

TRANSCRIPT OF WISCONSIN-MILWAUKEE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT INTERVIEW

Interview with Mr. Leonard Zubrensky
Former Legal Counsel to Governor Reynolds

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Interviewer: Dr. John R. Johannes

Tape Counter Number

Topic

- 000 - Law school I connection with Reynolds. A few months later, Reynolds hired Zubrensky. Reynolds knew so much about politics, he was unable to sign a simple letter because it was inadequate. Zubrensky then handled all the mail and signed it for Reynolds. Main job was to review all legislation for signature or veto recommendation. Department of Administration cleared bills and recommended to Zubrensky, who would write both a veto and adoption message for Reynolds. Reynolds would decide based on his enormous knowledge of and interest in state government. Reynolds an amazing repository of knowledge of politics, government, and world affairs. Another job was to clear state contracts for Reynolds; Department of Administration would send them to Zubrensky. Reynolds once decide to hold off signing one particular contract with two men on basis of "gut feeling." Two days later they were indicted. A third job was trouble-shooting. Anecdote of a shooting by member of farmer's organization. Anecdote of a bridge designed by Frank Lloyd Wright's son-in-law. A fourth job was to travel with Reynolds on campaigns to watch over campaign contributions to make sure they were legal. Anecdote: Hubert Humphrey speech and envelope filled with money.
- 102 -- Reynolds' priorities were affected by GOP control of legislature. GOP wouldn't agree to anything Reynolds wanted. Unlike Gaylord Nelson, Reynolds was thought of as a "fluke" governor who beat Kuehn accidentally. Sales tax battle with legislature. Reynolds did come into office with an agenda.
- 142 - Best things Reynolds did as governor included his efforts to teach Wisconsinites about their government and its operations: mental health, housing, highways (Project 66, which was opposed by business community because Reynolds was a Democrat).
- 166- Biggest mistake: press conferences held twice weekly for purposes of educating the citizenry on the issues. But *Capitol Times* (then influential) asked Reynolds at every press conference whether he would promise to veto sales tax, which he did. Eventually, the staff stopped the conferences to end embarrassment of Reynolds on sales tax. Press was not kind to Reynolds, but they liked him. Anecdote of party in governor's residence that included a reporter who wanted to print story about the party. John Lingard, *State Journal*, treated Reynolds fairly even though the paper was conservative Republican.
- 220 - Governor's office was small. Zubrensky had Gerald Boyle and David Adamany. Stanley Zuckerman was in charge of staff and legislation. Zubrensky often would testify before the legislature on behalf of governor, but the overwhelming GOP majorities blocked all major initiatives. They came close on open housing, but couldn't round up the last needed vote.
- 270 - Appointments. Reynolds failed on appointments because of solid GOP legislature. Gaylord Nelson was successful because he was most loved official in Z's memory. Zeidler nomination to Resource Development. Zeidler was pro-business in many respects and had a plan to change state constitution to allow state funding of private businesses. Zubrensky approached Attorney General (GOP) for an opinion under pledge of secrecy; but Atty General George Thompson

leaked it to the press. Thompson was dedicated to beating Reynolds, and his office was not usable by Reynolds. No cooperation possible. When Reynolds wanted to file a suit, he hired outside counsel. Anecdote of reapportionment. Tried to hire several lawyers, but none of the major lawyers would sign on. Once Reynolds appointed a state legislator., Dick Zaborsky, but Senate refused. GOP legislature simply refused to confirm, believing Reynolds would be a two year governor.

- 435 - Reynolds' strongest supporters: Dave Obey, Bob Huber, Fred Risser, Frank Nikolay, maybe Norm Anderson. Huber, however, was conservative. Republicans would not cooperate. Bobby Knowles was one Republican everyone liked, and Reynolds could talk with him. Glenn Pommerening. Most differences were political, not personal. Anecdote about Nile Soik's being seated after a questionable election; Soik repaid by "taking a walk" on open-housing bill. Bill Steiger was likable and promised to deliver ten Republicans on that bill. GOP wanted to cause Reynolds to lose reelection.
- 552 - Source of legislative ideas. Legislative process in governor's office. Reynolds set a record for vetoes. Anecdote of mourning dove and hunting lobby -- veto poem. Reynolds submitted legislation that, on principle, he thought best. He refused to make deals with Republicans on appointments.
- 629 - Lobbying legislature: Reynolds wasn't comfortable, so staff did it. Bob Huber was the emissary to Democrats. Unlike Nelson, Reynolds refused to go out drinking with legislators. No deals on legislation could be made because governor was never close enough for a "deal" to matter. Dick Zaborsky was another key person.
- 652 - Budget and sales tax battle. Republicans refused to pass his budget. Often Reynolds met with GOP leaders but could not reach agreement. Department heads told Reynolds that, without a budget, many employees would be laid off. Reynolds didn't want that, so he yielded to GOP on sales tax and budget cuts. Then *Cap Times* said he'd broke his word.
- 680 Campaign in 1964. Reynolds spent all his funds on one five minute spot that pulled him even with Knowles, but he had no more money after that.
- 701 - Fair Housing Bill. Story of Milwaukee fair housing after Reynolds administration. Zubrensky brought lawsuit and won restraining order against anti-fair housing referendum. Story of how Reynolds appointed Zubrensky as legal counsel. Reynolds wanted fair housing more than anything else. Pat Lucey's testimony for fair housing -- Pat is very bright but not personable. The bill almost passed because Steiger and Knowles supported it in principle.
- 775 - Lucey-Nelson. Nelson-Louie Hansen-Madison-Cap Times crowd vs Reynolds-Lucey crowd. Strong rivalry fueled by staff rivalries. Zubrensky was friendly with Nelson and his staff. Personal stuff. Big flap over judicial appointment: Nelson wanted Jim Doyle appointed to federal bench, but JFK chose Rabinowitz, whom Lucey and Reynolds appointed. But Senator Nelson blocked it in Washington. Vignette about Jim Doyle on Wisconsin State Supreme Court.
- 829 - Reynolds ran as favorite son in 1964 because LBJ didn't want to run.