment over the years, I just remind them of my little caper in my own district.

Morris: Has boomeranged.

Petris: Yes.

Anna Petris in the Early Campaigns

Morris: Does Mrs. Petris take part in the campaigns?

Petris: Not now. She used to. She used to come with me and ring doorbells and climb up those steps and hand them the pamphlets. She did a lot of that. In the headquarters, she was the only one that I could ask to stay in the headquarters late at night and do the typing. We had a wonderful friend by the name of Scott

Kellogg, who died years ago, who had an office in the Tribune building, and he had among the first of the typewriters that-- [would type names and addresses off our precinct lists onto form letters.]

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Petris: [That way we could personalize letters] through those machines to constituents, to the voters. I had volunteers doing it in the afternoon after office hours, but we needed somebody [who could work as late as] midnight for a few hours. And of course, Anna's the one who said, "Okay, I'll do it. I know you don't want to ask anybody else." So she did a lot of that kind of stuff, and whenever we asked her, she was Johnny-on-the-spot. But fortunately, the last several times, it hasn't been necessary.

But in the earlier times, I remember walking down the street doing the precinct work, ringing doorbells, and I'd hear her screaming, hollering, "Come here right away!" "What's the matter?" "This dog's going to bite me!" Some dog had run up the stairs and cornered her. Or as she approached the door, a big old police dog would be growling like crazy, and she didn't even want to ring the doorbell. Poor thing. But she endured, she stayed with it.

Morris: Does she share your interest in things governmental?

Petris: Oh, yes. And she shares my views. She agrees on most of the things. But she's no longer active in the community. She was for a while. But she doesn't go out and go to all the meetings and things like she used to. She used to cover a lot of meetings in the earlier days.

Morris: She feels like she's--

Petris: She's done her share. As a matter of fact, I remember in one campaign, there were a lot of volunteers at the Democratic headquarters, and there was some grumbling because in that year, they hadn't seen her. She used to go down and bring coffee and donuts and help address things. Well, we don't address them by hand any more, but we were at the time.

So one of the ladies, who was a wonderful and loyal supporter and volunteer, she said, "I don't know, how come Mrs. Petris isn't down here? I don't see--" she was complaining. So one of the ladies told her. She said, "I thought you ought to know that somebody complained and thought you ought to be down there." [Anna] said, "Please tell her and anyone else that I appreciate very much their contribution to my husband's campaign.

Just tell her I contributed my husband, and that's enough."
[laughter] What a great answer!

Morris: That's a great line. It sounds like she inherited her father's skill in the--

Petris: Her father was very skilled in that, yes.

Morris: In general, do legislative wives take part in public matters, or do most of them try to stay out of it?

Petris: It varies. It ranges from a couple that are very well known in the Senate whose wives are with them every instant on a twenty-four-hour day basis. They go into the office, they work there all day, they're unpaid, they help in the management of the place, they run errands, they write letters, they answer the phone, they talk to constituents, they go to meetings, and at night when there are functions that legislators are invited to, they go along. There's two of them that do that, around the clock. I am just amazed.

Morris: Who are they?

Petris: Herschel Rosenthal from L.A. and his wife, Pat, and the other one is Senator Alfred Alquist.

Helping Out Other Candidates

Morris: Do your large margins mean you have some time and energy to put into other people's campaigns?

Petris: Oh, yes, sure. I've always done that. I've always helped in the other campaigns, and I'm always on the speaker's circuit. Well, just last weekend they opened the Democratic headquarters on 42nd and Broadway [in Oakland], where we usually have it, and this is for people who are up for election. Well, I'm not up for election. Even if I were going to run again in two years, which I'm not, I'm not up for election. It's supposed to be the year that I bypass elections, but I always get in on that. I'm always invited, and I always attend, and I was one of the speakers to rally the troops to go out and do this and that, do everything we can to help our people get elected.

So that doesn't change whether I'm up for election or not. The degree of intensity changes. When it's your own campaign, of course, you do a lot more.

Morris: Yes. I can imagine. How about when some of the initiatives have gotten really heavy, starting with Jarvis-Gann, the tax limitation measure in 1979?

Petris: Yes, I've always been very active in those. I go out on the hustings. Hasn't done much good. I made a lot of speeches on Prop. 13. Well, actually, it was voted down in my district. I don't take credit for that, but I made a lot of speeches.

Morris: Out beyond the district?

Petris: Within the district and beyond. [interruption] Where were we? Campaigns?

Morris: We were campaigning for Prop. 13.

Petris: Yes, on propositions, I spent a lot of time on them. Prop. 13, I probably made a hundred speeches. Prop. 14 way before, the racial thing. That year, I think I told you, I didn't do any campaigning of my own election. I was in the Assembly. I had Audrey Gordon as my campaign manager. She manned the headquarters, and I said, "Audrey, I want you to get as many volunteers as you can to ring doorbells and pass out our literature, because I'm not going to do it this time." She said, "What are you doing? What do you mean?" I said, "Well, I think it's more important to fight this Prop. 14. It's a disgraceful thing to officially sanction racial discrimination in housing, and I'm going to do everything I can to defeat it."

I made about a hundred speeches in and out of the district [then too]. I went to L.A., I went to Monterey, I went to different places. Most of it was in the Bay Area. And we got clobbered two to one. I came back with a very humble feeling about my persuasive powers. I think I made a dent in places where I spoke, but you can only reach so many people. It was a [debacle].

And in every major proposition like that, I've been very active. And in the court fight, Rose Bird and the supreme court, I made a lot of speeches on that. Got beat two to one there, too.

Morris: On her re-confirmation [to the bench]?

Petris: Yes, on removing the judges. Yes, I did everything from speak to a group of three or four to a mass rally to audiences of twenty-five or thirty or fifty to radio and television. I was on prime time on KNX in L.A., six o'clock news. I debated with the former district attorney of L.A. So I don't hold back on those. I really do what I can, absolutely.

Morris: Is this something that you get tapped to do as a member of the Rules Committee? Do they have some decisions on--?

Petris: No, no relation to that at all. It's just each individual's feeling about issues.

Rose Bird's Defeat and Later State Supreme Court Trends

Morris: Were there any things that you thought could have been done differently in the Rose Bird campaign that might have made a difference?

Petris: Oh, yes, a lot of things. First of all, she could have had a lot more people out there supporting the court, but they were hard to find. We had some wonderful people. We had a black fellow from L.A. who was president of the state bar. He made some wonderful speeches. I shared the platform with him once or twice, and when I read some of his statements, I was so impressed with what he had said, I asked him to send me a copy of his speech.

We had other people, the dean of the law school at Santa Clara University, who is now one of Simpson's team, O. J. Simpson's defense team. Gerald Uelmen. I started to say Uberroth, but it's not Uberroth. I worked closely with him by correspondence and phone. I never had meetings with him, but we shared views, and I asked him to send me any articles he might have written. He was very active.

There just weren't enough people to overcome what I thought was a total fraud in the whole campaign. The trial lawyers were active in supporting the court, and other lawyers.

Morris: Supporting the court?

Petris: Oh, yes.

Morris: I would have thought that maybe they were against it, thinking that she was for too much change in the way things were done.

Petris: Well, the myth that they circulated was that she ignored the statutes and just wrote her own law. This court that succeeded her--

Morris: With Malcolm Lucas as chief justice?

Petris: The Lucas court, has officially written to the legislature asking for permission--I don't know if they need our permission--to rewrite a statute--now, which one is that? Very, very strange request. We've never heard of such a thing. They want to entertain some kind of a lawsuit where in their decision--and there's none pending. You could always manufacture one, because you can always get two sides disagreeing on a set of facts, on the law, and they wanted to rewrite the doggone law. And here they are, elected by the public that supposedly was sick and tired of having the Rose Bird court rewrite the law instead of simply interpreting it according to the statute and staying within the statute. I mean, way beyond anything anybody on the Rose Bird court would ever dream about.

Morris: Oh, dear.

Petris: Oh, it's horrible. And of course, what we're finding out is on the decisions affecting consumers' rights, they've been just kicking consumers in the tail. They've been terrible. Just about every decision in the marketplace favors the merchant or the manufacturer or the huckster over the consumer.

Morris: So the feeling is that there is definitely a point of view on this court.

Petris: Oh, absolutely. That's why the whole campaign was fraudulent, because every judge has a point of view. If he doesn't, he's dead. I remember during that time, there were fights in other states. Oklahoma had gone through a big fight before that.

Morris: On its supreme court?

Petris: Well, it's on the appointment of judges. They said that the appointment of judges shouldn't be left to the politicians, it ought to be done by other judges. Take it out of the pale of the political arena. So they had the supreme court, I believe, of Oklahoma do the appointing. Turned out to be the most corrupt system they'd ever had. [laughs] And others wanted to have it done by the bar. I thought, If they think that a bunch of lawyers who are in combat all the time and see the gladiators all the time and represent them are going to be totally neutral on things such as appointing a judge, they're sadly mistaken. They don't know life. For goodness' sake, life doesn't work that way.

We had a variation of that in the reapportionment fights. There was a strong move--I think it was on the ballot--a strong move to have the courts do the reapportioning.

Morris: Oh, yes, that's been around for some time.

Petris: Yes. Have some judges do it, as opposed to having it done through litigation when the supreme court finally comes out and handles this case, and they appoint a referee like they've done here a couple of times. Just have the courts do it originally, because they're neutral. And my answer to that was, if you think that you can take a lawyer--a judge has to have so many years in as a lawyer--and if that lawyer has an active practice, whether he goes into litigation or not, he's constantly confronting disputes. And if he doesn't take them to trial, he's mediating. He's trying to settle it, he's trying to negotiate. So he gets a pretty good taste of life out there, the rough and tumble of the competition, whether it's in the marketplace or wherever.

And if you think you can get a man like that who is totally neutral when it comes to naming a judge, you're mistaken. Show me a man that fits those qualifications, and I'll show you a person that hasn't lived or done anything.

Appointing Good Judges

Morris: You've had a lot of experience, both as a lawyer and watching the rough and tumble and participating. Do you have any ideas as to what would be the best way to appoint judges and run the courts?

Petris: Oh, sure. I don't think there's anything wrong with our current system. The thing that's wrong is, you get a bad governor, he makes bad appointments. So some people have said, "Well, you ought to have every court appointment subject to confirmation." That could get into a political brawl, too.

I don't think the critics are right when they say, "Sure, you become governor, so you appoint a person who was your campaign manager." Well, what was he before that? The campaign manager is not likely to be a twenty-five-year-old who just came out of law school. He's somebody who's been around a while, and the reason he becomes campaign manager is because he's well known in the community, he's respected--at least by his own party, if not everybody--and he's had a lot of experience.

The best judges are those who have gone through the rough and tumble of life. That's why I prefer to see the judges drawn from the ranks of the general practitioner, as opposed to the specialist. Take someone who has tried only bankruptcies. That's a federal thing, so it wouldn't apply, but you could still run for a public office if you wanted.

Morris: Or somebody who's just done corporate law.

Petris: Just done corporate law, or just done personal injury. Or, a lifetime in the district attorney's office. That's a very narrow view of the world. That's only the crime things. A lot of other things are happening out there. I don't like to see a lot of district attorney types appointed to the bench. We need some. We've had some very fine judges--Folger Emerson, Cecil Mosbacher-- I've tried cases before both of them in the old days. They turned out to be very good judges.

But Deukmejian couldn't seem to look beyond the district attorney's office when he wanted to put somebody on the bench. That's lopsided; that's not right. He should have some, he should have some from private practice, he should have some from the defense bar, and he should have a corporate attorney, as long as he's got some experience in litigation. But even that isn't necessary. The experience in litigation is really overemphasized. That's one of the things I argued on the Rose Bird thing. They said Rose Bird didn't have any experience. She had more damned experience than just about anybody that's ever served on the supreme court of this state in history.

Morris: In general government?

Petris: No, in appellate work. As a lawyer, she belonged to a group in San Francisco which you can't join unless you have participated in fifty appellate arguments, fifty appellate cases, either supreme court or the appellate court. And she'd had over two hundred. But you can't even get into that group, that's how highly specialized they are, and elitist, you might say, from the standpoint of the degree of experience. Can't say that about any other judge. And she taught law at Stanford, and so forth.

And you look at the Supreme Court of the United States, my God. You've got some giants who have never tried a case. I think Oliver Wendell Holmes was one of them. He taught law, but he didn't practice law, except for his very early days as a youngster. Felix Frankfurter. There are a number of them who were among the best judges. They were great scholars. There was a time when--

Morris: Were some of the people objecting to Rose Bird the same people who used to want to impeach Earl Warren because he had not been on the bench before--

Petris: Oh, sure. Well, that wasn't the reason they wanted to impeach him. They might have said that. [But] that's very shaky ground, because the opposition can, as I say, roll out this list of judges

going back to day one that didn't have any experience below in any court. They went directly to the Supreme Court. Look at Earl Warren himself. The reason they wanted to impeach Earl Warren is they felt the decisions over which he presided were too damn liberal. Desegregation, for God's sake, *Brown v. Board of Education*. Turned those people over on their heads. I mean, they thought that was high treason.

Eisenhower himself said the biggest mistake he ever made was appointing Earl Warren as the chief justice of the Supreme Court. Why? Because of the desegregation decision. He didn't say that was the reason, but you could read between the lines on that very quickly.

Morris: And Harry Truman said that Warren was a Democrat and didn't know it.

Petris: That's right. I remember a great quotation from Earl Warren, whom I greatly admired. I voted for him. The only Republican I've ever voted for. First time I ever voted, I voted for Earl Warren. He was back in Washington speaking to the Press Club when he was governor. One of the questions they asked him was, "Well, we hear from the Republicans in California that you are far too liberal to be a Republican governor in California. As a matter of fact, they think you're a socialist. What comment do you have on that? How do you answer that?"

He smiled and he said, "You know, let me tell you what a socialist is. When the government helps me, that's progress. When the government helps you, that's socialism." [laughter] I've never forgotten that.

Morris: Well, in view of the fact that you have to be home in fifteen minutes--

Petris: I'm sorry about that. Maybe we can finish another time.

Morris: Yes. I would like to plan on another session.

XXII THEN AND NOW

[Interview 7: October 21, 1994] ##

Governor Pat Brown's Vision: Postwar Construction, Higher Education, and the California Water Plan

Morris: I thought that today we would wrap up the questions that have been--

Petris: Hanging.

Morris: Dangling, yes. Sort of give you a chance to philosophize a bit on things like, when you came into the Assembly and there was a part-time legislature and not much staff and things like that, and then--

Petris: The staff we did have made more salary than we did. [laughter] Our salary was \$500 a month, and most of the staff made more than that.

Morris: That must have been sort of discouraging. You wonder why people worked so hard to get elected.

Looking back over the thirty years, how does the way the legislature operates now compare to then, in terms of what you accomplished and how effective an individual member could be, and the quality of administration?

Petris: Well, I thought the early days under Pat Brown's leadership were the best. We're still coasting on legislation that was enacted under him. The succeeding governors didn't do much. Pat Brown was the high-water mark. The state had gone through the war effort and had piled up an enormous surplus. When he came in, however, it was all used up, and he faced a deficit of a quarter of a billion dollars, which was unheard-of. And then there were a

lot of other problems that couldn't be attended to sooner because of the war, public works in particular.

Morris: Still in the fifties?

Petris: Yes, even as late as the fifties. Well, the war ended in '45. So he got elected more than a decade later, but the problems were still there. We found that we couldn't cope with those problems on a limited short session. They used to have the alternating sessions in those years. One year was the budget year, and the only thing we were supposed to do was put out the budget. That was limited to thirteen weeks, period. We had to get out.

Then the other year was a general session, to cover any subject. As a result, we had to rely on having the governor call a special session for each problem. So there would be a special session on water, and there would be a special session on agriculture, and there would be a special session on employment, whatever the problem was. So that was changed by a vote of the people, I think it was a referendum that we passed and it passed on to the people, to allow us to have a general session every year, just on all subjects with no limitations. That eliminated all that duplication that we went through with special sessions. We used to have four or five or six special sessions concurrently.

Morris: Well, that would get a little confusing.

Petris: And it got confusing. So as far as administration goes, that was a big improvement. It gave us a lot more flexibility. Of course, it increased the length of the session enormously. So each year was still a budget year, but it also included everything else.

The other feature of those years was the strong leadership by Pat Brown. He adopted kind of a slogan: "Let's Rebuild California." The infrastructure was in bad shape because nothing had been done during the war years. There hadn't been any new revenue added to the till, because they were working off the surplus, which makes sense. At home, if you're running out of money, instead of running to the bank to make a loan, you raid the cookie jar. [laughs] And that's what we did.

Morris: There was all that money in special funds?

Petris: Well, a lot of it was special funds. That's another improvement we made under Brown: we got rid of just about all those special funds. I was chairman of the tax committee when we did that. That was one of my key programs. We got rid of special funds, we got rid of some of the taxes too, like the personal property tax on business inventories and the personal property tax on things in

the home as well, and tried to simplify that part of the tax structure.

But the main thing was that Brown had a lot of foresight. He was a man of great vision. He knew California and loved it; it was obvious. He was born here, third generation or fourth, San Francisco. He rolled up his sleeves and said, "It's time to rebuild California." He went out and talked to the people, everybody. He talked to business leaders and labor leaders, anybody who would listen. He made a lot of trips around the state. He also brought people to Sacramento.

He is responsible for the water plan. That had been tried before, but nobody succeeded, because there was certain built-in opposition to it. Right here in Contra Costa County, for example, they were deathly afraid of having this canal built to take water out of the Delta and ship it down south. George Miller, who was a very powerful senator, fought that every time tooth and nail.

Morris: For it or against it?

Petris: Against it. So any time a water plan was proposed that would help distribute the water from the north to the south on some kind of equitable basis, they'd get very nervous about it. It took us back all the way to the water wars that California had from its earliest days.

People don't realize that we were either at the edge of the desert or a substantial part of our state was a desert; it still is. Most of the water comes from up here. Of course, in more recent years, they started making a contract to get the Colorado River water for L.A. and other parts of the south. But now when they see that [supply] diminishing, they're looking around at other parts of the state for more and more water, because there's so many people down there to supply.

So he came up with a water plan, and he managed to get it passed. It went to a statewide vote, and it was approved by the people.¹

Morris: Right, there was a referendum.

Petris: Senator Miller still opposed it, but Brown was able to carry the day. It was quite an accomplishment, actually, because the Senate at that time was run by what we call the mountain counties. They

¹ Proposition 1, California Water Resources Development Bond Act, November 8, 1960.

were elected on the basis of area, not population. So the rural interests, the farm interests, pretty much controlled the state.

And they always had more than a third [of the votes], they could knock down anything that came along they didn't want. And that's been the case since the beginning of California. The farmers were the powerful interest when the state was formed, and they saw to it that the constitution was written in such a way that they would have control as long as possible. That's where the two-thirds vote came in [1928].

Morris: Did you find legislators from the farm counties hard to deal with when you came along?

Petris: Well, no. They weren't hard to deal with. We worked very well together on most issues. But when it came down to the nitty gritty on certain basic things that were important to their districts, the answer was just no, period. So there wasn't much left to talk about. [laughs]

Taxing Matters, 1960-1994

Petris: I remember, we had the same problem on apportionment of gasoline taxes for the purpose of building roads, both local and state. They had a formula. Again, it favored the north, and most of the people were in the south. There were a lot of debates on that. I remember we had a senator, Tom Rees, one senator [who] represented all of L.A. County. They had about sixteen assemblymen representing that county. So he had a terrible load.

So there was a bill to change the formula for distributing the gasoline tax more favorably to the south than we'd had before. I thought it was an equitable formula, and I thought on the basis of the number of people they had there that they should get more money, so I voted with the south. Caused a little consternation among the northerners, but I told them, "You're just not being fair."

Morris: Did that cause you trouble amongst your constituents up here?

Petris: No. Didn't hear a peep out of anyone.

Morris: Tell me a little bit more about the decision to do away with some of the special tax funds.

Petris: As chairman of the committee, I had a lot of discussion on that with the committee and with the public. We had a lot of hearings on it. I carried a bill that called for a thorough study of the whole tax system, both state and local.

Morris: Is that what triggered the study that we've talked about earlier?

Petris: Yes. Well, there were several things that triggered it. There were a lot of people who were saying we hadn't had an overhaul for a long time and it was time to do it. The state was growing fast, and we didn't have a realistic tax structure to keep it fair, and so forth. So there were a lot of reasons for doing it; that was one of them.

We had hearings up and down the state, and then I put in this bill that called for very major changes. I hired, as chairman of the committee, some outside experts. They were all professors from different schools: one from UC Berkeley, one from UCLA, there was one from the Claremont cluster, I think we had one from Stanford--we had both the private and the public schools, their top economists advising us on it. We had one from the law school at Cal who was an expert on taxation. We had a bunch of hearings, and had them participate.

Then I asked each one of these experts to study a certain portion of the whole tax structure. There was one doing the sales tax, and [he] wrote a report on the sales tax. What's the impact, is it progressive, is it regressive, should we continue it, should we modify it? Same thing with the local property tax, with the income tax, with the franchise tax, with the bank and corporation tax--every one of them, we had [a study]. And we published volumes that filled a box about that big.

Morris: A four-inch shelf.

Petris: About five or six inches. I still have one set. I lost mine in the fire, but somebody graciously provided me with another one. That was a monumental work. I can brag about it, because I didn't do it. I was the chair, but I had the good sense to engage the best experts in the field to do the study and write the report. It was a Revenue and Taxation Committee report, but it was authored by Professor So-and-So and Professor So-and-So. They all made recommendations. They analyzed that portion of the tax system that was assigned to them, gave the history of it, the weaknesses and the strengths, and then made recommendations on what we should do to improve it.

That all went into a major bill, A.B. 2270, that incorporated their recommendations. It went out of the Assembly quite well,

with more than the amount [of votes] needed. I think it was a two-thirds vote that was required. We had pretty good bipartisan cooperation on that. It was a big committee; we had about twenty or twenty-one on that committee. Among the things we did, we went to other places to check out their tax structure, and met with legislators. We went to New York, went up to Albany and met with their rev and tax committee chairs, and went to Massachusetts, to the state house in Boston, and we went to other places. We got a pretty good picture of how some of the other states were coping with the problems.

Of course, they couldn't match our problems, because our state was so big even then. I remember going to Boston; for goodness' sake, we went into the senate chambers and they sat around a circular table, there were thirteen of them. For the whole state of Massachusetts, thirteen senators! [laughs]

It was like a little committee for us. There were [fewer] members of the senate in Massachusetts at that time than there were members of our [Senate] tax committee. And if all the committee members had attended with us, we'd have outnumbered the whole senate. They didn't all come, but we had a pretty good turnout.

So we were trying to learn from others. I also had a lot of meetings with Wilbur Mills' staff. He was the chairman of the tax committee in Congress. He was in the house, and he sent a couple of his people out here, and I had meetings with them in Sacramento and in San Francisco. Because we had to know how any major change would impact on the federal and vice versa.

Morris: Did he have any good ideas?

Petris: Yes, they had some good ideas. They also raised the red flags where they thought there might be problems. One of the areas that we talked with them a lot about was pay-as-you-go on the income tax. We had had it [at the federal level] since World War II, when Beardsley Ruml recommended it. [When] the bill [first] went in--Ronald Reagan wasn't there yet--I got it passed in the Assembly, but it was defeated in the Senate, with George Miller again leading the charge. He was chairman of the tax committee on that side.

And that was this rivalry between the two houses. The old-timers there considered us a bunch of upstarts in the Assembly, and there was a feud going along a good part of the time between the Senate leadership and the Assembly leadership, which was Jesse Unruh at that time. They didn't want to give us any credit for doing anything creditable.

I remember on two measures: one was the tax, the other one was a major study I had done, or my committee had done--a different committee--on the nursing home industry. Bob Crown was chairman of the budget committee, it was [then] called the Ways and Means Committee. He had his staff check out the finances of the nursing home industry, because a lot of state money went into those places, to take care of the elderly in particular. So he wanted to know if we were getting our money's worth. So we did a very thorough study of the whole nursing home industry, and did a beautiful report.

Prior to that, the covers of the reports were like a 1900 copy of the *New York Times*, very formal and rigid and colorless and somber looking. Well, I had a very bright young woman who did the staff work--I forget her name now, unfortunately; she's passed away for years now--she came up with the idea, "Why don't we put a picture on the cover?" So she got a beautiful picture of a mass meeting of senior citizens. That picture on the cover of this committee report was just full of people with snow-white hair who were listening attentively to somebody at a meeting. It was very nice. But that's a different subject. That's on the question of the nursing homes.

Morris: Was Miller hard to get along with?

Petris: He and I got along very well, but he was feisty. He was a strong leader. He wasn't easily dissuaded once he made up his mind about something, but he was an excellent senator. He was terrific. We had our differences between the two houses, and on some policies.

He was very helpful to me on the tax reform, as a matter of fact [even though the overall bill] was shot down. But it was a massive package, and it had reforms in all these different tax things. We thought the only way to get it passed was to do it all at once. Otherwise, you do each part separately, you give separate targets to people who are opposed.

So the following year, it was broken up into half a dozen different bills, and some of them passed and some of them didn't. [Even though] we didn't get the impact of the reform that we wanted, we still got substantial reform out of it. Assessment practices were changed. At that time, the big scandals broke where the assessors of three Bay Area counties went to jail, including Alameda and San Francisco, for illegal favoritism of some taxpayers over others. They kept the property tax on businesses low and socked the homeowners.

But my opponent, after that was passed, went around saying just the opposite, that Petris and his so-called tax reform raised

taxes for the homeowner and lowered it for business. We had done just the opposite. That's the way campaigns are, unfortunately.

So we had excellent success on most of the ingredients of the package that were later passed separately. For example, the assessment reform, everybody agreed we had to do that. That part of the bill was drafted by the attorney general, because he had a lot to do with the prosecutions. Not that he prosecuted directly, but he wanted to make sure that these guys were put away. There were two up north and one down south, so they weren't all in the Bay Area. So the net effect of that was some very good reforms, but the impact wasn't nearly as great as it would have been if the bill had remained intact the way it was in the very beginning.

The basic idea was an acknowledgement that the unfair part of our system was the property tax, both on the home and on business. A lot of businessmen testified at our hearings, and they said, "We don't mind paying a fair tax if it's based on profits. As long as we're making money, we're willing to pay our fair share. But when you tax our furniture year after year after year--"

Morris: And it's the same furniture.

Petris: Yes, the same furniture, "--and fixtures and other things that we have, speaking as retailers, it's just not fair. We could be in a horrible year where we're losing money and facing bankruptcy, and we still have to pay this tax. But we don't pay any income tax, because we have no profit. So it's not fair." So that's one of the things we got rid of. The businessmen were very cooperative on that, on the overall package.

Just about all the major industries supported the overall reform. Pat Brown was active in helping us get that done. For example, one of the big important parts was insurance.

Morris: Insurance companies?

Petris: Yes, insurance companies that did business in California. They had a sweetheart of a deal that had been created a long time back which gave them an exemption--if they owned that building over there, let's say a twenty-five story building, and they had offices on one floor, the entire building was exempt from property tax. They had convinced the legislature and the people that if they paid a franchise tax and this other special insurance tax, it [was unfair that they should have to pay tax on their property too.]

So I put in a bill when I was chairman to repeal that. Governor Brown supported it very strongly, but I [didn't] get the

two-thirds vote to get it on his desk. Then I think the second or third year, we got it passed. It went to the people for a vote.¹ It was a reform that said, "Okay, you can keep your exemption for that portion of the building which you're actually using, but the rest of the building that you're renting out, that's not exempt. Your tenants are going to have to pay their share of the tax in the form of the rent they pay you, just like any other building," because it was an unfair advantage. You've got one building owned by an insurance company next door to another building exactly the same in the width and height and number of floors and all, one paid real property taxes, the other paid none at all. So that was a very important reform. It didn't remain in the package, but it passed separately and was approved by the people.

Legislative Cooperation and Rivalries

Morris: Would you have been responsible for getting that onto the ballot?

Petris: Yes, I had a lot to do with it. Not alone; there were a lot of people who worked on it. But I was the first one to carry legislation to try to change that.

Morris: Right. But then when it didn't work going the legislative route--

Petris: Yes, I was very active in that too.

Morris: In taking it on to the ballot.

Petris: Yes. The governor showed a lot of leadership there, too. He was determined to do it. He thought it was unfair.

Morris: Was it the insurance companies' legislative representatives that saw to it that the bill was defeated, that it didn't get through the legislature?

Petris: Well, the whole business community, except the real estate industry. They thought it was fine.

Morris: So in that case, you were on the same side as the real estate industry.

Petris: Yes. That happens from time to time.

¹ Proposition 8, Taxation: Insurance Companies; Home or Principal Office Deduction, November 8, 1966.

Morris: How about on Proposition 13, which was generally backed by the real estate industry in '78?

Petris: No, I was strongly opposed to that. The business community opposed it. The real estate people supported it, especially residential. The brokers that were in the residential field. But I opposed it. I made a lot of speeches against it all over the place. Didn't do much good. I made--I don't know, probably about ninety speeches against Prop. 13. I was very persuasive, yet we lost it two to one. [laughter]

Another one I lost two to one was Proposition 14 way before that [in 1964], to sanctify and legalize racial discrimination in the sale of residential property. Fortunately, the court threw it out, as we knew it would.

Morris: Would you say that in both 13 and then the earlier 14, it was a matter of people taking a look at the facts or more a matter of advertising that convinced people to vote for something that maybe wasn't in their best interests?

Petris: Well, I think it was a little of each. The homeowners were pretty well informed on the problem of property tax. Now, you see, if my major bill had passed, there never would have been a 13, because the basic program was to move away from the property tax. You couldn't do it overnight; that would have been devastating. So we figured a three- to five-year period to gradually move away from the property tax, reduce it each year, and increase income tax to the point where there would no longer be any property tax, except for basic police and fire services in the local communities, and nothing else. Not even schools would be on it any more. The school money would all come from different forms of income tax.

The idea was to shift it from a regressive tax to a progressive tax, and real property tax is very regressive. The income tax was progressive, and we were trying to make it more progressive. The sales tax was what they called proportional. A lot of people say it's regressive but it isn't, because with our exemptions, like prescription drugs, medicine of that kind are not taxed, food is not taxed, and that takes the edge off. There are other states that tax everything. But that feature of our sales tax made it progressive.

##

Morris: Was it an idea ahead of its time?

Petris: What's that, my bill, the package?

Morris: Right, to make a major change in how the state financed its expenditures.

Petris: Well, a lot of it was just jealousy on the Senate side. It was very dramatic, because I had had good support from the Assembly, bipartisan, as I mentioned. I made sure that the Republicans were active in the committee. They came with us on the trip. They played a role in discussing these things with legislators and tax officials in other states. They were, a lot of them, co-authors. Some of them refused to vote for it later for partisan reasons, but in the making of it and putting it together, they were very helpful and cooperative.

So I was presenting the bill to the Senate Revenue and Taxation Committee, and Unruh came in. He just kind of took over the rostrum and took it away from me, and made a strong pitch. That really antagonized Miller. I guess Miller might have been opposed to it anyway, but that made it certain. That Senate committee killed the bill.

Morris: I see. Had Miller and Unruh had their differences before?

Petris: Oh, yes. They were at odds, and I guess Miller considered that an intrusion: let the author present it himself; you don't have the speaker come over here and do it.

I don't remember Pat Brown's role. I think Brown had been persuaded by Miller that it wasn't a good bill, so he wasn't too hot for it. But he didn't campaign against it, he just was waiting to see--

Morris: Let the legislature fight it out.

Petris: Yes, right.

Morris: That kind of left you high and dry, didn't it?

Petris: Oh, yes. That left me high and dry, and this work that had lasted for three years, preparation, and all the hearings and the reports that had been published. Even as they were shooting it down, a couple of the members praised me for this report. I thanked them and said, "That's fine, I accept your comments," knowing that I didn't do it. I was just the one who picked the people. [laughs]

So that was a bad defeat and a terrible setback for a number of reasons. We would have been well on the way to a more fair and equitable tax system. We would not have had Prop. 13.

XXIII LOCAL GOVERNMENT ISSUES IN THE EIGHTIES AND NINETIES

Windfalls and Exemptions

Petris: Homeowners were very outraged at the skyrocketing taxes, and they blamed the legislature. Well, we didn't raise the tax rate; we didn't touch it for years. What raised it was the prosperity in California that attracted so many people that there were more people than homes available to buy, so that drove the prices up, and the assessments rose rapidly each year, so every county was getting tons of money through a windfall, and a beautifully designed--it wasn't designed, it just happened that way--but a beautiful mechanism for local government, because they got a lot more money without having to vote to increase taxes. That was the whole thing.

So my bill would have put a brake on that, by simply reducing enormously our reliance on the property tax. If we had confined it to safety, police and fire, and even taken schools and everything else out, and all those special districts, it would have had a small impact on the taxpayer. So the homeowner would not feel endangered.

But I understood the seniors' [anxiety] especially, and I had legislation to have a seniors' reduction. Now I forget what we call it; we still have it on the books.

Morris: Exemption?

Petris: Yes, exemption.

Morris: That was another thing that was eventually passed as a separate bill.

Petris: Yes. That was in the original bill. That was one of many things in the bill.

Another part of the bill that passed separately was the Williamson Act. John Williamson represented the farm country down in the Valley [from Bakersfield], and he was a member of our committee. He was very active in the hearings when it came to the plight of the farmer. The farmer was becoming land-rich and cash-poor. The assessments were hitting the farmer harder than anybody else, because there's a provision in our constitution, that the assessors had to follow, that said that all land must be assessed not by its present use but its "highest and best use."

Morris: Ah, yes.

Petris: So if you're sitting on a farm, an old family farm of a few hundred acres, and all you want to do is farm, but you're being surrounded by shopping centers and other developments, and they're marching up to your land, that makes your land extremely valuable. Well, you don't have the income to pay the taxes; you just want to be a farmer.

So we developed a policy within this bill after these very sad hearings. I remember a lot of cases, one family in particular down in the Valley, old Italian family, where they'd been working that farm for three generations. All three generations came in and said, "This is killing us. You've got to do something." So we devised this mechanism in the law that later became the Williamson Act that reduced the assessment on farms as long as the [owners] continued to farm. It also had the effect of keeping more green space open. But once they sold it, it would be reassessed at its proper current market value. So the farmers kind of made an agreement with us that we'd give them that very substantial tax break, and they would continue farming. If they took it out of farming, well, then all bets are off.

Morris: It would go back on the market.

Petris: Yes, it would go back and they'd get hit with the same tax everybody else was getting.

Property Tax Limitation and Fiscal Autonomy

Morris: Prop. 13 is kind of an interesting case in terms of the relation of the legislature to local government. I want to take a detour here. After Prop. 13 was passed, the legislature appropriated a fair amount of state money to bail out city and county governments, if I remember correctly.

Petris: Yes. That wasn't immediately caused by Prop. 13; that was caused by the--

Morris: We're now up into the Jerry Brown governorship?

Petris: Yes, we're now up into the Jerry Brown and the big, fat surplus, and that combined with Prop. 13. If it had just been Prop. 13 alone, we wouldn't have had the money to give it. But they took such a beating under Prop. 13 that, I forget the number, \$30 billion a year has been taken away from local government. I don't remember the numbers. They're staggering.

That's one of the main points I used in my speeches. I said, "First of all, you're going to shortchange the schools." And then I'd quote [Howard] Jarvis. I debated [Paul] Gann; I never got to debate Jarvis, but I debated Gann on that once or twice. And I would quote Jarvis who had said more than once, "I don't care about schools. People who support me don't read anyway." Very cynical, terrible statement. He said, "The people that I'm going after are the ones that are on welfare for four or five generations. We want to put a stop to that."

Morris: How was Prop. 13 going to put a stop to welfare?

Petris: I don't know. He never explained that.

So the impact of Prop. 13 that I was complaining about during the [June 1978 initiative] campaign was, number one, a terrible hit on the schools, by taking away the property tax substantially, and number two was the shift of power away from local government to Sacramento. I said, "You people at the local level are always complaining you don't want the state being an octopus and reaching out, and, especially in the boards of education, you don't want to be running to Sacramento with hat in hand pleading for money. Well, you're going to have to in the future, because you're not going to have the money. We're going to have to appropriate more and more money out of the general fund, out of those other taxes--sales tax, income tax, corporate tax--and send it back to you in local districts. Now, you know what happens when we do that? If we're going to spend the money, we're going to control it."

Morris: Tell you how to spend it.

Petris: "That's a basic axiom. Tell you how to spend it, and tell you where you can't spend it. It's much better to generate it out of your own resources at home." I argued that all over the place, but the average citizen didn't care about that. It just didn't seem to register.

- Morris: So when we get into the early eighties, the counties and cities came to Sacramento hat in hand?
- Petris: Oh, absolutely. That's exactly what happened.
- Morris: And there was no difficulty, the legislature said, "Fine, here's some money"?
- Petris: Yes. We made a bad mistake. We sympathized with their plight. Some of us were opposed to it. I remember asking some local visiting officials in committee some embarrassing questions, or chamber of commerce types, or business people. I said, "How did you people vote on Prop. 13?" "Oh, we voted for it." I said, "What are you doing here? You made your bed, you should lie in it. Why do you want money from us?" I said that repeatedly. Well, I was upset because I had made that argument and nobody listened, I guess, during the campaign. But that's what happened.

And now that's a permanent fixture in our system now: local government has much greater reliance now, has to rely much more on the state than ever before. The percentage of money from the locals to support schools, for example, is way below what it used to be. That's why the difference between us and New York, for example. The state of New York spends twice as much money per student than we do. They're at over \$7,000; we're at about \$3,400. The main reason is the property tax from the local base. Ours is very low and theirs is much higher.

Impact of State Revenue Fluctuations

- Morris: Then recently there was a newspaper story right after the [1994-95] state budget was passed which said that Alameda County could lose as much as \$40 million, and Contra Costa County at least \$15 million, in state funding.
- Petris: That's this past year.
- Morris: It's for this fiscal year.
- Petris: Yes. That's not Prop. 13; that's the Ronald Reagan depression. That's the economy.
- Morris: How did we get, in fifteen years, from a period in which the state was bailing out the county governments to a point at which the state is cutting back on the money that the counties get?

Petris: Well, it's really ironic. Somebody should write this up in the history of the state, as well as the nation.

Morris: This is your chance to express your opinion.

Petris: All right. Here's how it happened: Ronald Reagan is governor. He ran on a platform of no new taxes, cut the cost of government, cut and slash--that's the term he used--wherever you can. There's too much fat and so forth. That's a popular theme. And that's one of the many reasons he got elected.

Now he gets elected, and he faces reality. He realizes that we're going to have to have a tremendous tax increase to keep going. Since then, I've said many times in my speeches, "Everybody hates taxes, especially the politicians. Nobody wants to carry a tax bill or vote for it. There's good reason for it. They're afraid that they'll get defeated at the next election."

And then I say, "I don't know one person who ever got defeated on account of taxes in the entire legislature. Not one.

"[They say that raising taxes] can destroy careers. But let me tell you about that, however: during the Reagan administration, there were two separate bills. The first one was the highest tax increase in the history of California. It passed. Then later, there was another one even higher than that. The bill was carried by George Deukmejian. It destroyed his career. The only thing that happened to him is that he went on and became governor. And the governor who signed those horrible bills became president of the United States. So how do you figure it's so horrible to talk about and carry a tax bill?" That's really ironic.

It was those tax increases that made the mechanism generate the money that created this huge surplus when Jerry Brown succeeded him. You see what I mean? [laughs]

Now, of course, part of that surplus appeared before Reagan left, and I think he had a program to give back a lot of money to the people, and there was some refund of many millions. But by the time the individual taxpayer got it, he didn't have enough money to go to a movie. And they got very upset about that, because they read about all this millions in refunds; they just didn't realize how many millions of people there are in California, how many taxpayers there are. But it's really an ironic turning of the circle.

Morris: How does it feel to somebody who's been in the legislature throughout that cycle, to now be faced with a budget in which

you're cutting back funding that used to be available to local districts?

Petris: Well, it's very sad, and it's horrible. And that's part of the cycle--that completes it. See, now Ronald Reagan becomes president, and he is praised for his supply-side economics and this and that, and they praise him for a very prosperous period of years. The economy was doing beautifully. But now that we look back and we ask ourselves, "Well, who profited?" All the studies show, even the Federal Reserve Bank's study the year before last toward the end of the year showed, the top 5 percent got all the cookies. The middle level was stagnant. And the blue collar people took a beating; they went down. That's the way Reagan likes to have the economy: the money should go to the nice people. And there have been a lot of articles written on that, explaining how that comes about and so on and so forth.

So now the result in California is that our economy, along with the nation's economy, went down the tubes. And what do we do? We have a governor who absolutely refuses to support any tax increase. He wouldn't even approve the extension of the half-cent sales tax. He threatens to veto any tax measure, so that means nobody's got any money to support programs.

Morris: This is Wilson, today's governor?

Petris: Yes, Wilson. Now, to his credit, in his first year he did support a tax, when we faced a \$14 billion deficit. He supported some tax measures, and I think he deserves credit for doing that. That included an increase at the very top level, but it was a small increase. It generated a pretty good amount of money, but relatively speaking, it wasn't a big hit. And this involved people who had been in on the windfall during the Reagan years. They're the ones who profited by it. So our position was, give some of it back, for God's sake. It's not going to hurt you. And some of us said, "Yes," but the overwhelming majority said, "No." So Wilson did sign it. I thought he did a courageous thing, and he showed some good leadership. If it weren't for Wilson, it wouldn't have passed, because we needed Republican votes to get the bill passed.

So then what happens? Now we're in his second year of office. He goes to the state convention of the Republican party in January, and they boo him. They pass a resolution saying they're not going to support him for reelection, because he signed the tax bills. Now, the way we arranged it in the first year, everybody was looking at this horrible monster, \$14 billion deficit coming up if we didn't raise the money. I mean, that's

bigger than most states have for their whole budget. This is just part of [our] big budget, okay?

So the Democrats met with the governor and said, "Why don't we meet each other halfway?" "Well, what do you mean?" "You know we're going to need more taxes."

Morris: This is legislators meeting with the governor?

Petris: Legislators meeting with the governor, right.

Morris: How many of you?

Petris: Oh, I wasn't in that. It was just only three or four from each side. Maybe five or six, because it had both parties.

So the Democrats said, "We'll meet you halfway. We're looking at \$14 billion. Some of that has to be raised from taxes, and some of it has to come from cuts. Now, if you'll agree to meet us halfway and approve a tax increase for half of it, which means about \$7 billion, we will go to our caucuses and try to persuade them to support cuts." Now, what cuts are these? Social services, what else. So they did. Willie Brown went to his caucus, and our president came to our caucus and said, "This is the only way out for us. We cannot reject these cuts if Wilson strays from his normal path and his party and says, 'Okay, I'll go for the tax increase if you meet me halfway.'" I think the man deserves a lot of credit for that.

So that's what happened. I don't remember the exact numbers, but they were roughly 50-50. Seven billion in taxes, \$7 billion in cuts. Those cuts hurt. I mean, they're the soft underbelly--

Morris: And the governor said, "You'll make these cuts"?

Petris: Yes. And we did. I don't know if we picked particular cuts, but they did it in cooperation with each other. But it was the soft underbelly that gets hit--senior citizen assistance and all kinds of basic social programs that we've been fighting for for years and years. It was very sad, very painful cuts. But that's how we saved the state in that first year.

Well, the second year the deficit is down to \$12 [billion], and then it went down to \$7. So it became more manageable, but it was still very difficult. Of course, the cuts that hurt the most, in addition to social services, are the universities. My God, two years ago, the Cal State University system eliminated 12,000 classes, 12,000 courses. That's abominable. And they had to lay

off professors, and of course, in that kind of situation, we have a reputation in the country of having the finest universities, UC especially. The Cal State system is very strong in a number of fields. So the buzzards are always circling over California to swoop down and pick the best professors and carry them back to their place, and that's what they did. The best ones took off. They got these tremendous offers.

I remember listening to a professor from Berkeley. This is only one of many examples. Very bright, up-and-coming scientist, was going to be the best in his field. He had repeatedly turned down offers during that critical period from Eastern schools with a tremendous increase in salary. Almost tearfully he said, "I love this place too much, I'm not going to leave. But there are a lot of my colleagues who are leaving, and I don't blame them. They have family, and they're going."

You don't get them back the next year if your economy starts improving. They're gone. We're talking about decades before we can get back to where we were. So the impact has been absolutely terrible. Now, UC has been very skillful in adjusting, and they managed to get through that critical first year without cutting any classes. They asked the faculty to take on a heavier work load and do this and do that, made a lot of adjustments. But they've still been hurt.

Fund Transfers and Other Budget Strategies

Morris: What about the various agencies in the county government here in Oakland? Are they sitting on your advisory committees or meeting with you as this process is going on to say what can we do?

Petris: Oh, they're in communication all the time.

Morris: While the legislative negotiations are going on?

Petris: Oh, yes. They're up there testifying at the hearings, both individually and as part of the county supervisors' association, association of all the counties. But they took awful big hits too.

Morris: Yes, that's what this article in the *Tribune* is about.

Petris: Yes, that's that \$40 million. And that's why I carried a bill this year which went against my grain that transferred \$7 million out of the East Bay MUD [Municipal Utility District] treasury for

two years in a row and shifted it to the county to make up for the loss of money for police services. Of course, East Bay MUD came in and opposed it, but they were very apologetic, because they know I'm one of their strongest supporters, and I've fought a lot of battles up there on behalf of East Bay MUD. In fact, the previous year, after the governor started this thing of raiding the local coffers and transferring the money to the state--one year it's the schools, the next year it's the county, he went back and forth--so last year when he did that, his raid included special districts of various kinds--water district, lighting district, whatever.

East Bay MUD was in a panic, because they were going to get hit very hard. So I put in an amendment in the legislation, which to my delight managed to stay all the way through, which exempted multi-county districts from that hit. Totally exempted them. Now, that saved East Bay MUD, BART, East Bay Regional Parks. They didn't lose a penny. Well, other single purpose districts or single county districts were losing their shirts in the raid. So this year, East Bay MUD of course tried to defend itself and opposed my bill, but they acknowledged to me privately that they were very lucky to escape the hit last time, and it's their turn this time.

I also had an amendment which saved Kensington. Their police department would have been wiped out. I don't know how many they have; maybe three on the police force. [laughs] But the governor's program would have absolutely put them out of business. They would have just had to give up, no police department. So I put in an amendment that saved them.

But last year, it was through the multi-county mechanism that we managed to save them. I just couldn't protect them any more. It was their turn to take the hit. So I carried the bill reluctantly, because I wanted to have control of it. I didn't want to have somebody else carrying it and really hitting them harder. So I tried to contain the damage as much as I could, and as it turned out, the county understood it pretty well. Of course, they got the money, they were happy. But the East Bay MUD has a reserve of about \$70 or \$80 million, and this bill didn't even take money out of the reserve. What it did was eliminate the annual contribution to the enlarging of the reserve. So this year, they're not going to get the \$7 million additional that they usually get in the reserve, and next year they're not going to get it, but that's it. Two years and it's over.

Morris: I see, so there's a time limit on these budget actions?

Petris: Oh, yes, it's just a two-year thing. It's not forever, it's not a shift in the tax rate or anything like that.

Morris: Yes. It sounds like it takes some pretty skillful research to find out these--

Petris: Oh, somebody, yes, spent a lot of time. We've got a lot of good experts up there, and they spent a lot of time studying this whole array of problems.

XXIV REFLECTIONS ON A LONG CAREER

Policy vs. Budget Priorities: Welfare and Corrections

Morris: [An]other aspect of the recent budgets is that when we hear about the shortfalls and the things that have to be cut to make up the deficits, how does that equate with finding what sound like tremendous sums of money to put into bills for crime control and building more prisons and things like that?

Petris: Well, it doesn't. We don't have that money. We're committed, but we don't have the money. The only state agency that got an increase in its budget in the last two years is prisons. They got a whopping 10 percent. That's just to take care of current things, based on population increase. So the conservatives, who love to build prisons, are challenged. They say, "Hey, how come we're going to put all this money in prisons?" "Well, we can't avoid it, it's population growth." But when we tell [them] we need more money for welfare population growth due to the crummy economy and the fact that they can't find a job, [they] say no.

[Governor] Deukmejian's solution was just to put a cap. You only have this much to spend on welfare. It doesn't matter if the population triples the following year, you don't have the money. But you won't do that for prisons.

Morris: There was no cap on prison budgets?

Petris: No, absolutely not. Now, the one we don't have the money for is future construction of additional prisons, which everyone acknowledges is going to be required by Three Strikes and You're Out.

Morris: Doesn't the Three Strikes and You're Out ballot measure include provision for more prisons?

Petris: Yes, but not the money. The money isn't there. Each year in the budget we're going to have figure out a way to get the money. Through bond measures usually is how we get it. They've been defeating the school bond measures; let's see how they vote for prisons. They'll probably vote for the prisons. The public, I mean.

Morris: There are some on the ballot this year, aren't there?

Petris: Yes.

More Women in Elective Office

Morris: Okay. What I'd like to talk a little bit about also is during this thirty-year period, we've had not only an increase in minorities but an increase in women as candidates and in elective office. Have they made much of a difference in how the legislature does business?

Petris: I don't think there's much difference in how they do business; just that they have a voice that wasn't there before. The system, the procedure hasn't changed any, but the awareness has increased, the sensitivity has increased by the presence of the women, just as it was under the new minorities that came in. Sure, it has an impact.

Morris: Have women in the legislature raised issues that haven't been raised before?

Petris: No, I don't think they've raised any new issues. Just that they have managed to get the spotlight on [them] a little better. They have a women's caucus, which is not a partisan caucus; it's all the women, regardless of party, they belong to the women's caucus. They have their own issues that they emphasize. But those aren't new issues that we've never considered before. There are a lot of things that have been coming up that just didn't get passed, but they're getting more legislation passed than before. I don't remember the details.

Morris: Well, yes. If it's a women's caucus, you don't get to sit in on those.

Petris: No.

Morris: But if it's a bipartisan group, does that potentially have some effect down the road on how the two parties relate to each other in passing legislation or considering bills?

Petris: Well, yes, it interacts with that. But it hasn't had a big [effect]--

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Morris: You [were saying] that conservative Republicans are not going to vote for something because it's a women's--

Petris: They're not going to vote for women's rights, absolutely not. Any more than they voted for the rights of other minorities. They're just totally unsympathetic for the most part. There are other reasonable, moderate Republicans that are fine. I'm not speaking about all the Republicans, but the conservatives run the show in this state, the conservative Republicans. That's the Reagan heritage.

The Republican Right and the Democratic Rainbow

Morris: Or the Republican party?

Petris: Oh, yes, absolutely. Sure.

Morris: Do you see that [conservative control of the Republican party] for the foreseeable future, or has it always been and it just wasn't visible?

Petris: Well, I don't know about always. No, it hasn't always been. It wasn't that way under Earl Warren. But under Ronald Reagan, he carried the ball for the far right, and they gained enormous power in California and they still have it. They dominate the party, and they dictate the agenda, and they have pretty much their way in the formulation of the Republican party policy in the legislature. Wilson has run into trouble with them. They're the ones that read the riot act on him and said they weren't going to support him for reelection because of his votes on those tax measures. They didn't take into account the things he had to go through and the problems the state faced. All they say is, "Well, cut."

Well, we did cut. We cut \$7 billion; that's not easy. They don't care. They don't care. They'd just as soon see the whole welfare program eliminated. They think that people on welfare are

a bunch of bums, it's all their own fault: if they had any spunk, they'd go out and create a new Montgomery Ward and become multimillionaires. Totally insensitive to the conditions of the poor and the needs.

Morris: Is this rank-and-file Republicans, or is this more or less the leadership?

Petris: No, this is the leadership.

Morris: Leadership as in where the money comes from?

Petris: Sure, as in where the money comes from, and the [California] Republican Assembly, which started out as a moderate group. It was a fairly liberal group, the Republican Assembly. It's now extremely conservative and brags about it.

Morris: How about the Democratic party? We went through a new left and the old left. Did that cause problems within the party, and is that still the division--

Petris: Not in Sacramento. Because from the very beginning when I was there, we had a rainbow in the Democratic party. They covered everybody. We had very, very liberal people, and we had some pretty darn conservative people who came from conservative districts. They voted with the Republicans on a lot of the key issues. But on most issues, they voted Democratic.

And we still have them. You take a guy like my dear friend [Robert] Presley. He comes from a very conservative district, so if you sit in a committee and watch the votes, you see him voting with the Republicans eight times out of ten. But on some basic Democratic philosophy, he's there.

Morris: Like human services?

Petris: Yes. He's a Democrat, and he's proud of it. But there are a lot of other areas where he's extremely conservative, and he's representing his district. It's not that he watches to see what the Republicans are going to do; he knows his district. He doesn't have to wait for anyone else. That's his baby. So we've always had that range.

The Republican range is like this: very tiny, very short. Ours is like that [spreads arms wide]. I really believe it, that our party encompasses a lot more different viewpoints than the Republicans. As a matter of fact, I've often said that if Abraham Lincoln were living today, he would not join his party. [laughter] Especially during the civil rights movement. That

civil rights thing should have been passed many, many years before. It took a courageous Republican, Bill Knowland, who was majority leader--

Morris: In Washington?

Petris: In Washington, to run with that. Because prior to that, there was always an unholy alliance between the Republicans and the Dixiecrats from the South. They managed to kill any civil rights--you know, this civil rights thing didn't start with Martin Luther King. Harry Truman had that report, "To secure these rights"--it was taken from the Declaration of Independence--"to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men," et cetera, et cetera. The report under Truman pointed to the terrible gap in civil liberties, civil rights. Civil rights especially.

Morris: Coming out of World War II experiences?

Petris: Yes, after that. But it didn't get anywhere. Hubert Humphrey managed to move us forward. That great stirring speech of his at the Democratic Convention in '48, when Truman ran for president. He ran for election after he had [become president when Roosevelt died.]

Senator Bill Knowland, Civil Rights, and the 1958 Campaign

Morris: Tell me some more about Bill Knowland as the crusading liberal. He has a pretty conservative reputation around California.

Petris: Well, it's well deserved. He was extremely conservative, but when it came to this civil rights thing, he was very active. He had to push [President Dwight] Eisenhower into going along. Ike was no liberal; he was very conservative. He's thought of as a moderate, but on certain key social issues, he was very conservative.

Morris: Did you ever talk to Bill Knowland on this kind of thing?

Petris: No, not on this kind of thing. I got to know him pretty well after he came back from the Senate. While he was still in the Senate, I invited him to my home, my wife and I, on two or three social functions. We met him through our close friend Paul Manolis, who was his top staff person in the Senate and worked for him in a very high position at the *Oakland Tribune* when Senator Knowland came back. We were entertaining visiting dignitaries from Greece. I remember once we had the president of the parliament, and on other occasions we had other officials. We'd

have a little reception for them at our home, and we would invite Knowland.

I got to like him as a person. He and I got along very well. Politically, we just were pretty far apart. But after I got to know him, I found he was a very decent human being. I learned from a person who worked with him for years a lot of things you don't get in the press. When he came back, for example--now here, you know, he stubbed his toe on the right-to-work issue. Pat Brown just trounced him, and that's the number one reason he lost [when he ran for governor in 1958,] I think. There were other reasons, too, but that right-to-work [ballot measure], he just stubbornly insisted that no person should be forced to join a labor union; if he didn't want to join, he didn't have to join, he could still have his job and so forth.

Morris: Was that bad advice, do you think, or was that just [Knowland] being a businessman?

Petris: No, that's very deeply ingrained in his own spirit. I imagine that some of his political advisors must have cautioned him to lay off of that, that it was just the wrong time to be doing this in California. It was behind the times, and it was not a very smart thing to do politically. But he was a believer, and he stuck with it, and got disaster as a result.

But in spite of all the arguments that were used on the other side, just none of them got to him. One of the arguments I used in those debates was, okay, you know under the present law, if you have a closed shop, you've got to belong to the union. Now, if you don't want to belong to the union, then you shouldn't have any of the benefits that the union gets through its negotiations with management. If they stretch their vacation from ten days to fifteen, you don't get the extra five, because you don't want the burdens. You don't want to pay dues. So you shouldn't have the benefits.

But under the law, if you have a grievance against your employer, the union must represent you in that grievance. Even though you don't want to be in the union, and you stay out of it. They didn't talk about that, you see. [laughs]

Morris: You were out campaigning for that proposition, too--or against it?

Petris: Against it, absolutely. Sure. That's pretty fundamental. My father was a union man. He was a strong advocate of unions. He thought our unions were too weak. He worked for the railroad, Southern Pacific. He didn't think they were assertive enough or militant enough. Because of the sensitive nature of the whole

railway system in the United States, they had the legislation at the national level which made it very difficult for the labor railroad unions to go on strike. They were subject to a freeze order. All the president had to do was make a declaration and order them back to work, and they didn't have the same power to strike like the automobile people. Automobile workers can close down every automobile manufacturer in the state for weeks, but you do that to the railroads and you have a lot of economic problems in the country. We recognized that, and that's why--

Morris: Yes, you get into the nature of utilities and that sort of thing.

Petris: Yes.

Congressman Ron Dellums

Morris: Going back to the different kinds of Democrats, did you and Ron Dellums as he became more senior in Congress, did you get in each other's way at all, or manage to get along together? Because he's pretty much identified with being fairly activist.

Petris: Oh, yes, no. The more the years went by, the better we got along. We always did except at the local level. To this day, we don't agree on local level. In Berkeley, for example, he supports the most radical groups in Berkeley, and I support the moderates represented by the Berkeley Democratic Club. When he was on the Berkeley [city] council, he would openly support a new candidate against a Democratic incumbent. Well, I thought that was a terrible no-no unless the Democrat had really done something bad. If he's doing reasonably well, you support your own people and you encourage them to run for higher office.

He had a string of endorsements against his fellow Democratic officeholders, and I always thought that was terrible. So when it came to the local elections in Berkeley, we were always on opposite sides. But at the national level, I think he is--in my book, I would put him down as one of the top five members of the House of Representatives, in the whole country, not just out of California. I think he's a magnificent representative of his own constituency and the minorities as a whole nationally, and labor as a whole nationally. I just think he's been fantastic, just a tremendous legislator.

And the mere fact that he was able to hang in there in spite of all [his] criticism of the national defense effort, where he felt there was a lot of waste and there was a lot of phony fears

being generated--he proved to be right--by the CIA during the cold war, and they always manufactured some kind of incident prior to budget time. And if they didn't have an incident, they would publish reports that the Soviet Union was getting ready to double its defense budget and we had to match it. He would oppose it every time. Now [October 1994] he's chairman of that committee; that's amazing. Chairman of the Armed Services Committee.

Morris: That's a case where the seniority system seems to have a certain amount of poetic justice.

Petris: Well, that's true. But if he were up for that chairmanship a few years ago, they would have denied it to him. Somehow they always figure out a way, if they want to dump you.

Morris: But it's okay now that there's a Democrat in the White House? Is that the way it works?

Petris: I don't know if it has anything to do with the White House, just their internal workings.

Morris: Are there issues in which either Sacramento or you as an Oakland state senator have need to talk to people in Washington that Dellums is helpful on?

Petris: Oh, yes, sure. We stay in touch with him all the time locally. We don't bother him in Washington very much, but when we have a problem--a constituent comes with a problem that's at the federal level, we don't just say, "Well, go see the congressman," we get into it, get the facts. Our staff is made up of people who specialize in certain subjects. So we have an immigration person who works closely with Dellums' immigration person. If it's an immigration matter, it's a federal jurisdiction, so we give them as much help as we can, but we say, "You go see Mr. So-and-so on federal matters." The national people, like INS [U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service] in San Francisco, they don't pay much attention to us state people, but when a congressman calls them, they [listen.]

Morris: Really?

Petris: Oh, sure, absolutely.

Morris: But it's the same person with the same problem?

Petris: Yes.

Morris: And they won't talk to somebody from Nick Petris' staff?

Petris: Well, they'll talk to us, but we don't carry very much weight. The ones that carry the weight are the federal representatives. So we have a very good working relationship with all of our congressmen: with [Fortney "Pete"] Stark and with Dellums. Sometimes we have to go out of the area too. No, we work very closely with them. And we call on them for help for solving local problems as well sometimes when the federal government gets involved.

Oakland Issues; Regional Prospects

Morris: Yes. Would you and your office have gotten involved in the days when the governor's office and the HEW were leaning on Oakland's economic opportunity program?

Petris: Yes. What year was that?

Morris: That was like '64-'65.

Petris: Oh, way back then.

Morris: Right. One of the versions is that Reagan didn't like the way the anti-poverty money was being spent in Oakland and he tried to get the feds to wipe out the Oakland program.

Petris: Oh, yes. Well, it's deeper than that. [As I said earlier], Reagan hates the poor people. I don't care what anybody says: Reagan hates the poor. He's demonstrated that time and time again. For example, he doesn't like the War on Poverty program because it pays for lawyers who are very busy suing the government. He doesn't like the kinds of cases they handle when it doesn't involve the government.

Morris: How about the Port of Oakland and the Oakland Raiders? Did you get called in to aid the cause of keeping the Port of Oakland solvent when it had difficulties, and when the city council was trying to keep the Raiders from moving to Los Angeles?

Petris: Oh, yes, I got in on that somehow or other. They had their ups and downs, but over the years I think the port has done a great job. Just did a marvelous job. Started from scratch and expanded, and they brought in business from overseas. A friend of mine was chairman of that. Several of my friends were chairmen. Peter Tripp was one of them; he was a former vice mayor. He did a great job in the formative stages of the Port of Oakland. He traveled to Japan and brought in a lot of business from there. I

think overall, the Port of Oakland has done a great job. And now they're finally going to get the dredging started, thanks to Dellums and others in Washington.

Morris: Right. Did that take some negotiating also with the local water quality people?

Petris: Not the water quality people, but the BCDC [Bay Conservation and Development Commission]. Their executive director was a terrible thorn in the side. I thought he was distorting the mission of the BCDC, as the author originally of that statute. He was quoted on more than one occasion in those conferences they had, to work out the dredging, as strongly opposed to it. They had to get a permit from BCDC, and the appeal made to him was on the basis of economy of the area and how many jobs that would create. By deepening the channel, you bring in bigger ships, you have more shipping. It amounted to a large number of jobs. He said, "I don't give a damn about jobs. That's not my responsibility."

Generally over the years I've been a strong supporter of BCDC. I'm kind of a jealous author, you might say.

Morris: Right, the father of it all.

Petris: But I've tangled with them once in a great while. Once when the Oakland airport needed to extend its runways to accommodate larger airplanes, the staff again was very hostile. So I went in and made a very strong pitch in favor of granting this. After all, this is a new age, we have longer runways, we have bigger ships, we have bigger everything, and we have to keep up with the times. We have to be realistic. San Francisco has it. They've extended several times into the water. All we're asking is to do the same thing. It's done all over the country. And the safest way to have the planes come in is over the water instead of over these buildings.

Morris: Well, over the years, there have been repeated efforts to try and bring all of those separate agencies into one sort of regional planning and operating unit. What do you think the future of those kind of efforts are?

Petris: Very dim. There's just too many local interests that are opposed, and they help each other. We had that problem with ABAG [Association of Bay Area Governments]. I was a strong supporter of ABAG, because they were bringing about some modicum of cooperation. I got into several fights when we were creating the BCDC and there was very strong opposition to that, because they thought they were going to lose their sovereignty to this agency, even though it had locally elected officials on it, among others.

A large number, some appointed by the governor, some on it by virtue of the office they held, others appointed by fellow elected officials, by county supervisors and city council members.

I remember I used to tell them, "Well, one man's junk pile is another man's castle. You might be sitting on the water looking at something you think is horrible, but the person that has it and is doing something thinks it's great."

We were afraid that a certain group within the local governments would--I call them mutual backscratchers. If Berkeley didn't like a certain project today, they'd prevail on Oakland to oppose it, and next time around, Oakland would help Berkeley kill some other project. It was mostly on the negative side, not on the positive side.

So I think the prospects of a genuine regional approach are very dim and remote. It's been brought up many times.

Morris: Even in a period like what we're presumably in now, of economic shortfall?

Petris: Yes, even there.

Morris: It's not an opportunity for getting some consolidation in order to cut the deficit?

Petris: No, I don't think so. It's too strongly ingrained.

XXV ADVICE TO THE NEXT GENERATION

Understanding Our Court System

Morris: That brings us to the point, I think, of when you're talking to students, which I gather you do in addition to other responsibilities.

Petris: Yes, as much as I can. I always enjoy talking to students.

Morris: What kinds of things do you try and convey to them about the principles of government or what makes it work, or why we should continue to--?

Petris: Well, I first try to sound them out by asking them a lot of questions. It's amazing how they vary from school to school and grade level to grade level. Some kids are very sharp and they're right on the ball and they're well informed, and other kids don't even know what you're talking about. So I play the teacher often.

I generally try to make it more simple. I don't talk about the principles of the Constitution and our founding fathers. I get into it in a different way. For example, I find an abysmal amount of ignorance about our court system--among adults as well as children. It isn't just the kids. So I try to get them to have an understanding of why we have courts and what their function is. I ask them, for example--I vary the examples--but I'll ask them, "Suppose you started to build a fence in your back yard, and as you're getting underway and the neighbor figures out what you're doing, he comes over very angry. He says you're encroaching on his property by a whole foot. And you argue back and forth and you can't come to any agreement. You don't want to move six inches to compromise, and he doesn't want you to [build] at all because you're way over on his property. How are you going to resolve that?"

"Well, I'm going to tell him this, and I'm going to tell him that." "Yeah, but it isn't working, and he's going to tell you something, and it's not working. Where do you go?"

Once in a while, somebody will say, "Well, we'll go to court." But most of the time, they don't get it, so I have to tell them. You go to court. Somebody files a lawsuit. Now, the majesty of the judicial system is that all of us agree in advance, whether we realize it or not, that we're going to respect and honor the decision of the court. Even though we might appeal it all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, ultimately we're going to follow that decision. So we all agree that they're the ones that we give the power to to decide these issues. And that's true whether you're fighting over a back fence or General Motors, the biggest company in the country, is fighting some other giant like IBM over a contract with their computers. Who's going to resolve that? The courts. They start down here [at the municipal and superior courts], and you move up through the appeals process, if need be, and further on to the state and then the U.S. Supreme Court if the dispute isn't settled.

Now, how do you suppose people who don't have courts decide an argument?

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Petris: I'll tell you how. They had a big club, and the guy who was the biggest and had the biggest club would use force to beat up on the other one, and that's how it was resolved. Well, we like to believe we've gotten away from that for a long, long time. But ultimately, that's why we have wars. Nations can't decide.

What we miss is the fact that there are a lot more issues decided between nations in the courts and in mediation than there are through wars.

Morris: That's good to hear.

Petris: Well, it's true. Nations are quibbling all the time over economic differences, over treaties, how to interpret treaties. I have a cousin who is a justice of the European international court. It's called the International Court of Justice of the European Community. He was appointed by the government of Greece to serve on that. I visited him back there in Luxembourg and I was fascinated to hear disputes between nations being discussed by the court, which arose from differences of interpretation of treaties that these two nations had with each other, usually on commercial matters, but they'd cover other matters too.

So I try to get the kids to understand [that] it makes a lot more sense to have the judges resolve this, but it doesn't work unless we all realize that we give our consent ahead of time to give him that power. Especially if we don't like the result, we're still going to obey it. That's an order of court; that's the law. So I get into that.

Finding Heroes

Petris: Then I also try to personalize it by talking about individual leaders. I ask them, "Who are your heroes?" And that usually stumps them. There's always a smart aleck who says, "Michael Jackson," [but] they know I'm talking about public things, government issues, not entertainment. Of course, they're telling the truth: [he] is [their] hero. So there's nothing wrong with that, except that it doesn't fit into the direction I'm trying to go. [laughs] So I get a lot of interesting responses to that.

Inevitably, somebody will ask me, "Well, who are your heroes?" And that's what I'm looking for. I say, "Well, there are a lot of heroes. The first are my mother and my father." And I tell them why. And then I say, "The rest of the heroes I carry around with me all the time," which I do. I have them [with me] today--they're in the form of coins. So this gives me a chance to talk about the birthplace of democracy, about ancient Greece, Athens in particular. I'll say, "Here's a coin, thirty drachmas. The face is Pericles. Now, who's Pericles?" And most of them don't know, so I tell them about Pericles and the Golden Age of Greece and the first genuine democracy in the history of the world. He was a great statesman and a leader; that's Pericles.

Then I have Alexander the Great, and I tell them about Alexander the Great. I pass the coin around, so they all look at it. I also have Aristotle, who is on a Greek coin--

Morris: Is he?

Petris: Yes. Isn't that great?

Morris: Yes.

Petris: I don't think we have any philosophers on our coins in the U.S., but of course, Aristotle has been around a lot longer. [laughs] He's another hero. And let's see, who's this? Oh, Homer. Here's Homer.

So then I go to the U.S., and I say, "I have some U.S. coins here. Here's George Washington, a twenty-five cent piece," and I pass that around. "Who was he?" Well, they know who George Washington was, so we talk about him for a while.

Morris: They do know George Washington? I'm glad.

Petris: Yes. Well, so far. [laughs] So then I relate that to the founding fathers, and how they drew on Greece for the basic principles of the democratic society: a constitution, a government of laws and not of men, as opposed to a dictatorship where it's a government according to the whim of the leader and not some guides that everybody knows, and make the contrast there. And "he's a great hero; he's the father of our country." So I pass that around.

Then I have Thomas Jefferson, one of my favorites of all time. He's on the nickel, and I pass that around. Then I have John Kennedy, the half-dollar. Some of them, of course, recognize that. They know the name of John Kennedy. Then I show them the dime: Franklin Roosevelt. Some of them know about Roosevelt, some don't, but I want to make sure I talk to them about Roosevelt and why he's my hero.

And the last one is the lowliest coin of all: the penny. Now, who's on the penny? Well, everybody knows it's Abraham Lincoln, and in most cases they know who Lincoln is. So I talk about Lincoln. Why is he famous? And I get interesting answers. Sometimes they'll say, "Well, he freed the slaves," or they'll say, "The Gettysburg Address." Well, what was that all about? Why was he making a speech? What was the situation?

And eventually, I get to explain that fully, that this speech is equated with Pericles' great speech, a funeral oration, both of which talked about a great war that saved the democratic society of the time. In Pericles' case, the Persians were invading. They had invaded three or four times, and the Greeks won colossal victories over them, and the funeral oration was made after the battle of Marathon, in which he praised the soldiers and he comforted the surviving families, and he talked about why it was so important that we win that war, because it was the forces of freedom against the authoritarian system in the East where individuals had no freedom whatsoever. And what do you think Lincoln was talking about? Exactly the same thing. So I'd try to tie them together.

So I carry these around all the time as my good luck pieces, but I use them in talking to students. One of the coins is missing; I noticed that the other day. I forget which. Oh,

Pericles is missing. I think when I passed them around in one of the classes--

Morris: Some scamp didn't pass it back.

Petris: Yes, I didn't get it back. So I asked some friends from Greece the other day when they go back home to send me a couple of coins of Pericles.

Morris: Pericles is still on a Greek coin?

Petris: The current coin. Yes, it's not an ancient coin, it's a current one, contemporary. [telephone interruption] So I really enjoy that.

I went to a grammar school once in Sacramento at the request of my little nephew, who is Anna's sister's boy. He's thirteen. This was a couple of years ago. I did that in his class, and asked him about it after. Oh, he thought it was neat, he learned some things too. I said, "Well, you and I have to talk about these things a little more."

Morris: Oh, absolutely. Isn't that great to have a new audience?

How about, have you been recruited to talk to college students at Sac State or here in the Bay Area?

Petris: Very little. I used to do a lot more in the past. I guess they got tired of me. I don't know, but I rarely get invited these days.

Morris: Really? There's new college students every four years.

Petris: I know. I used to go to Berkeley a lot, and I haven't been there for a long time. The only person that's invited me to Berkeley in the last three or four years is the Berkeley Students' Democratic Club. [laughs] But I used to go speak to their poli sci classes, I used to speak at Mills College, at Holy Names, and at a prep school here in Oakland, which is a pretty remarkable place. I don't remember the name of it--I think it was just called the Prep School.

Morris: How about College Prep?

Petris: Yes, College Prep. They used to be up here near Broadway on Claremont Avenue, and now they're way up on the hill. For quite a while they've been up there in the hills, just above the freeway, not far from where I live, as a matter of fact. They've got a whole new complex, some beautiful new buildings. But I haven't

ever been invited to talk to them at their new location. But I enjoyed speaking to the university students, too.

Morris: Do you use the same approach with them to get the same ideas across?

Petris: I didn't start this coin thing until about three or four years ago, and I haven't been to any college groups since that time. But I always start with questions, though. I want to know what they think of this or that.

Morris: I've heard of that before; isn't that called the Socratic method?

Petris: Yes, that's right. [laughter]

Government as a Career; Paying Attention to Politicians

Morris: And are you trying to encourage them to think about government as a career for themselves?

Petris: Yes, I always talk about that too. They ask me what do I do, the high school kids, what do I do, how much do I get paid--they always ask me that. And do I have the power to do this or that. So I explain what the job is about, and what it's like, and how exciting it is. I try to make it sound attractive. Almost every time, except when I forget, I ask them, "How many want to run for the Senate? How many want to be governor? How many of you want to do this or that?" Now, the reason I do that, in addition to exciting their interest, I ask them, "Well, suppose you had my job right now and you're the senator." Let's say a high school class. "What kind of laws would you introduce?"

Morris: And they say?

Petris: They probably haven't given that much thought. And they come up with some things, like more money for schools, and [that's] pretty nice. But then at a time when we have some very serious problems in our society, socioeconomic, it gives me a chance to give them a little lecture, you might say, on the plight of the poor, whose responsibility is it. People are homeless; what should we do about it? What kind of legislation, if any, would you introduce? Or do you think it can be handled through volunteer groups? And we get into a pretty good discussion.

And then among black students, I always talk about Martin Luther King. Of course, they all know him, and one of the questions I always do is this, to get them interested in politics --that's right, I had forgotten that--I always ask them after we've had a discussion for a while, "Who is the greatest person that ever lived in the history of the United States?" Person--I don't say politician. And invariably, the answers come out: Washington, Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Kennedy, along that line.

So then I ask them, "Now, who were these people anyway? What did they do?" So eventually they'll say, "Well, they were in government." I said, "They're all politicians, aren't they?" "Yes, that's right, they're politicians."

So then I ask them, "Do you have a lot of homework?" Oh, they always have a lot of homework. "So you work at it, what, an hour or two a night?" "Oh, yeah, we do a lot of homework." And I look at the teacher, and the teacher usually smiles.

So then I ask them, "Now, suppose you want to take a break. You've been studying for a solid hour, and you want to take a break and have a glass of water or some milk, so you turn on the television or the radio. The first thing you hear is a politician making a speech. Might be the mayor of the city, might be the president, might be whoever. What happens next?" Every single time, they say, "We turn it off."

I say, "Well, at least you're very honest about it." So then I tell them, "You just told me who the greatest people in the history of the country were, and they're all politicians. Now you're telling me you hear a politician, you turn him off. How is a politician going to become a [hero like George] Washington if nobody listens to him? You see what you're doing when you turn him off? You're depriving yourself of a chance to find out what kind of leader this person is, and you're depriving yourself of a chance to learn what the major problems are in your own community. You may not agree with what he says are the worst problems. He might say, 'We need a whole new sewer system in this town,' and what you're thinking of [is], we should have a longer summer vacation." [laughter] So I lead them into different ideas that way.

"Let me ask you: what was Washington before he became president?" They'll say, "He was a general in the Revolutionary War." "No, way before that, when he was much younger." Most of them don't know. Well, he was a senator. He was a state senator. It was called the House of Burgesses in Virginia.

Morris: I had forgotten that. I would have said he was a surveyor.

Petris: Yes, he was, much earlier. "And Abraham Lincoln served in the Congress. Doesn't that tell you something? Now, if you don't pay attention to the politician, how are you going to vote if you don't know anything about them? And here's a chance to learn. Because tomorrow you're going to be a voter.

"Now, suppose this politician, on the other hand, while you're listening says, 'I've been studying our school system, and I am convinced that we're much too lenient and our summer vacations that we give the children are much too long. They should be only two weeks; that's enough. Most of us who work only get two weeks' vacation the whole year, and that's the way it should be with the students. They should be working harder at school.' Would you turn it off?" And they say, "No."

I say, "You bet your life you don't. You're going to run inside and tell your parents, 'We want you to listen to this crazy person who's trying to take our vacation away,' and you pay very close attention. And then you'll talk about it, and maybe your teacher will tell you, 'Well, if that's a serious proposal, if somebody in Sacramento brings it up, maybe you should go up there and express yourself.'

"Well, how are you going to do that? Where do you go?" They don't know. So I explain the committee process. Now, here's a bill that says summer vacation is like this now, instead of like that. So you go up there and you tell them why you think you need more time.

"Now, how come you're doing that for the summer vacation but you're not doing it for the sewer system? The sewer system is just as important, because if you didn't have it, we'd have epidemics of illness. You'd get all kinds of terrible diseases. So you see, the citizen usually reacts to something that directly affects him or her. Maybe his pocketbook, maybe his leisure time, in your case, vacation.

"But the good citizen doesn't limit himself to what directly impacts him. That's kind of selfish. The good citizen looks at all the problems in our society and tries to improve the whole level of our society, and that means being concerned for the poor, being concerned for the minorities, being concerned for the homeless, being concerned for our system of justice, the whole thing.

"Now, as you get older and you pay attention more, you'll find that you're more interested in some things than others. But by the time you go around the room, if everyone pays attention like you're going to be doing, all the problems are covered."

Morris: Each person has something he or she cares about.

Petris: Each person has some interest, right. If I were talking to them today, I'd say, "Well, maybe you want to get after the baseball players for the strike, or the owners, you want baseball to continue, you don't want it to die. Baseball's dead in our country now [during 1994-1995 players strike]. What about that? Sure, okay, you could work on that. But your sister might be interested in something else. And by the time you get around the group, you're going to pretty well cover most of the problems.

"So as a senator, you're listening to everybody, and you have your own ideas of how you're going to improve the society. So you put in bills to try to accomplish that. Isn't that exciting? And suppose you get the law passed, and the governor signs it. Because of your efforts, you've got a law that really has teeth in it and it's really going to make a difference in the lives of a large number of people."

Well, at that point they'll ask me, "What kind of bills have you had?" So I tell them about some of my medical stuff, the kidney dialysis, that whole program is mine. Saved a lot of lives. Crippled children's program that's aimed at the youngsters who have hemophilia that were just in terrible shape. There wasn't enough attention being paid to them. I got them under the crippled children's program and got a lot more attention for them. It prolongs their lives, doesn't save them, because they're all doomed. It's just a matter of time in most cases.

And I talk about a few medical things which mean life or death. Talk about my car seat program, safety for kids. Special seat in the car. You know that special seat in the back of the car?

Morris: The one you buckle a child into in the back seat of the car?

Petris: It's more than just the safety belt. It's got the head thing, and it's got a sturdy seat. Well, that's only been going on a few years. I carried that. It was one of the first in the country. You know how many children's lives have been saved by that?

"Now, don't you think that's a great source of comfort and satisfaction if you, as one person, can say, 'As a result of the work I did on this bill, there are thousands of lives that have been saved in the last ten years?'" And I tell them in the first couple of years, I used to get newspaper clippings from total strangers, and they'd have a picture of a terrible crash of two cars. Two people killed in one, one person in the other, a little baby in the back in the seat, strapped in, a little youngster,

two, three, four years old, not a scratch. "Now, wouldn't you feel good if you could say, 'I did that'? So that means something, to be a legislator." That's one of the ways I try to get them interested.

Apathy Makes Us Vulnerable

Morris: I should think so. You make a very, very powerful case. Why do you suppose so many people are so cynical, disgusted, turned off, about politics and government? And they don't vote. It is such an exciting subject.

Petris: Well, I'll probably get in trouble for my answer, because my staff tells me, "Don't use that answer." I think it's their own damn fault. And I have told Rotary and Kiwanis and the chamber in speeches in the last two or three years that I regret very much to say, after all these years that I've been in politics, that this great American public is the least attentive, least interested, and therefore the least informed body of citizens in the world! I remember the first time I said that to a business group about three or four years ago, they really got upset, and they challenged me.

I said, "Well, first of all, that doesn't apply to my district." [laughter] So I would tell them, "Well, people don't really pay much attention, they don't know what the issues are. They [rely] on thirty-second commercials during election time. They don't read the newspapers. Very seldom do you find people that read the paper cover to cover. They get a five-minute blitz on the screen. If they're up until eleven for the eleven o'clock news, they might watch it for a half hour. But even that isn't enough. The [news broadcast] can't cover everything.

"Then they get excited when they run into a problem, and they don't realize they're really part of the problem." So I remember the first time a guy challenged me and he said, "Give me an example." I said, "I'll give you a couple.

"Nineteen eighty-eight, George Bush running for president, his first election. 'Read my lips: No new taxes.' You suckers swallowed that hook, line, and sinker, and you voted for him. Now, let me ask you: think back to '88. You know what the state of the economy was then? You know what the problems were in our country then? There isn't a person who was actively interested in what's going on who didn't know that that statement was a total

fraud, who didn't know that no matter who the president is, taxes have to be raised. It's time, because of this and this and that.

"Now, if George Bush were a candidate in England, France, Germany, Italy, Austria, any one of our Western democratic allies and made that statement under similar circumstances, the people would have laughed him right out of the race. They would have said, 'Who in the hell does he think he is, treating us like a bunch of five-year-olds? We know what the conditions are. What do you mean, there's not going to be any new taxes? Of course there are going to be new taxes. You can't get away from it.' But we bought it, hook, line, and sinker. That's not the only reason he got elected, but it's a big reason.

"So what happens? He goes in, new taxes are enacted, he signs the bill. He didn't even veto it. Why? Because the reality caught up with him. To his credit, he signed it--but he broke his promise.

"Now, there are other countries that are a lot more enlightened because people pay attention. My people come from Greece with the glorious tradition of the birthplace of democracy. They've got plenty of political problems, but it's not due to lack of attention. Maybe it's due to too much attention." [laughter] So I challenged him. I said, "I'd like you to come to Greece with me, I'll take you to a remote mountain village and [let you] meet the shepherd. He hasn't been past grammar school. His mission in life is to count the sheep and protect them from the wolves. He has little communication with the outside world.

"But you ask him, 'Who is the prefect in this province? What are the issues? What about the national government?' Ask him anything you want on the political scene, and he'll answer you bang, bang, bang, bang, just like that, and will give you a good dose of his own opinion.

"And then he'll say, 'Where are you from?' You tell him, 'United States.' He'll give you an earful about what's happening here. Well, how can he do that? He's up there--he's got a little pocket radio, and he listens to the news--"

Morris: Not the top forty?

Petris: Right. He listens to the news, and he listens to political discussions, and then once in a while he'll go down to the nearest village and have a cup of coffee in a coffee shop. It's an old Greek tradition, and all they do there is talk politics. He'll spend a few hours there, and he'll come back to the sheep. Now, he's better informed than most average guys you grab on the street

and poke a mike at them and ask them questions. They don't know. They can't answer those same questions. They just don't care. It's not that we're less smart. It's not that the [Greek villagers] are much more intelligent than we are. It's just that they're interested and they pay attention.

And you know what the result is? The result is it makes you very vulnerable. So the political snake-oil artist can sell you anything he wants, and when he says, "No new taxes," you buy it. When you know that the conditions demand it, you're not going to be influenced by what he says. But since you don't know--.

And then I gave another example. I said, "Well, you know, let's say next week you read in the paper that Senator Petris made a speech somewhere and he said this and this and that. And you say, 'Wow, that's really good, good for him. That's a great idea. We ought to do it.' Well, if you've been in the habit of reading the paper every day, you would know that two weeks before, that same senator said just the opposite to another group. But since you don't read the paper every day and you happened to catch this one, you're snookered."

So they say, "What's the solution?" I say, "You do the same thing [my parents did]. It's too late for you and me, but for the kids, you do what my mother and father did for us. They were immigrants, they studied English at night to learn to become citizens, and my father, a daily ritual when he got home from work, tired as he was, waiting for dinner, he would read two newspapers cover to cover every day. You can't develop that as a lifetime habit without asking a lot of questions. So as you run into this speech, it would remind you of the prior speech, and you'd say, 'Aha, there's another phony. Who does he think he's trying to fool? Not me.' But if you haven't read anything, you're very, very vulnerable. So you have to teach your kids, read everything, and read it with a critical eye."

And the newspaper is only the beginning. You go from that to journals of opinion, periodicals, select--we have wonderful programs on television that discuss public issues, PBS especially, McNeill-Lehrer, all kinds of things. But people don't follow them. They don't give a damn. Then they get turned off. Why do they get cynical and turned off? They haven't produced anything, they haven't contributed. So what are they angry at other people for?

Morris: Wonderful, wonderful. Cathy said you had a couple of places to be.

Petris: Yes, I have to go. I guess it's getting to be that time.

Morris: Actually, I think this is a good stopping place, and when you get all the transcript, if you find there are more things you want to say, we can include them.

Petris: Oh, no, I think I've said too much! [laughs]

Morris: Well, with reason, you can delete.

Petris: No, I've enjoyed it. It's caused me to sit back and think about some of these things that have happened.

Morris: Good. You've put things beautifully and told some wonderful stories.

Petris: Well, I'm honored to be included in this series.

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I. INTRODUCTORY COMMENT TO FIT THE OCCASION

II. We've been having a lot of fun here tonight. We are celebrating the liberation of a great man and the beginning of a new career.

With your indulgence, I would like to open my portion of the program with a prayer -- beautiful thoughts expressed by Robert Louis Stevenson a long time ago: for though we are a thousand gathered to pay tribute to Martin Huff, the ties of affection are so strong, reinforced by the esteem and admiration which we feel for him that ~~ixxixix~~ our emotions bind us together like one big family. In that spirit, I'll ask all of you to join hands with the person sitting on ~~xxx~~ either side of you -- and if you can link up between tables, reach out and form one big circle of hands and hear this prayer with me:

k LORD behold our family here assembled.
We thank Thee for this place in which we dwell;
for the love that unites us;
for the peace accorded us this day;
for the hope with which we expect the morrow;
for the health, the work, the food and the bright skies
that make our lives delightful;
and for our friends in ~~ap~~ all parts of the earth.

Give us courage, gaiety and the quiet mind.
Spare to us our friends, soften to us our enemies.
Bless us, if it may be, in all our innocent endeavors.
If it may not, give us the strength to encounter
that which is to come, that we be brave in peril,
constant in tribulation, temperate in wrath, and
in all changes of fortune
AND DOWN TO THE GATES OF DEATH, LOYAL AND LOVING ONE TO
ANOTHER.

Amen.

* Speech as typewritten by Petris. An accompanying note comments, "Obviously, there was considerable deviation from the notes, but I believe the essence is here."

tend to take it for granted. We forget what a ^{high price we paid +} ~~price~~ long and painful and laborious and bloody road it was which was brought us here:

In the earliest days, at the dawn of history we see the Sumerians developing the first cities out of their agrarian surplus in the Mesopotemian valley between the two great rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates. They are supplanted by a brilliant people whose art work we envy and whose architecture is still a great mystery to us -- the Egyptians. But those cultures were ruled by despots with absolute power of life and death over all their subjects.

In the next phase of mankind's upward march the noble Greeks appeared on the scene, bringing us out of the world of fear and superstition and into a marvelous order governed by rational man -- men of reason who ~~considered~~ regarded other men with contempt as barbarians if they were content to BELIEVE WITHOUT REASON AND LIVE WITHOUT LIBERTY.

"MANY ARE THE WONDERS," proclaims Sophocles in the Antigone, "BUT NOTHING IS MORE WONDERFUL THAN MAN".

"AT the center of the Greek outlook," writes Professor Bowser, "Lay an unshakable belief in the worth of the individual man. In centuries when large parts of the earth were dominated by absolute monarchies of the east, the Greeks were evolving their belief that a man must be respected not as the instrument of an omnipotent overlord, but for his own sake,. They sought at all costs to be themselves, and in this they were helped by the nature of their country." ^{The Greeks were un-reverent toward authority. They even talked to the Gods + quarreled with them whom they created in the image of man.}

And the nature of that country provided a fertile field for individual expression and worth and that in turn led to self-

Uses of POWER -

Prometheus
Heracles
Athena
founded the
Areopagos
Supreme
ct.

Distribution of Power -

Watergate
med blind-
ness toward
power -

Anything goes

Alexander
Greeks wd
not bend
their knees
even to him

government. This, Will Durant observes, "was something new in the world; life without kings had not yet been dared by any great society. Out of this proud sense of independence, individual and collective, came a powerful stimulus to every enterprise of the Greeks; it was their liberty that inspired them to incredible accomplishments in arts and letters, in science and philosophy,... A heroic effort of flesh and spirit rescued these achievements, and the promise they held, from the dead hand of alien despotism and the darkness of the Mysteries, and won for European civilization the trying privilege of freedom."

Although the Greeks were conquered by the Romans their letters and philosophy and institutions were in turn adopted by the conquerors who ~~found~~ found the selves sending their best young men to Athens to be educated.

But then that civilization was plunged into darkness and for centuries the rule of despots returned in to nation after nation until all of what we know as Western Civilization was in a straightjacket again. There was no advance on the frontier established by the Greeks until King John of England made some concessions to the knights of the realm ^{at Runnymede} ~~and other~~ in 1215. ~~in 1215.~~ ~~in 1215.~~ ~~In the year 1215 a rebellion took place.~~

The knights who were responsible for collecting taxes and paying tribute to the King and for fighting his wars finally got tired of it. If they were going to be called upon to make these sacrifices, then they wanted to share in the power.

And the march toward self-government started all over again. One day they knights surrounded King John ~~at~~ as he

sat upon his throne and said, ^{with} swords in hand, held in a menacing manner: JOHNNY BABY, WE WANT A PIECE OF THE ACTION, or else--- off goes your head. The King allowed as how he would welcome a discussion of the matter and their demands were met -- in writing -- in an instrument called Magna Carta in the year 1215.

From that day on the rise of man in the west becomes again a long, slow, laborious, painful and bloody process -- resulting in ever widening shares of power ~~to~~ down the totem pole, down the pecking order, until Parliament was formed and ultimately a House of Commons.

But, as much as England had progressed by the Age of Enlightenment in the 18th Century, she was governed still by a tyrant, as far as the American colonies were concerned. So we staged our demands for sharing a piece of the action and ultimately we got the whole ~~prize~~ pie by forcibly ejecting the British.

Yet in our own country, the American Revolution was just a beginning. Human nature being what it is, we find that those who made the revolution as freedom loving as they were, and as noble their ideals and concepts for the uplifting of mankind -- they were stingy and did not share their power with the poor, with those who did not own real property, with women, or with Black people. United States senators were not elected by a direct vote of the people, but by the state legislatures -- for many decades.

And so we witnessed a re-enactment of the encirclement of King John by the confrontation of many King Johns in our country -- *only here it was through the ballot box that victories were won* by the women in their suffrage movement (which is still going on

in the fight for the Equal Rights Amendment), by the Mexican-American farm laborer struggling to find his place in the American sun from California to Florida, by the Black person who followed Martin Luther King into the segregated restaurants and into jail, by Rosa Parks who ~~sk~~ sat in that bus on that k dra atic day in Birmingham and said "I won't move any further back in the bus I'm tired. I've been working hard all day. And besides, I'm already in the back part of the bus." By the Black man who endured the electric cattle prods of Bull Connors, and the fire-bombing of his homes and his churches, and the murder of his children and of ~~the~~ college students who rode the freedom buses into the South to raise the same banner of ~~freedom~~ liberty against centuries of oppression which the handful of Greeks raised against the mighty Persian Empire.

Every skirmish, every upheaval, which in our own time seemed so distasteful to the "silent majority", results in broadening the power base of democracy--with extension of the franchise, with a greater share in the economy ~~kt~~ through increased ^{meaningful} opportunities in education and employment .

To accomplish these objectives, it takes good men and women to step forward as leaders and models of good citizenship.

"The world is upheld by the veracity of good men," wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson. "They make the earth wholesome, . . . They who lived with them found life glad and nutritious. Life is sweet and tolerable only in our belief in such society; and actually, or ideally, we manage to live with superiorss...the search after the great is the dream of youth, and the most serious occupation of manhood...."

Among those good men is Martin Huff.. whose name throughout this country is synonymous with integrity, honesty, courage, devotion to our institutions and to the law.

It was his persistent courage and towering integrity under fire, under tremendous pressure, which led to this salute by all of us this evening. In every age it seems that someone in authority seeks to abuse the law, to flaunt it, to twist it to his own purpose, contrary to the letter and the spirit of the statutes. *And some brave men rises up + blows the whistle.*

In ancient Greece it was ARISTIDES THE JUST. He was so devoted to the concept of JUSTICE that he slavishly lived and practiced JUSTICE in every sense of its rich meaning in all his dealings with fellow men. But the Athenians wearied of him and ~~his~~ his constant living reminder of what each of them should be like. They found it too difficult to emulate so they ~~removed him from their society by ostracizing him~~ *ostracized him.* ~~into exile.~~ *And Socrates - ~~refused~~ ^{he gladly} to flee to Thebes -*

In another era, Sir Thomas More, Chief magistrate of England refused to bend the law in order to accommodate the desires of King Henry Eighth on the question of his divorce and subsequent marriage to Anne Boleyn. He would not compromise. And he paid for his valor, his courage, his integrity, with his head. But history acclaim him the ~~hero~~ the hero and his executioner the villain.

And in our time and in this place we have Martin Huff the shining example of the good citizen, obedient to our laws, who refused to close his eyes to special privilege and favor demanded by our contemporary King Henryies. We do not have to await the judgment of centuries of history to separate the hero from the villains in this piece. We know that vindication comes in the knowledge of having done what is right and lawful.

in spite of temptations, of threats, of pressures...

A few years ago a great American said, after having been aligned for a couragesous decision:

"....One must be true to the things which one lives. The counsels of discretion and cowardice are appealing. The safe course is to avoid situations which are disagreeable and dangerous. Such a course might get one by the issue of the moment, but it has bitter and evil consequences. In the long days and years which stretch beyond that moment of decision, one must live with one's self; and the consequences of living with a decision which one knows has sprung from timidity and cowardice go to the roots of one's life. It is not merely a question of peace of mind, although it is vital; it is a matter of integrity of character."

(Dean Acheson)

I believe this describes the position and the conduct of Martin Huff, the Good Citizen, who understands and appreciates what Democracy is all about. It means for all of us a lesson in the obligations of good citizenship. It means that if we are to preserve this system of ours, so grand and glorious, with all its faults and weaknesses, we will have to WORK at it, purposefully, devotedly, every day of our life. And even if we feel we that we have not fulfilled the promise to our ourselves, or we have not reached the ~~objektive~~ goals, we can look back with Oliver Wendell Holmes who said "Alas, gentlemen, that is life. We cannot live our dreams. We are lucky enough if we can give a sample of our best, and if in our hearts we can feel that it has been nobly done."

Martin Huff, the Good Citizen, can rest assured that his work has been nobly done. We thank him for this and

for providing us with such an inspiring example of what our country is all about. Virtue in public service was the goal of the Athenians during the Golden Age. It was the goal of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson.

John Adams said that "The material rewards of public service were indeed small, but if virtue was to be rewarded with wealth, it would not be virtue. If virtue was to be rewarded with fame, it would not be virtue of the sublimest kind. Who would not rather be Fabricius than Caesar? Or Aristides the Just than even such a noble figure as William III?.."

On his first day as a private citizen Martin plunged into a new public service. He has already been up and down this state appearing on Television, in press conferences and meeting with large numbers of people to bring about an improvement in our tax structure in California. He ~~xxxxxxx~~ is working full time, without a salary,

PLEASE REFER TO:

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CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE

Senate

August 1, 1994

Life at the University of California at Berkeley began for me in January, 1940. I was a bewildered 16 year old from McClymonds High School in Oakland, the only student coming from a tiny class of 100 and going directly to U.C. with an enrollment of over 16,000! A few others did go later, after working for a year or two. One of them became a doctor. I am grateful to my high school classmates who went to work immediately. Their taxes helped put me through U.C.

Today I still think of U.C. with a great deal of gratitude and affection. As a student I benefitted greatly from the stimulating, meaningful application to me of its motto: Let There Be Light. Apart from that, I am grateful as a citizen and Senator of California for the magnificent contributions of the University to our state, our country and, indeed, the whole world!

My parents, Chris Petris and Mary Kakouris Petris were immigrants from Greece. They had a better than average education. Both of my mother's brothers who remained in Greece became educators. For several decades my father worked at the Southern Pacific round house in West Oakland, servicing the steam locomotives. He saw the world from a wet, noisy and greasy pit, underneath the engine. He inspected and repaired the "truck", the bed of wheels on which the locomotive is cradled.

I have a younger brother, Gus, and a younger sister, Katherine. Our parents became naturalized citizens when we were in grammar school. From that time, until their deaths, they never missed voting in an election. I have seen them get up out of a sick bed and walk to the polling place on a cold or wet day in November. Good citizenship and a good education were top priorities they emphasized for us. To be a good American, they felt, we must first be cognizant of our Hellenic heritage. Thus, they lectured us on the wonders of ancient Greece, the cradle of western civilization, the birthplace of democracy. If we combined the best features of Greek and American history and traditions, we would become the best of Americans. These lessons, and my U.C. years prepared me for election to public office.

My parents had great respect for teachers and appreciated the importance of education. There was never any doubt that we would go to college. Unfortunately, our father insisted that this did not apply to our sister who should learn secretarial skills. It was a bad decision which I deeply regret to this day. (She has been using those skills for many years in the Office of the President of Merritt Community College).

Like other members of the Greek Orthodox Community of Oakland our parents paid tuition for the three of us to attend Greek school three afternoons a week. We learned the language, recited poetry and acted in plays. This was to prove invaluable to us throughout our lives. For example, in 1946 Gus and I were two of the six liaison officers to Greek officials while we served under Ambassador Henry F. Grady (of U.C.) on the Allied Mission for Observing the Greek Elections. The U.S.A., England and France participated. In 1966 I represented Governor Edmund G. "Pat" Brown and the University at the inauguration ceremonies in Delphi, Greece for the U.C. Graduate Study Center in Ancient Greek Drama.

For me, U.C. presented a golden opportunity to expand the horizons of the mind. The appetite which had been stimulated by our parents and nourished by my splendid teachers at Cole, Lowell and McClymonds in the Oakland Public School system was enormously increased.

U.C. meant the chance for knowledge, for an understanding of the past, for dreams and visions of the future. I remember President Robert Gordon Sproul's welcome to the freshman class. He urged us to pay close attention to our professors. "We have a great faculty - - but the progress you make will be up to you." He urged us to get acquainted with one of the leading libraries of the world, which was at our disposal. He also said that the professors were at their best when they wrote their books. So I read and read and read.

I never had a bad or indifferent teacher. I learned from the professors and the teaching assistants. I plunged into the "extra" reading lists recommended by the professors. I took more and more courses, until, in my junior year I was packing 22 1/2 units. When I tried to increase it to 25 my faculty counselor stopped me. At the same time, my parents became concerned and made me quit one of my three part-time jobs.

Life at Cal provided precious memories: President Sproul's oratory, his booming voice and great wit; the graciousness and kindness of Vice-President and Provost Monroe E. Deutsch who always took time to counsel the students and listen to us; the lectures of Professor Smyth in European History; former General David P. Barrows in Political Science; Robert Nisbet in Sociology; I spent a lot of time in the library stacks. It seemed to me that nine times out of ten he was there, pulling down books.

In the School of Journalism, my major, we had experienced journalists teaching us. They were always accessible, helpful and encouraging. The Dean, Professor Robert Desmond, led a very competent group. Among them was the late Scott Newhall who was editor of the San Francisco Chronicle for many years.

I enjoyed the tranquility of a beautiful haven, the A.F. Morrison Memorial Library. Textbooks and note papers were not allowed. It was strictly for pleasure. No pressure. No exams to worry about. It was beautifully decorated with luxurious chandeliers, comfortable couches and sofas and wood paneling. There, I read books totally unrelated to my courses.

I also spent hundreds of pleasant hours in the Doe Library. When the voice announced that the library was closing at 10:00 p.m. I wondered where the time had gone. I was impressed by the man after whom the Charles Franklin Doe Library was named. He was born in Maine in 1833 and died in San Francisco in 1904. After all these years I am still deeply moved when I read the inscription about him at the entrance:

He was a quiet man of simple tastes and orderly life. Diligent in business, he dealt honorably with all men. Charity for divergent views and a gentle tolerance toward the beliefs of others tempered the native sternness of his convictions. Shrinking from the social turmoil, he found through books abundant converse with the best who have thought and recorded, and now that he has yielded the stewardship of his goods, his last desire opens the companionships he loved to the use of all the recurring generations of the young.

I remember the foyer of the Doe Library with its four impressive tall marble columns. On one side, two are adorned with the busts of Homer and Hermes (a copy of the famed Praxiteles' sculpture of 330 B.C.). Opposite them, on the other two columns, are the busts of two Roman Emperors, Caesar Augustus and Marcus Aurelius. I remember these as symbols of our Graeco-Roman civilization - our roots which are now under heavy attack on many campuses throughout the United States.

These columns, standing like sentries in defense of our civilization, call to mind the admonition of my parents to become good Hellenes in order to be good Americans. They embellish the academic atmosphere of the University. These and the Greek ceilings and key architecture of several of the buildings on campus help me to reach back to those illustrious beginnings: Socrates' admonition to "know thyself"; Plato's first days as a teacher in that garden in Athens where he sat on one end of a log and his student at the other. This eventually became Plato's Academy which lasted for 900 years.

As the University celebrates its 125 years, my fervent hope is that it lasts much more than 900 years and that those columns will still be there and the students will still be receiving the Light beamed through the centuries from the ancients.

More memories. . .Campanile's carillons; sitting in the Cal rooting section at the football games; the amazing enthusiasm and "school spirit" of Geology Professor Norman E. A. Hinds who invited the Cal marching band to burst into Wheeler Auditorium going full blast during his lectures on Fridays; commuting daily from West Oakland by street car, with my books and a big brown bag containing both lunch and dinner lovingly prepared by my mother; the wondrous magical effect on me of reading -- especially in history; political science, philosophy, journalism, sociology; students of Hellenic descent forming Epsilon Phi Sigma, the Hellenic students club . . . with Paul Christopoulos, Georgia Changaris, George Nicholau, Ted Efstratis, Gus and John Nichandros and many others.

Then there was R.O.T.C. By mistake I got steered into the Coast Artillery Corps instead of the Infantry unit. I was out of my league, with a lot of engineers, scientists, mathematicians, but the error probably saved my life. The Infantry units were called up for active duty long before us. Not only did I have a difficult time with mathematics, the circular slide rule, Sines and co-sines, parallax, computations of the speed of the airplane targets, the velocity of the 90 millimeter projectile, the powder temperature. I wasn't even marching properly. One time our army instructor raced all the way across Edwards Field to shout at me to straighten out my rifle!

That changed after Pearl Harbor. We were all bucking to become officers when called up. My whole attitude changed. I forced myself to learn and ended up as the commanding Cadet Colonel of the Coast Artillery unit of the R.O.T.C.!

My fervent hope is that the University will never again be subjected to the attacks and the painful cuts which it is suffering these past few years.

Since 1959, I have been in the Legislature. For the past several years I have chaired the Education sub-committee of the Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee. I have fought consistently against student fee increases and I have watched with much pain the severe wounding of the greatest public University in the world.

We have lost some of the nation's finest professors in this process because we did not have the courage to communicate frankly with the public about the needs of the state. We should have asked them to support a tax increase to solve the problem.

Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes described taxes as "the price of civilization". Today taxes is a dirty word to be avoided at all costs. So, we protect the private comfort of our wealthiest citizens, at the expense of good public policy - especially in higher education.

The University of California is the engine which drives the economy of the state. For decades it has generated a world wide brain drain into California. We have attracted the best minds in every field.

Sadly, the direction of the brain drain has been reversed in the last few years - resulting in irreparable harm.

#

APPENDIX C: Senator Petris's extemporaneous remarks at Lifetime Service Award Banquet in his honor at the Greek Orthodox Cathedral of the Ascension, Oakland, December 2, 1995.

[This occasion does me] tremendous honor and give[s] me a good pat on the back--This is a real wallop, not just a pat on the back. I want to express my thanks, first and foremost, to the committee under the chairmanship of Kris [Krisoula] Natsues and all the members of that committee. [I understand] about 500 gallons of coffee were consumed and many hundreds of hours of meetings took place at her home and elsewhere in putting this together. It's obvious to anyone who's here that there was a lot of planning in putting this perfectly executed evening together.

So I extend my thanks to the committee, the president of the community, members of the board...and everyone else that participated, And of course to everyone who is here. All of the preparation is in vain if you don't show up. I thank each and every one of you.

I'm grateful and honored to have Chancellor Tien of the university here. I thank him not only for being present but for expressing those marvelous words. I had to ask my wife, "Is he really talking about me?" When she confirmed it, I felt even better.

We start with the beginning--with my parents, Christos and Mary. I wish they could have been here to see this. I know a lot of you have for your parents the feeling of affection that my brother and sister and I have for ours. We call that the unique generation that came over from Greece. We are the first American-born generation and they were the first that came over. And the common phrase we use is, after they left, the mold was broken, and there ain't going to be any generation like that ever again. So I thank not only my parents, but my in-laws and everybody else's in-laws and everybody else's parents who belonged to that generation. There aren't many of them left....[Applause]

Next I want to thank my wife, Anna, for her contributions. I think a better word might be her tolerance, her patience. For those of you who are in public life, like my colleague Lou Papan (I think he's still here; I appreciate his being here--), Judge Bostick, and all of us in elected office--our wives become political widows for a good part of our lives while we're serving. What can you do? And after we get home, that all changes. We make pests of ourselves. Anna, you're going to see more of me than you wanted to after I retire one year from today. I've heard from retired friends that the first week or two are wonderful. After that, every time the wife turns around the husband's underfoot. She tries to give him an assignment. "Go down to the park and play chess." Or "How about checking out this book for me at the library? See if you can find it." Anything to get him out of the house; because we get in their way.

But it isn't just a matter of patience and tolerance; it's active support that Anna has given. Many, many times when I asked her, "What do

you think we ought to do in this situation? Should I accept this assignment?" or this or that, she always says, "It's up to you. Whatever you decide to do is OK with me." I think she's plugging for me; but it shows her spirit and her degree of cooperation and assistance. Anna, I want you to know I appreciate it. I may not say it often enough. And in case the time ever comes when you forget that I said thank you, I want to tell you in front of this magnificent crowd, which has been screened for its excellent memories before being admitted. [Applause]

I also want to thank the members of my family. I have the most wonderful mother-in-law in the whole wide world [applause]...and my little sister, Maria, and her husband, Sully, and [the relatives from] Sacramento. Thank you for coming. We've got my little brother, Gus, here, who's been taking pictures. Stand up; I can't see you. There's Gus and his wife, Marie. I know they all join me in thanking you for this absolutely wonderful tribute. I hope I haven't overlooked any family members. To be safe I should probably ask each and every one of you to stand up and take a bow.

In addition to the fun and friendship, let me just take a couple of minutes to say a few words on the occasion of this endowment of the Greek language school. You know the Greek language, we might remind Chancellor Tien, has been described as the oldest continuously used language in all of the western world. The Chinese language is the only other one that has a longer history and culture and has also been used continuously and plays an important role in the education of our people--so we have something in common that's very noble, Chancellor. And that makes me doubly happy that you are here and that you came from that wonderful place in Asia to help us here with our education, and to join us here tonight with Mrs. Tien.

You know, the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* are still described by the experts as the greatest adventure stories ever written. Now, that says a lot because there have been a lot of other great epics written; but these are in a class by themselves for many reasons and in many categories. [In part] they reflect the wealth and richness of the Greek language. And the experts have also said it's been pretty much the same language almost continuously from ancient times down to modern. Now few of us read ancient Greek, but if you read ancient Greek you would get the gist of it, because it's still basically the same language. That's quite an achievement in itself. Whether you're talking about the great poets--Homer, Hesiod or Pindar, who wrote the "Ode to the Athletes" that won the first games, down to Demetrios of our time whom we just lost last year--you find a connection and a continuity in the language.

Henry Miller, who was a great admirer of the Greek language, and Greek people, the author you recall who lived down there near Monterey in Big Sur--he wrote a great book called *The Colossus of Marisi*.... He says, "There is no language that can render the flavor and the beauty of modern Greek." And he goes on several sentences, and then he says, "Read the language. It's still a language for poets, not for shopkeepers." Now, if

I were writing that today I'd say, "There are a lot of Greeks who are shopkeepers. And a lot of our shopkeepers are poets." There is poetry in every one of the Greeks that I've ever met anywhere. [Applause] So I'm very delighted and proud to be included in this program to acknowledge keeping the Greek language alive. It's a great and glorious language. Some other people who did not have the [advantage] that we had of being born into the Greek community went to great pains to learn it, to study ancient Greek, to study modern Greek, and they carry it with a great deal of pride. They go around telling their friends about it. But we're born into it. It's the first language that most of us of my generation learned. It's a very, very great treasure that we have, that will be preserved through the medium of this school....It shows pride in the language. It isn't only a matter of nationalism; it's a matter of pride in the most beautiful language in the whole world. That might be a little chauvinistic, but I plead guilty to that [Audience chuckles] on this occasion. It's the mother of all the western languages.

Now, I don't mean to go on about that. My heart is filled with gratitude. I see so many of you from near and far. It's dangerous for me to start singling out names; Anna has cautioned me against it. So let me say to each and every one of you, I'm grateful to you for being here, whether you came from across the street or Sacramento or Stockton or even Boston. That one we do have to mention. We have with us Mr. George Bissell, who is the chairman of the board of trustees of Anatolia College. The headquarters are in Boston, but the Anatolia campus is in Greece, up in Thessaloniki. My wife and I visited the campus just two or three weeks ago when we were in Greece and were refreshed in our admiration for the school and the things that are done under its president, Bill McGrew. He and his staff are totally devoted to Greek history and culture and are doing a wonderful job at Anatolia College.

Mr. George Bissell, who came here all the way from Boston just for this event, inspires and cajoles and pushes and pulls us and does whatever he can to make us make the financial contributions that are necessary to keep Anatolia College going. Now this isn't a pitch tonight--tonight is to talk about the language school here; we'll get to Anatolia another time. Thanks very much for being here and thanks for all you do for Anatolia. Mr. and Mrs. Bissell--please stand up and take a bow.

I do want to thank especially the University Marching Band for being here and everyone else who took part in the program. To me, this is like a family gathering. It reminds me that growing up in this community was like growing up in an extended family. This support--and this will close it--the support that I've received, not just since I started to run for public office, which is only a brief hundred years ago, but before that when I was younger, when I was in Greek school--has been very important to me. I always got tremendous support and encouragement from the extended family in the Greek community, and that encouragement continued onto into my political career.

When I first started to run for public office, the members of this community flocked to my help with signs on their homes and with money and walking precincts. Including my dear mother: She had bad feet. She couldn't walk too well, but she went and got some pamphlets from the headquarters without my knowledge and climbed up and down the steps in our neighborhood and when they opened the door, she'd hand them a pamphlet and say, "You vote for my boy?" [Audience chuckles] We got more votes in that precinct than anywhere else. [Laughter] And that was the spirit the whole community had. I want you to know that I'm mindful of that and I'm very, very grateful.

I'll close with a story that illustrates the support and the passion for education in the Greek community. Most of our people who came over in our parents' generation did not get much schooling in Greece. They didn't have that opportunity. And they came over here to seek their fortunes and better their lives. This conversation took place a lot of times, and I think others of my generation went through the same experience: You're walking down the street, and you run into a fellow whom you call uncle, because he's one of those bachelors who frequently visits our house, has dinner with us from time to time, and then stays and plays cards with my father, and they wind up quarreling like mad about the political scene in Greece. [Audience chuckles] We heard more quarrels about the generals versus the royal family--those of you who are my age remember that....

So you're walking down the street and you run into Uncle John. And the conversation would go like this: "Good afternoon, Uncle John" [looking way up] "How's school?" [looking down to boy level] "Oh, school is wonderful." "Are you studying?" "Yah [in Greek] I'm studying. I'm reading." "Good. Study so you can become a man." And then he would say, "How are you? How's your mother, how's your father?" [Applause] Now that's what I call having your priorities straight. That reflects the spirit of Hellenism, the passion for education that goes way back in Greek history, prior to Pericles, prior to Socrates, and prior to Plato and Aristotle.

That spirit is what developed the culture, the climate in Greece that made it possible for these great philosophers to develop and be cherished and studied and followed to this day. And here are these folks who didn't even go past the second or third or fourth grade; and they have it in their hearts; they have it in their heads and they want to pass it on to the youngsters. I hope my generation can continue to do that. And one way to do that is by supporting the endowment for the language program here at the Cathedral of the Ascension.

Now, for the fourth time, I will end this. Let me again say thank you very, very much. I hope I haven't left anyone out that I should have mentioned. For the first time, I feel that my term is coming to an end. But, because of the reception and encouragement and applause like I get here, I feel I want to go another four or six years.

[Applause]

Appendix D. From Nicholas C. Petris, Oral History Interview, Conducted 1988 and 1989 by Gabrielle Morris, Regional Oral History Office, University of California at Berkeley, for the California State Archives State Government Oral History Program.

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A. 1988 Christmas card, Senator and Mrs. Nicholas C. Petris.

B. "To a Fallen Eagle," eulogy for Robert W. Crown, May 22, 1973.

Is the issue really money? John Portman, the architectural genius who is also Atlanta's biggest builder, is one of those rare members of the power structure who is willing to be frank. "The blacks are going to have to share their political power," he said, "and the whites are going to have to share some economic power" (emphasis added). But when Mayor Jackson proposed a modest increase in business taxes to keep up with rising costs of government, the howl from the Commerce Club was audible throughout Georgia. Make no mistake: Maynard Jackson is no radical. Though he may indulge the black masses with a little demagogy from time to time, he is not likely to challenge the economic order. The power structure, however, recognizes that its fate is no longer completely in its own hands, and some of the hands that hold this fate are not friendly. "Whither Atlanta" is a legitimate question, to people who are nervous.

THE NEW REPUBLIC

Milton Viorst

6.07.75

Thoughts for Graduation Day

WHAT'S EDUCATION GOOD FOR?

It has been said that every nation has the God it deserves; where education is worshipped the inference must be obvious. For us it has been more than a common necessity: it has shared the authority of family, church and state. Other cultures relied on pluralistic institutions like clan or craft to diffuse a sense of self and society. Ours is a product of the classroom, as well as our sense of history and other realities. What we know has come to us through a single, universal institution.

As all other institutions diminished the schools too lost their authority. In some respects that was both necessary and desirable, for that authority was finite and had to come from somewhere; it was borrowed and perhaps ought to have been returned. But, being gone, it left us with very little place to go.

From the beginning there has been doubt of the direction that education--hence we ourselves--should pursue. Our colonial government, with missionary assurance, once offered the tribes of the Six Nations the chance to better themselves by learning the ways of our society. As Benjamin Franklin observed, the offer had few takers. Here, from his Remarks Concerning Savages of North America (1784), is the reason why. The speaker is a chief of the Six Nations:

YOU, WHO ARE WISE, MUST KNOW THAT DIFFERENT NATIONS HAVE DIFFERENT CONCEPTIONS OF THINGS; AND YOU WILL NOT THEREFORE TAKE IT AMISS, IF OUR IDEAS OF THIS KIND OF EDUCATION HAPPEN NOT TO BE THE SAME WITH YOURS. WE HAVE HAD SOME EXPERIENCE OF IT; SEVERAL OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE WERE FORMERLY BROUGHT UP AT THE COLLEGES OF THE NORTHERN PROVINCES; THEY WERE INSTRUCTED IN ALL YOUR SCIENCES; BUT WHEN THEY CAME BACK TO US, THEY WERE BAD RUNNERS, IGNORANT OF EVERY MEANS OF LIVING IN THE WOODS, UNABLE TO BEAR EITHER COLD OR HUNGER, KNEW NEITHER HOW TO BUILD A CABIN, TAKE A DEER, NOR KILL AN ENEMY, SPOKE OUR LANGUAGE IMPERFECTLY WERE THEREFORE NEITHER FIT FOR HUNTERS, WARRIORS, NOR COUNSELLORS; THEY WERE TOTALLY GOOD FOR NOTHING.

In fact this gives rise to the suspicion that these people knew at least

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as much of libraries as they did of universities. For one of the best-documented themes of modern literature (aside from the creation of culture in the minds of barbarians) is the uselessness of being taught. English literature, the language of self-taught men, is generally on the side of the Indians.

Schooling in Shakespeare is either a joke or a catastrophe. His young men bumble through their courses just in time to enter a world for whose hungers knowledge has made them unfit. The Taming of the Shrew begins with Lucentio declaring that he will institute "a course of learning and ingenious studies" in Pisa, and with Baptista Minola, the middle-class father of us all, letting drop this tremendous challenge to the Fates and their sense of humor:

SCHOOLMASTERS WILL I KEEP WITHIN
MY HOUSE
FIT TO INSTRUCT HER YOUTH. IF YOU,
HORTENSIO--
OR, SIGNIOR GREMIO, YOU--KNOW ANY
SUCH,
PREFER THEM HITHER; FOR TO CUNNING
MEN
I WILL BE VERY KIND; AND LIBERAL
TO MINE OWN CHILDREN IN GOOD
BRINGING-UP.

He is really asking for it--but so of course is the idea of education evidently on the author's mind. Any conception of reasonable learning, not to say of reason itself, is absorbed into Katharina's passions and the splendidly therapeutic madness of Petruchio. There are three models of human relations in this play and we should be aware of their progression: it begins with a college, which becomes submerged in a madhouse, which ends in

a marriage. There may be some message there.

In Shakespeare the world answers ideas with perfect pitch. Whether in LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST, THE SHREW or HAMLET that pitch is observed. Young men come back from school to a world academically imperfect, and for that they are "totally good for nothing." It is a world in which teachers fail and ideas come to nothing: Friar Lorraine makes a marriage that contradicts itself into a funeral; Prospero, reviewing his own life, says to Caliban,

I PITIED THEE
TOOK PAINS TO MAKE THEE SPEAKE,
TAUGHT THEE EACH HOUR
ONE THING OR OTHER.

--a picture destined to stimulate 19th century vulgarity and modern sentimentality. But we are generally beyond the power of our best impulses and the only law governing Caliban is that of probability:

YOU TAUGHT ME LANGUAGE, AND MY PROFIT ON'T
IS, I KNOW HOW TO CURSE.

Before we praise the times that have given us to ourselves we should remember that all ages have their central metaphor. Faustus burnt his books, Prospero threw his in the ocean, Don Quixote, reading his once too often, went mad.

John Milton's essay ON EDUCATION may prove the Indians right after all. He insists that men be taught "to improve the tillage of their country, to recover the bad soil, and to remedy the waste that is made of good." Students should know "the tempers, the humours, and the seasons" --which is to say the character of their bodies and that of the world--hunting, fishing, gardening and doctoring; and "the beginning, end, and reasons of

political societies; that they may not in a dangerous fit of the commonwealth be such poor, shaken, uncertain needs, of such a tottering conscience, as many of our great counsellors have lately shewn themselves." Amen, and very close to home. In addition, Greek, Latin, geometry, sciences, literature; BUT ALL TO SOME END.

Is it possible that Franklin's Indians, like those of Voltaire, went on to Leonardo after Milton and Shakespeare? The former wrote to Ludovico of Milan: "I am prepared ... to make an extremely light and strong bridge. An endless variety of battering rams. A method of demolishing fortresses built on a rock. A kind of bombard, which hurls showers of small stones and the smoke of which strikes terror into the enemy." But, he added, "In times of peace, I believe myself able to vie successfully with any in the designing of public and private buildings, and in conducting water from one place to another. Item: I can carry out sculpture in marble, bronze, or clay, and also in painting I can do as well as any man."

Any man who reads a book is always in the presence of a contradiction. He loves order but admits necessity. He absolutely requires freedom but understands the traditions that confine it. He worries about the utility of ideas. He accepts the tension between learning and expression--perhaps all of these simultaneously, and sympathetically. He admires the great reach and power of a system that developed from the Tribes of Israel and the Academy of Athens to the monasteries of the Old World and the universities of the New. But he will think also of conflict between the system and the men it fails to serve. He will think of Ben Jonson, who had to be a bricklayer; of Alexander Pope, whose

religion and deformity disqualified him from Oxford; of Shelley who was thrown out of school and Keats who could not afford it; of Dr. Johnson and Dickens, poor to a degree no one here can possibly imagine, self-taught and producing a kind of adversary prose on education that has become part of the modern sensibility; of Scott Fitzgerald who was thrown out of Princeton, and Ezra Pound who could not hold down a teaching job, and T.S. Eliot who preferred working in a bank to getting a PhD. In short we have educated ourselves to know, admire and imitate those to whom formal education itself was not much "use."

It is fairly plain that some care has to be taken in working out the claims of great institutions against those of great men--how much more so in the case of common necessity. Even the relatively narrow issue of learning versus utility has its dangers. It is now often said that education should prepare us to have children, jobs and leisure time; to be consumers and members of a community; a triumph of vocation. That is not what the Six Nations meant when they thought of man in Nature. What earthly good would it have done Hamlet to study criminology at Wittenberg? Would that have prepared him for a country that was in fact a paradigm of the human mind? A country in which every lust including self-love and every sin including self-deceit was spelled out; not as in a tragedy on the stage alone but as in fact we find it daily. What an error it is to assume that the knowledge of typing and filing, even the ability to distinguish between brand names and candidates is in fact sufficient for life. [Life, in a sense, is what happens after you have faced necessity; it takes place before nine and after five.]

A sound education will permit the mind

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11/2/80

9.02.91

to distinguish between the true and false; to understand the unrelenting deviousness of human psychology and the terrible complexity of historical issues. It is bound to what we call the liberal arts because, in painting or history or poetry they have, more successfully than any other form of intelligence delimited and filled in the picture of existence. If then some actual purpose is to be hoped for education it should be a little more than now seems popular. To "bear either cold or hunger" is in fact a moral quality, and the Six Nations evidently found that useful. We soon may ourselves. To be a good counsellor meant as much as being a good hunter, and that, they said, they could not do without. We have recently found the same. [We may as well accept the contradiction: education has always been of two minds. It has needed ideas and values to retain moral and intellectual identity. And it has needed to be useful in social life because it happens to be the modern form of transmitting that life. But what is it useful for? Milton thought it could repair the damage of original sin. A century later, Jefferson said it was the one sure support of republican government. A century after that, it was seen as a way to Americanize foreign immigrants. Today its use is to prepare us to be good citizens--and to be rather successful. But surely "useful" has some other meanings: self-knowledge, knowledge of other men. Knowledge of when society should be stable and when it should change, and finally how much the concept of "usefulness" is bound to passing time. One other thing: education can be both complete in itself and a preparation for something more difficult, and I think more noble than you have yet experienced. That is the act of becoming what you have studied and admired, and I hope you find yourselves up to that.]

12.04.75
 Periodic
 list

10.20.77

4.14.78

6.05.77
 2.07.88
 9.06.91

THE NEW REPUBLIC

Ronald Berman

6.07.75



CONSTITUENTS

Are the most important people in our office.

Constituents are not dependant on us.

We are dependent on them.

Constituents are not an interruption of our work.

They are the purpose of it.

Constituents do us a favor when they come in.

We aren't doing them a favor by waiting on them.

Constituents are part of public service;

They are not outsiders.

Constituents are not just votes on election day.

They are human beings with feelings like our own.

Constituents are persons who come to us

With their needs and hopes.

It is our job to fill them.

Constituents deserve the most courteous attention

We can give them.

They are the life-blood of this and every public office.

They pay our salary.

Without them we would have to close this office.

We won't ever forget it.

* Senator Petris kept this framed on the wall of his Sacramento office.

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