

TRANSCRIPT OF WISCONSIN-MILWAUKEE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT INTERVIEW

Interview with Mr. Richard Zaborski, former state senator, and
Mrs. Mary Ann Zaborski, former secretary to Governor John Reynolds

March 2, 1995

Interviewer: Dr. John R. Johannes

<u>Tape Counter Number</u>	<u>Topic</u>
000 -	Entry into politics. Henry Meier asked Zaborski to run for State Senate.
021 -	Years in legislature were satisfying while frustrating. Zaborski became minority leader for Democrats. Not much staffing. Most GOP legislators were (retired) farmers; Democrats were businessmen or workers. Became minority leader when predecessor retired; Milwaukee Democrats wanted a Milwaukee senator for leader; he won unanimously.
063 -	Quality of legislators. They were quite representative. Good Democrats included Gaylord Nelson, Henry Meier; GOP had the Knowles brothers. Good legislator must be knowledgeable -- usually town chairmen (GOP) who knew the people in their areas. Democrats generally came from cities. As Democratic leader, he got along well with Republicans Knowles, Frank Panzer, Jerris Leonard. Anecdote about senator who he "beat" in floor debate.
155 -	Good cooperation from the media, with some exceptions. Reporters were fair usually.
179 -	Minority status of Democrats. Developed an attitude of making the most of their minority status. Various strategies. Nelson could handle GOP with his expertise and personality. Democrats tried to unhinge the GOP and block their tactics. Democrats tried to legislate in cooperation with Reynolds, but GOP had upper hand. Democrats thus sought to make a case in the media.
232 -	Governors. Walter Kohler enjoyed GOP majority. A great corporate CEO, but not the best of governors. Thompson wasn't good governor. Nelson was nice, kind guy and a great talker. John Reynolds was a deep thinker but not good communicator. Warren Knowles was good. The best were Knowles, Reynolds, and Nelson; Nelson and Knowles were most successful "Chief legislators."
303 -	Biggest problems between governor and legislature were political attitudes. Democrats would discuss in caucus what they ought to do. If there was no time for caucus, Democrats would follow the lead of their party leaders or experts on the issue. Caucus would meet regularly, usually to discuss the day's work. Democrats were unified and cohesive. Parties were strong.
369 -	Governors' strategies. Nelson and Reynolds had uphill fight, so they talked to as many legislators as they could. Reynolds would host dinners, coffees, or parties; so did Nelson. Republican governors didn't need Democratic votes, so they would ignore the Democrats. Nelson was a good socializer and would win GOP votes. Nelson was successful because he had been a state senator. Neither Reynolds nor Nelson regularly met with Democrat leaders; they met occasionally, as needed. Depending on the issue and GOP interest and support, Nelson and Reynolds could win occasional GOP votes. Can't think of any Democrat who was called by GOP governor to pass GOP bills; they didn't need it. Nelson could pick up an occasional GOP vote by personal discussion and persuasion.
460 -	Interest groups and lobbyists: tricky and not on the up-and-up. Lobbyists would tell different

stories to different members. Sometimes lobbyists would provide information. Anecdote: Wisconsin Truckers (Johnny Varda). Labor leaders were fine and backed Democrats.

SIDE TWO

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Democrats got frustrated under GOP dominance and developed a cohesive common front. They'd have dinner together and have a good time. Story of sales tax under Nelson and Reynolds. Suggestion that Reynolds' lack of previous legislative involvement caused some problems. Story of unruly and intoxicated senator.

098 -

Nelson's legislative program, including reorganization and streamlining of state government.

102 -

Reynolds' problems in getting appointees confirmed (including Zaborski). Art Patrick was former Public Service commissioner who bought land that he knew state would purchase for highway. Other similar cases.

158 -

Reapportionment. Strictly a partisan matter that came up every session. Fair housing bill killed in the Senate. Reynolds did what he thought was right regardless of consequences. Reynolds was deep thinker; Nelson knew where the votes were and how to get things done -- good schmoozer, unlike Reynolds. Knowles was dispassionate. Majority and minority leaders could cooperate.

248 -

Change in state government. Increase in staffs gradually, with their goal being to reelect their bosses. Zaborski left the Senate because of financial and personal reasons -- frustration and burnout. When he left, the brewery did not use him as a lobbyist, even though he volunteered. Story of hiring Reupert Theobald as Director of Legislative Reference Bureau.

412 -

Life in Governor Reynolds' office. Stanley Zuckerman was top person in the office. Transition was hard; unless you know government, you're at a loss. No one there to help you. They relied on a civil servant "runner" to show them the ropes. Nelson's people were gone when Reynolds people arrived.

495 -

Lucey/Reynolds vs. Nelson. Issue was control and leadership of state party.

560 -

Although legislators may oppose each other, they develop a respect and liking for each other. About half of all legislators were truly dedicated and honorable. But there were the scum who would posture one way and take lobbyists' favors