

PATRICIA L. JOHNSON. Born 1926.

TRANSCRIPT of OH 1708V

This interview was recorded on February 3, 2011, for the Maria Rogers Oral History Program. The interviewer is Emily Shuster. The interview also is available in video format, filmed by Anne Marie Pois. The interview was transcribed by Phyl Thomas.

ABSTRACT: Patricia Johnson is a past president of the Boulder County League of Women Voters who was finance director for the League at the time of this interview. She discusses the League's goals of civics education, issues advocacy, and educating women for the political process. She also talks about the structure of the League and current challenges being faced by the organization, and describes some of the specific issues on which the Boulder County League has worked.

NOTE: The interviewer's questions and comments appear in parentheses. Added material appears in brackets.

[A].

00:00 (Today is February 3, 2011, and my name is Emily Shuster. I'm interviewing Pat Johnson who is the former president of both the Boulder League of Women Voters and the Colorado League, and is the current finance director of the Boulder County League of Women Voters. This interview is being recorded for the Maria Rogers Oral History Program and is being filmed by Anne Marie Pois.)

(My first question, Pat, is if you wouldn't mind telling us when and where you were born?)

I was born in 1926 in Hughesville, Maryland, which is a tiny little farming town where my parents had a chicken farm.

(And when did you come to Boulder? And what brought you here?)

In 1977, I came to Boulder because I was retired—my husband and I were retired—and he is a Colorado native. He was born in Loveland. And we had been out here often camping up in the Rocky Mountains and decided this is where we wanted to retire.

(And would you like to tell us a little bit about your life back in Maryland or wherever else you were before here?)

I don't remember anything about Hughesville, because we moved away from there when I was under four. I grew up in Baltimore and went to college at Oberlin, in Ohio. And after that I worked in Baltimore for a while and at Princeton at the Educational Testing Service. And then I joined the Central Intelligence Agency [CIA] and spent 25 years on the covert side. So I can't really talk about it [laughs].

That's where I met my husband. We were married in 1965. And I was abroad in Austria in Vienna; Frankfurt, Germany; Mexico City; and Saigon, South Vietnam, in the last two years of its life—'73 to '75. Then we were back at headquarters until '77 and then out here.

(And in terms of the period of your life before you were in Boulder, it sounds like you were doing all sorts of really interesting things. What got you interested in civic work and political work that may be related to your later on work at the League?)

I didn't do any civic work, that's the interesting thing. I did not do much civic work, because I was abroad an awful lot of the time.

(Right.)

So I didn't have any local connections. I lived in Washington, D.C., and in those days you couldn't even vote for President! I mean, all you could vote for was the Mayor of Washington. That's what the League is interested in right now—is getting Washington citizens to be able to have a Representative and actually vote for somebody. So my interest in the League—I had planned actually after I retired to join the League, because I figured I could learn a little bit about this country that I had been representing all over the world. [chuckles]

(Can you tell us a little bit about how you first got involved in the League here in Boulder?)

Yes. We came in 1977, and we had friends here—Walter and Cynthia Jessel—who we would visit every time we came out camping and stuff like that. And Cynthia was a member of the League. And I said I wanted to join the League, so she got me involved.

My first meeting was a consensus, which is a terrifying thing for an outsider. I wasn't terrified, but it's doing a process which nobody else really does. And I didn't understand it terribly well. And that didn't sit very well with me, as a matter of fact. So I didn't get invited particularly to do anything until one time Gail Rowe called me and said, "We're assembling the voter mail." We had a big mailing committee then. And she said, "Come and join us."

So I did and got to know this wonderful bunch of people. We sat around licking envelopes and stuff like that. And then I really got involved in the League, and began joining committees, and doing that. And discovering that the League is the best civics course you can take. You have access through the League to more information and more good judgment about what's going on in your immediate world and in the larger world than I'd ever run into. So that's my general feeling about what the League is and should be.

05:27 (And how would you say that educational aspect—or that informational aspect of the League that the members are given—how would you say that is brought about through the structure of the League or through its activities?)

It's because of the purposes of the League—I think really—if I could state them now. The League is basically a double—a two-part organization. It tries to educate the public to be good American citizens by doing a lot of voter service, which is one part of our League. And which we have—for instance, in April we're having “Know Your Legislators” in Boulder County. And I'm sure you've heard about this before—in which we get all of the people who are legislators down in the General Assembly to come for a talk about what's going on in the legislature.

And we also sign up people to vote. Throughout the year we arrange for doing things like that. And the other thing we do is advocacy, which is based on positions we've taken through the consensus process. We study issues at the national, state, and local levels. And then we have what we call “consensus” which is not a vote. It's a general feeling of the group that they agree. It's not a percentage exactly, it's a sense in the meeting.

I'm a Quaker. So it really comes from that. And what we do decide in the Friends Meeting is the sense of the meeting—what most people seem to think. It's a good system!

(Yeah, it sounds very democratic.)

Yeah.

(Yeah. So it sounds like you've given us a really good general background of the League function. My next question is how would you say—and I guess you could talk about your personal experience, which you have already I guess a little—how an idea in the League is acted upon and the process? And then maybe giving a couple of examples of different issues and how that's gone about.)

Okay. Let me think about what I should tell you. [pause] I think Boulder County Plan—which I wasn't here to get involved with at the beginning—is a good place to start. Boulder, as you know, has a county plan and a city plan, which has to do with governance and how it develops specifically. And this got started a long time ago—in the '60s I think—by people who were not necessarily League people.

And one of the things that they were interested in was controlling growth, particularly of the mountain backdrop. And you've probably heard about this before. And we have this beautiful, beautiful mountain backdrop of the Flatirons, which are pretty undisturbed. Now, how is that? When you can go down to Colorado Springs, and you look at their mountain backdrop, and it's a mess. It's just all houses and also digging. We have a little bit of that here, but not so much.

So a group came up with the idea—this is not League though—but this is how it works—and we got involved in it later. The “blue line”—which is a line, which you can see—is

right behind three houses up Flagstaff Mountain Road. And above that line, a law was passed that there would be no city services. Well, that stopped development cold, and that was great. Now it happens farther north, you do have building up in the Boulder Heights and places like that.

The League has always been passionately interested in that kind of development—how broad the city boundaries are, and there are three sets of boundaries—there's the City boundary, and then there's a part around the city that can be developed, and then there's a part that shouldn't be developed. And this is reviewed every five years. And we've always been very involved in that.

And we're contemplating some things now which—I brought up an issue a couple of Board meetings ago about this argument about who is supposed to take care of—pay for—the fire management in the mountains. And there's conflict because there are a lot of organizations involved. And I said I thought we should study this, and look at it, and see what we should do. And well, I thought we should take some action on it. And they said "Well, we don't really know."

So now we would then study it and look at all sides of the issue. That's how you do a study, you look at all sides of the issue. And there are not usually just two!

[Laughter]

And then you have a meeting with the—it's called the unit meetings—to present what you've discovered. It's done by committee, so you're on a committee that chooses.

11:42 (Right.).

And then you have a general meeting or unit meetings like the first one I attended which was on energy issues, as I remember, and see what the sense of the meeting is.

(So in regards to that general issue how would you say where the League stands now, what actions have been taken, and what decisions have been come to—or not?)

Well, we have been participating, usually in the reviews—the every five year reviews of the plans. And we haven't suggested any changes that I know of most recently. But we certainly are a presence in deciding what to do. Pretty much.

And let's see if I can think of some other issues that we work on. Actually, I have worked more on state issues in the whole scheme of things. I haven't worked nearly as much on local issues.

And state issues—campaign finance reform was my big thing. And I got involved in that probably in the late '80s. See, we have a national position on campaign finance reform, which is in favor of public funding. And from that we are allowed to draw down a position and use it at whatever level. And oh—that's one thing we did do in Boulder that

I was involved in, which was really quite interesting—[chimes sound] was getting the law passed. Again—first of all, having a petition—getting a law passed which allows for public funding of City Council. And that I think was a big success, that was in ninety-something. I can't remember exactly when it was, but what we did is that there was a committee that was formed that the League was a part of. We were not the only game in town. And on that committee were people like Steve Pomerance and his then to be—later, his wife—Alison [Allyn] Feinberg—who had been a city council member, and so on. And so we did this. Sue Anderson and I were both League members on it. And so that worked fine, we got the petition.

And campaign finance reform at the state level—we worked to get a statute passed which would do the same thing—offer public funding for legislative candidates that wanted it. You can't make it mandatory because that has been declared unconstitutional—federally. So the only thing you can do is offer it. In Boulder that has really, really worked and people are punished if they don't take it.

That doesn't happen so much at the state level. So anyway, we passed the statute—Amendment 15 is the statute—and the next year the General Assembly abolished it. Then we went on to—we were in a coalition with Common Cause and COPIRG [Colorado Public Interest Research Group]. Do you know what COPIRG is?

15:45 (Mm-hmm.)

Okay. In all of these cases it passed by 60 percent of the vote. And so the people really, really wanted this. And I carried petitions. Actually, I'm very good at that.

[Laughter.]

I've discovered a talent for doing this. Standing in a big, crowded area like the various Boulder fairs that we have, and catching people, and getting them to sign. So I really know the process of how you do that and how important it is that you know what you are talking about.

[Laughter.]

And so I felt very proud of that 'cause we passed this, and it went down. So finally we did Amendment 27, which was the one that is in the Constitution. And I was in a meeting in which somebody was saying, "Well, it shouldn't have been in the Constitution."

Well, we wouldn't have—well, we tried—but you've got to have something that the legislature won't turn down, because the trouble is nobody who got there by the old system wants to change it. You've got a catch-22 about campaign finance, which is like no other.

[Laughter.]

And it's never going to go away. So you always have to keep fighting the fact. It's got to be the people who do this.

(Yup).

And Congress—I just can't imagine that they ever would. Although I would think that they would get tired of all the fundraising they have to do. Aren't they sick and tired of it?

[Laughter.]

(I would imagine so, I would agree.)

So that's my—I don't know how we got off on this but still—

(No, it's definitely relevant. I was thinking it sounds like you've been involved on almost every level in the League. You've worked on specific issues, you said you passed around petitions person-to-person, you've also been president locally, you've been president of the State League, and now you're Finance Director. So I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit about how those different levels of involvement came about, and how they affected you, or how you experience them?)

This has taught me an awful lot having done different things at different levels. The thing I never really worked on is voter service, and that's a big strength of the League—mostly because I'm an “issues person.” And we're like that in the League. There are people that really like to do voter service, and that's very valuable. And that's how I first learned about the League when I was a kid. I remember that the League put out candidate questionnaires and things like that in Baltimore. And so I was always aware of them. My mother was never involved, although she was active in other things, but she was never involved in the League. But I got a good impression of the League from way back because of voter service.

But when I got in the League I saw this quality that makes the League so important and valued in communities. I mean in poll after poll the League turns up way at the top of trusted organizations. They really trust us. And when I saw that this worked on the advocacy side—because that's what I am, I am an advocate [laughter]—I really trusted that because I thought the way we go at the consensus process and the study process—I've been on committees that have done studies, and the way you look at the evidence is the right way to do.

I also see changes in the League that worry me—

20:21 (Right.)

Because the way life has gone and women's role in the world—in the United States—professionally, for instance, has diminished our numbers! Because it used to be that

bright women married, had children, and no jobs—and fled from the home to League because it was some place that they could keep their mind alive! And that's gone now, because young women marry—with or without children—are working! So many of them are, and so they don't have time. So we have a much older League. And I think there's less zest for action. And that bothers me. This is clear, this is people.

[Laughter.]

So that's one of my concerns, and as I've done all these different things in the League, I kind of feel that I—I haven't done everything of course, but—

And the other thing about League is that it doesn't like to raise money. And I don't know whether most organizations do or not but most organizations realize that you have to do that, and figure out how to do it. And the reason I'm finance chair is because nobody wants to do it. And I've done it for other organizations, and I know sort of how, I think—whether you like it or you don't like it, what you are doing is you are giving people an opportunity to associate themselves with this terrific organization. And that sells! It really does.

So those are the kind of things that come to mind when I think about League, which is I think an astonishing organization. What it gives to the country is amazing.

(Absolutely. I know you've just touched on this a little, but is there anything else you'd like to say about how the League has changed through the years up from even its very beginning to now?)

Well, I can't judge that because I've only been in since '77, that's a late comer. And in the old days—if you look at the old minutes—if you look at the book you see this—that the women were referred to by their married names, not by their first and last name until after the war!

(This is in the official minutes of the meetings?)

Oh yeah. If you look at everything—Mrs. Henry Worthington or whatever.

[Laughter.]

And that was sort of a change, but it was an escape for a lot of young after the war. And before the war. A lot of young women who wanted to keep their minds alive and who wanted to participate in something beyond themselves. And you still have that, that's why people join League is they want to get beyond themselves to do something in the community. So you get interesting people who are willing to do work.

I'm not sure that we're doing as much advocacy as we ought to do. That's the thing that most concerns me is that the kind of campaign finance thing—it's not just that, I mean—redistricting is another interesting thing, which is not ever going to be solved by

legislators. It's the other catch-22—and so I'm concerned about that. So I think as the world changes we've got to look at it as it is and see where you fit in.

Now in Boulder there's another aspect which is Boulder seethes with organizations that want to change things. PLAN-Boulder does a lot of what we do, and they just don't do it the same way we do it. And I think the idea that you don't do stuff—and people can't sometimes join the League, and they don't really understand that you can't just go off and do things. You've got to open the book and say, "Because of this."

You get very good at interpreting the rule book.

[Laughter.]

And that's one thing that's very important that you're always doing things that are in your program. Now we lose people over program. When we came out in favor of abortion, we lost a lot of members—things like that. That's why we didn't address the issue for many, many years. But finally the pressures from within were so strong—and because it's basically a local organization it is—uh—

You know there was a wonderful picture in a cartoon in the paper the other day—yesterday I think it was—of a pyramid standing on its point. Did you see that?

26:29 (No.)

Which is Egypt. And I thought it was such a marvelous idea of what's going on there now. Well, that's what we are! We're a pyramid standing on its point, because the leadership depends so much on local leads to come up with the ideas. We only have convention—for instance, we bring together—before a convention there is a lot of politicking back and forth between local leads who want to bring up issues for study for action. And in convention you listen to all of this and you decide about that. And it's us—down here—at the local level—that are the base, and we know that. And so I think it's not like groups like Common Cause, which is headed up and asks for money but it doesn't ask you to do anything. Not really. And I want us to stay that way. It's a unique organization, I don't know of another one like it.

COPIRG operates from paid people basically. And we have a paid lobbyist at the state level.

(Is that true in every state League?)

I think most of them. We're lucky in that our capital is our biggest city. There are a lot of places where the capital isn't, and lobbying is just technically harder. But we have an office in Denver—our state League office is in Denver, which is across from the capital [building].

[Laughter.]

And in my time there we moved from Race Street to there. We painted the building, and I can remember we painted those offices. That was between '85 and '87—no—'89 and '91. Yeah. And so you just walk across the street, and you're there, which is very nice. It's very convenient.

I ramble.

(No. That's good.)

[Laughter.]

(And I don't think you're rambling, I think you have a lot of really great stories. It sounds like you have some really amazing memories, and you've had some really great life experiences in the League.)

Oh yes. And people I admire so much. We had a president who was sued personally. I can't remember what happened with that. My memory comes and goes. But we've had some great, great leaders. And national leaders! Betsy Cain [?], who was a national leader when I was working on campaign finance reform, came to Boulder—ah, came to Denver—on a tour and she was so good! She spoke very well. She was big on campaign finance reform. I remember that. And Ralph Nader—I met him.

30:15 (At a League event or—?)

I think we had him for a League event as a matter of fact—in Denver. And he was a very impressive guy. And what's his name—[Fred] Wertheimer—the former head of Common Cause—his wife [Linda Wertheimer] is on NPR—Wertheimer. I can't think of his first name.

So it's an interesting world. And to me it gets you where you need to be which is conscious of what's happening out there, and with some tools to do something, and do it in a proper way—in a sensible way.

So I think of League as a training. And again, we are a training ground for politics. People leave us and run for office. And the one problem I find—one big problem with League is that if you're a leader you have to watch your political connections, and money, and all that kind of thing. And it's hard, it's really hard because you get very interested and very concerned about our political representation, and you have to pull back.

(Because you have to stay neutral for the public?)

Yeah. And then there's the division between the voter service side—which is the 501(c)3— and the non-voter service side—advocacy—which is the 501(c)4—and we keep these very separate. And I think we bend over backwards sometimes in what we

consider to be advocacy. And I think education can be on other subjects than just voting. But it's hard. But everybody tries to stick by the rules and yet not be too limited—you want to not feel closed in—and I do forget some of the rules some of the time.[laughs]

But it's a terrific organization.

(I have another question that we have again touched on a little bit, but what would you say the significance of the League is as a women's organization?)

We aren't entirely a women's organization any more, as you know there are men in it, and we have a man on our board—Bruce McKenzie. And as a women's organization we were essential in the beginning. We were formed out of the passing of the Nineteenth Amendment for the purpose of educating women to be in the political process. And I think we've been very important in that over the years. And I'm very proud of what we've done in terms of women. I think we're not alone any more in that, I think there are many organizations which pay a great deal of attention to the position of women. But I think we were absolutely essential.

(Absolutely.)

(How would you say that you have changed as a result of your work with the League—as a result of accomplishments that you were able to do with the League, as a result of various activities?)

Well it was a second career. Really. I retired young and was able to have a whole different perspective. And one of the parts of the perspective was the women's world. I lived in a man's world—CIA is a man's world—and got used to it. And I must say I like certain aspects of the way men conduct business. [laughs] Work.

But what I became very much aware of is how terrific this volunteer organization is. And how effective it is. And how smart the women are in this volunteer world—which I hadn't thought too much about before. So it added another level of understanding—a great level of understanding—of how women function in a volunteer world. I think they talk too much about who's going to bring the cookies, but that's life.

[Laughter.]

I've been to a lot of women's meetings, and I must say they could be briefer. But when you think of the City Council meetings, we're pretty good.

36:09 (I would agree.)

[Anne Marie Pois:] (I was going to perhaps pipe in and say: what are some of the challenges you've met as the fundraiser for the League—or opportunities or accomplishments?)

The challenges are getting out there. Well, I've learned how to do that, because I've gone door-to-door to businesses fundraising for the Colorado Music Festival, which is my other big thing. And so I know sort of how to do that. But here—I haven't done this really—I haven't done a whole lot because, what I've been fundraising for I have to keep imploring people to do projects that need money. Actually I have to ask Roche Colorado, which is a pharmaceutical company which is getting ready to leave—and they're very generous, and they support our League "Know Your Legislator" meetings and that kind of stuff. So that's really not a challenge I just call John Roche and he says, "Yes!"

But my challenge is to get out there and talk to banks. Banks are very good about supporting League Voter Service kinds of meetings. For advocacy it's harder. It depends on what you're advocating. But businesses tend to shrink away from taking sides on things. So then you have to go to find people—individual people—and that is a challenge. That's harder. But you just ask people! And keep doing it until you get lucky.

[Anne Marie Pois:] (Do you depend on a lot of small donations? I know there is a League membership fee.)

Yeah, But we keep a tiny fraction of that fee—because we collect for National and for State, and they take most of it. Whereas other organizations have their own drives—like Common Cause—you can give to State or you can give to their National, but they're separate. But we don't do it that way. And I would really like to look at a different way because we keep under \$10 a year from our members, and that's just not enough to do anything!

And I think maybe it would be nice if we could have an office. But that would cost money, and we don't have that. And then we have to pay rent for some of the places where we have our unit meetings. It's tough. But then you try to find people with some money and snatch it from them!

[Laughter.]

But it's hard—like every other organization. And we don't have a big budget for advertising. And I keep saying, "We have to advertise more—we have to put things in the paper."

Like I noticed some organizations do yearly "thank you" things, and they list all the people that have given and thank them, and I think that's a nice thing to do! People like to see their names—some people do anyway—like to see their names connected with good works! So there's an area where I think I would like to push for getting more money to do that. But that's 501(c)4 money, so it's not tax deductible. [sighs.] You're always into that.

40:39 (Can we take a quick break—can we take a quick pause?)

[They take a break and resume the interview.]

(Would you like to tell us, Pat, a little bit about your experience as state president of the League?)

Yeah. As I say I was president from '89 to '91. And we decided to move. And we did that—that was a pretty big deal.

(You moved to that new office across from the capital?)

Yeah, that new wonderful office, which we are still in.

And the other thing which was a big deal was setting up our 501(C)3. Now before that, all local Leagues and state Leagues were able to use the national education fund for our purposes. And then we send the checks written to them, and they send them back to us. But it's awkward. And so I thought that we should set up our own state education fund so we could just reach in and grab it. So we did that. It took a while, because there was some concern on part of board members that they were going to be somehow more liable to law suits or something. So we had an attorney on our Board who [chimes sound] kind of took us through all that.

So I feel very, very proud of that, that we got a state League. I keep wanting us to have one here in our Boulder League, but it costs some money to do. And you need money again—so that's the problem. Because then we wouldn't have to go to State and get the money, and make sure that it gets to the state and all that. It would be a lot better. So that's just administrative problems—yeah, really.

And on the substantive side I was a lobbyist at the state legislature before—while I was, I think, president in Boulder. And then up until I was president—and the president doesn't do that really.

(Yep. That's a separate position—lobbying. Okay.)

Yeah. But there was a volunteer lobby corps that I as a part of—and have been since. I stopped doing that now. But I used to be down there all the time. And the Legislative Action Committee met every couple of weeks, and we'd sit around and talk about what we wanted to accomplish. And we wrote a legislative letter which is always very useful. And we'd send it out to the legislators. And you could see it—it's a yellow, sort of orangey-colored document. And you'd look down there from the gallery and you'd see these yellow pages on their desks. So they read it—they really did!

[Laughter.]

They do! And I thought that was a very smart idea to circulate it among them.

When I was president of the Boulder League there was a big “to-do” about the city plan. They were trying to get the city zoning in—more in—it had sort of strayed from the city

plan as it was reviewed one year. And people got all upset about that, and they decided that what they wanted to do was to have a ward system in Boulder. But we don't have a ward system, as you know. We have a free-for-all. Because they thought that what was happening was that the liberal element in Boulder was winning all the time, and it didn't represent the "true" feelings of Boulder. So the Boulder League took a stance against that. But we were in favor of keeping it the way it was. And I can remember standing with somebody holding a placard in front of a microphone on some school ground—I've forgotten where it was—arguing.

[Laughter.]

I think I got my picture in the paper. That's what I thought we ought to do! Stand up there and say, "No, we should not do this. This is a better system."

But what I'm now saying is what I think we should do is preferential voting. Which is—it's perfect for a city council. You're choosing among a lot of candidates for a number of offices—ranking them. So what you do is that if you don't have a winner you keep taking off the bottom one—taking their second ranks—and redistributing the votes—which is a very practical way I think of discerning the intent of the people!

So I think we're going to work on that. But we have to look at our positions to make sure we can. I like that idea. I think it would probably be good in a national election where you have the kind of thing that happened in the [Jimmy] Carter [election]—with Ross Perot. You'd avoid that sort of—and yet you would allow third parties to have their say, because they represent people. And I think that's a good thing to do. But I don't know whether that has a chance or not. We don't have a position that supports it, so we would have to study it.

47:07 (Yeah.)

Those are the things that I would kind of have in mind.

I think the local League president has the toughest job of any League job because she's got to pay attention to everything that's going on in her community and be aware of state and national interests too, because she's part of that. And she has to see to it that her League is growing—and our League isn't. And not _____ because you can't, you deal with what you got. But what we have here is, I think, a healthy retirement community. People who come to live here—and they're not old—yet—they are retiring younger. We should get these people. And we do have some young people actually—which is wonderful—that are active. But not very many, because they're all working.

And one of the things I have—to go back to your earlier question—one of the things that I have learned is the League of Women Voters treat each other very nicely. And I appreciate that. They are solicitous about people. I hadn't been that way particularly because in a man's world you are not terribly solicitous. You just get on with it! So it's

kind of softened the edges, which I appreciate. I hope it has anyway. Although I still kind of snap once in a while.

So you set a tone. And you relate to the community that you're in as a president. And make sure you connect with other organizations, and are known, and are accessible. And listen—you listen a lot to what people have on their minds. And you have to decide! You have to decide some things. Who the League is going to put its emphasis on, whatever level you are at—the state or the local level. And it's work—it's a lot of work. But very satisfying. Yeah. It's an honor to be a representative of a group like this. And I think all of us feel that way.

50:02 (It sounds like that. Do you have any other personal stories or anecdotes that you'd like to share with us?)

One of my favorite people in League—Tess McNulty. Tess McNulty is dead. But she was the water guru of Colorado, and everybody bowed down to her. She was a short woman. And she'd been a Marine in World War II. She did not drive a car. I don't know how she got to be a Marine and couldn't drive a car. She was physically not built to reach everything. And she knew more about water than anybody in the whole world. And so I would listen to her always. And I also learned one big lesson from her about how you operate in politics which is: "You can never get it all in one go, you have to take it piece by piece."

And you have to just pay attention to what's going on around you and what's possible, and go at it that way. That's so important! And there are lots of people who really cannot stand that. And complicated issues like water—and campaign finance reform—it's a long term thing—you've got to do it forever! I mean you're just passing along—I'm in one stage of all this, and I'll die, and other people will still be doing it. And I knew that. And Tess was the one who really got me to understand that. She was very skillful. And everybody admired and respected her. At the legislature she was revered.

(What position did she hold with the League?)

Well, she had problems with authority.

[Laughter.]

So she never—I don't know if she was on the board ever or not. She would lobby at the legislature. And she had lived in the Washington area and was on with the group that cleaned up the Potomac River—which had turned into a bunch of sludge. I mean, she's really done things. Chevron gave out awards—I don't know if they still do or not—for public service and I wrote a grant and proposed her, and she won. And I felt very proud of that. We were very good friends, and I think of her all of the time 'cause she was firm in her beliefs about how water should be treated. She said, "Back in the Aztec days they did all the same things we did, and look what happened to them."

[Laughter.]

And she's right. They built dams, and they lost their water, and it dried up. And she said they weren't any better than we were—with all the talk of Indians and their relationship to Mother Earth. So she's I guess my favorite example of what a Leaguer can be.

[Anne Marie Pois] (Was she from Boulder or—?)

No, she was from the East. So she had worked in Washington. Her husband was killed by a drunk driver. And she had three sons, and I think two of them lived out here, and that's why she came to Boulder. She had been here—she was older than I. And she had been here four—but a smashing example of a public servant. So she had worked—I don't know where she worked in Washington. But she did do this thing with League in Washington. And so that's another kind of thing that we do—is cleaning up water.

Water is a big issue here in a different way. And so we have another powerhouse water person—Jeannette Hillery—You haven't talked to her, have you?

(Is she in Boulder County?)

Yeah. Yeah she is, she works mostly at the state level. But she's the new “Tess McNulty.” And she's very good, very good. But we are on environmental issues—which I have not worked on particularly. We have some powerhouses—people who do that. Ah—what else—

55:27 (I really like that phrase that “You can't get it all in one go.”)

That's absolutely crucial to understand if you try to get anything done in politics.

(Yup. And it sounds like a very fitting description of the League's work.)

But it isn't that you give in on everything, it's just that you plot your course—

(Right.)

Carefully.

And that's leadership.

(Yup.)

Figuring it out—how far you can move—and that's the other thing presidents do—is that they figure that out. So it's been fun.

(I think we are just about at the end of our tape, so you can take a little break if you'd like.)

Yeah.

(Okay.)

(Thank you very much Pat, it was a great discussion. Thank you.)

I've enjoyed it very much. And I hope I've conveyed the things that I wanted to. But we'll see. I mean I'll look at the tape.

[Laughter.]

(Yeah, let us know.)

56:53 [End of Part A. End of interview.]