

The Ann Richards Oral History Collection

**Susan Rieff Oral History Interview**

Interview 1 of 1: July 24, 2012

The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History  
The University of Texas at Austin  
Austin, Texas

## **Interview Information**

*These oral history interviews were conducted as a part of the Ann Richards Oral History Collection. The project is designed to expand and enhance the Richard's archives at DBCAH by recording the experiences, viewpoints, and perspectives of some who were centrally involved in her administration and rise to the Office of the Governor.*

*The purpose of the oral history transcripts is to reflect the words spoken in original interviews as closely as possible. The speech and thought patterns of the interviewees, as well as their actual word choices, are represented in the transcript. The transcripts have been edited for readability with regard to punctuation and clarity. In some cases, clarifying remarks from interviewees have been added in brackets.*

**Interviewer:** Erica Lies

**Location:** Briscoe Center for American History, UT Austin campus

**Transcriber:** Shannon Morris

**Tape Audit/Light Edit:** Erica Lies, 8/16/12

**Legal Status:** Full release from Ms. Rieff

**Erica Lies:** Today is July 24, 2012. I am at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History in the Third Floor Conference Room with Susan Rieff. So we're going to be talking today about your time—I know you have had a long career in the environmental field. We're going to be focusing primarily on your time with the Ann Richards administration. But before we get to all that, I just want to talk to you a little bit about where you grew up.

**Susan Rieff:** I grew up in Rogers, Arkansas, which was then a very small town in the northwest part of the state, the most beautiful part of the state, in the Ozarks. I've described it as sort of a Mayberry experience then. I was fortunate in that the public schools there were quite good. We were close to Fayetteville, which is where the University of Arkansas is, and so we had wonderful teachers coming out of the university. I became interested in the outdoors and conservation at a very young age. I was one of those fortunate kids at that time that had access to open space and nature and creeks and independence. I was always outside doing things. I became very interested in the environment and what was going on nationally and even globally as early as the 9<sup>th</sup> Grade. That was the first Earth Day—

**EL:** Oh, wow.

**SR:** —in 1970, and I had a wonderful biology teacher who was not long out of college and he was all about sort of the new interest in the environment and conveyed all that to all of us. So that's kind of where my affinity for this kind of work really started. Both my own just love of being outside and then the political piece of it which was kind of introduced starting in the early 70s. After that, when I graduated—and I was very interested in biology and sciences—I ended up going to Texas Christian University in Fort Worth for two reasons. They had a wonderful environmental science program, which was pretty rare at that time. They gave me scholarship so that pretty much nailed it. That's how I ended up coming to Texas for the first time.

**EL:** And then did you stay in Texas after you finished [inaudible]?

**SR:** I did. I was on my way to do graduate work in water chemistry or something like that, but a professor of mine had a contact here at the LBJ School, a wonderful professor named Gerry Rohlich and he sent me down to see Dr. Rohlich. And it was kind of love at first sight, both for the LBJ School and for Dr. Rohlich and the chance to do both science and policy work. So that is what led me to come

here and I graduated from the LBJ School with an emphasis on environmental policy in 1980.

After that, I was fortunate enough to be selected for what was then called the Presidential Management Intern Program and to take an assignment in Washington in the federal government without competition. It was a fabulous program started by Jimmy Carter. I went to the Department of the Interior because I'd done a summer internship the previous year at EPA and my boss there had gone to Interior so she said, "Come here with me." One of the wonderful features of that is you could do rotational assignments, and so I took one up to the US Senate and worked for my home state senator, Dale Bumpers. And I never went back to the Interior Department. I stayed in the Senate for about five years working for him, again doing natural resources, energy, interior preparations, and so forth. I was his legislative aide for those functions.

**EL:** Now, what was it that interested you in the policy side as opposed to becoming a scientist?

**SR:** Well, at TCU, I was really fortunate to get a lot of research experience, and while I liked it, I concluded that I really did have kind of a [policy and] political orientation. I thought I would be more able to have an impact, probably, through policy. I didn't think I was going to be the next Einstein. So I originally came here thinking I would do both. I did some environmental engineering courses when I [first came], but I ultimately let that go and just went through the policy program. But there was so much happening in terms of legislative work and Congressional things, there was just a lot of public awareness of serious environmental problems and opportunities and I just wanted to be part of that.

**EL:** And you had Barbara Jordan as a professor.

**SR:** I did. The year I came — [1978] — was [just after] Barbara Jordan came here. So she had just gotten here when I came. I was lucky enough to be in the second class that she taught. It was her ethics course. And it was just a life-changing experience, and for me, particularly, because we became quite good friends and I remained friends with her throughout her life. When I lived in Washington, sometimes when she would come for various reasons I would meet with her and go with her to places in Washington. She had a profound influence on the school and certainly on me and all my classmates.

**EL:** Uh-huh. Of course, she was also later involved in Ann Richards' administration.

**SR:** She was. She was Ann's ethics counselor and everyone that Ann appointed to a significant post in her administration had to go through an interview with Barbara.

**EL:** Did you have to do that?

**SR:** Well I already knew her, but I took a couple of people out to see Barbara.

**EL:** And what was their experience?

**SR:** Oh, they were nervous but it was all good. Governor Richards was very serious about [ethics] and she made sure that her appointees knew how serious she was about that.

**EL:** Now, right before you took the position with Ann Richards, you worked for the land commissioner, is that right?

**SR:** No. I was working for the Agriculture Commission.

**EL:** Okay.

**SR:** I was an assistant commissioner of Agriculture when Jim Hightower was elected agriculture commissioner.

**EL:** Okay.

**SR:** And he too had been defeated in 1990 by someone named Rick Perry. Ann Richards was elected in that election, so that's the switch that I made [to the Governor's Office].

**EL:** So tell me about getting the job offer from her—and even before we get into that. Now, I had read somewhere that you had actually previously accepted a job with Bob Bullock.

**SR:** Well there's a story there. I was actually in Washington wrapping up some business for Hightower, and I got a call from Bullock's transition office. This was after the elections, and he said, "He wants to see you and we've been sort of scouting you out." Well this was strange, but okay. I said, "Well I'm in DC." They said, "When do you get back?" I said, "I get back at 4:00 this afternoon." "Well great, come to our office." So, I went to the office when I got to town. I sat there until about 10:00 o'clock at night, maybe 9:00 o'clock at night, and at that point, I was summoned up to

Governor Bullock's office. He said something like, "Well, I understand you're good at this environmental stuff and so you're going to be with us and working on this stuff, and be our environmental person." There really wasn't a conversation, it was just kind of a—

**EL:** An order?

**SR:** —a statement of fact. I had never had any contact with Governor Bullock before then, and so I said to myself, Well I guess I'm going to be working in the Lieutenant Governor's Office. I believe that was on a Friday and on Monday—I think it was Monday. I then got a call from Governor Richards. I was back in my office at the Ag Department, and she said, "Well, Susan I'm down here on Padre Island with the team. Everybody's here, we're kind of staffing up the administration. We want you to be our environmental director." And I'm thinking, Oh, gosh, I really want to do that. I said, "Well, Governor, I think I have a problem, because I believe that Lieutenant Governor Bullock wants me to work for him." There was this pause and she said, "Yeah, well, you think about it and call me back and let me know what you decide to do."

So we hung up and I thought, This is so far above my head, you know. I don't want to work for Bullock. I do want to work for the Richards administration. I had worked a little bit on her campaign. And so all weekend I'm thinking, What am I going to do here? So Monday morning—well in fact, there's another part of the story. I called my good friend Bob Armstrong and said, "Bob, I think I'm in a pickle. What am I going to do?" and I told him what it was and I thought Bob would say, "Oh, no problem, just tell them this"—or something. Instead he said, "Oh, wow!" [*Laughter*] Anyway, Monday morning I walked back over to Bullock's office and talked to one of his [senior] aides and said, "I can't do this. I'm going to go to work for the Governor." And well it just suffices to say that my relationship with the Lieutenant Governor's Office was forever terrible.

**EL:** Because—

**SR:** Yeah, he was very unhappy and, you know, rightly so, probably. But I was very committed to Ann Richards and I also knew, I knew people that were going to be working for Ann, and I was very aware of Bullock's reputation and I just didn't think I would be effective working for him nor did I want to.

**EL:** And those are the reasons you didn't want to take the job with him?

**SR:** Right.

**EL:** Okay.

**SR:** I mean, it would have been very great policy work and I had a lot of respect for the talent in his office, but I just knew that I would not be well-suited in that environment. But I did pay a price for it.

**EL:** Okay. Well, we'll talk about that as we go on.

**SR:** It's not so interesting, really.

**EL:** Well, I mean I think all of it is valid and worth getting down.

**SR:** Okay.

**EL:** Now, you started—that was in the fall and then you started with the Richards administration in January.

**SR:** That's right.

**EL:** So tell me about the transition there.

**SR:** I can't remember exactly but we had some transition meetings, certainly, before she actually was inaugurated and started working on some of the documents like the—

**EL:** Blueprint for the—

**SR:** *Blueprint for the New Texas*. So all that work started within a week of the election. There was a lot to do.

**EL:** Now, when you were starting, what did you see as the priorities?

**SR:** She had staked out a number of very clear positions in almost every policy area in state government during the campaign. I was familiar with most of them on the environmental and natural resources side. And so, there was a pretty clear agenda that she had already developed, and I looked at those documents and talked to people who had been involved. As I said, I had been involved, but not heavily. I'd helped write some papers and things like that. So, the agenda in my area of responsibility was pretty clear. Now, fleshing it out was another matter. But she was concerned about the [Gulf] Coast. She was very concerned about the hazardous waste commercial development that seemed to be

taking off here. She was very concerned about the situation in the *colonias* along the Border and their lack of healthy water and waste water systems. The Clean Air Act had just been enacted at the federal level and Texas [was going] to deal with that. Low-level radioactive waste was a separate issue. Ann Richards really was a conservationist. She loved the coast and she loved being outdoors, and parks and sort of protection of the coast were high on her list. And I'm sure I'm forgetting some things. It was all very authentic on her part.

**EL:** And just about, I mean you're talking about this a little bit but just to back up because I asked you kind of why you don't want to work for Bullock, but not why you did want to work for Richards.

**SR:** Uh-huh.

**EL:** So tell me—

**SR:** Because I thought that for the first time in Texas—we'd have a governor who really cared about the environment and was going to do something about it. Her environmental agenda was unlike anything any other governor had put forth. I knew she was sincere about it, and I thought, my gosh, what a chance to be a part of this, and not just the area that I was ultimately responsible for, but the whole set of reforms and things that she wanted to do. There was so much [that] was reflective of my concerns. I wanted to be of help to that. I really did. I think we all really felt here was an opportunity to really change the way state government worked and the things that it was working to accomplish. So it was not a hard choice for me.

But I don't want to get too caught up in the Bullock story. Clearly I was going to work for Ann if I had the chance to do that.

**EL:** Sure. Now, tell me about getting started because when you all came in, the Legislature was already in session.

**SR:** It's always like that. The Legislature convenes a couple of weeks before the inauguration. We were taking over from Bill Clements.

What I remember is when we were able to go inside our offices, which was not until noon, after the inauguration. You don't get to start moving in that morning. You have to wait. They had cleared out the files and things, and that's not unusual, it's kind of a tradition. So we didn't have computers hooked up, we didn't have phones hooked up. It had all pretty much been taken down. So that made it complicated, but we got up and running.



And what I can tell you about that first session—I was not the hardest working person in the administration—but I think I took two days off, including weekends, between January and the end of the legislative session. I was like everybody else. We had so much to do and worked so hard because she worked so hard. I tell everybody who asks me what was it like working for Ann Richards that she was the hardest working person I have ever known. It was 24/7 for four years, with an occasional movie or occasional trip to the beach, but she was phenomenal in that way. So we had to work just as hard.

**EL:** Now, what were the first items that you started working on? Because I know that one of the first items on the agenda that she really wanted to get through was a temporary moratorium on hazardous waste permits until stronger permitting rules could be put in place.

**SR:** Right. In the environmental area, her signature [issue] was a hazardous waste bill and this was not an issue that she had come to by knowing anything really about hazardous waste policy. But during the campaign, she had met with a lot of people in communities that were being threatened by these new projects and so her concern and her knowledge grew out of those meetings with community groups and community leaders. She saw that they were very concerned because these facilities were being planned close to their neighborhoods, schools, churches, drinking water supplies, and she made campaign promises that she would see to it that they were not at risk from those things.

So one of the first bills that we had drafted with the help of Senator Steve Carriker, at the time, was Senate Bill 1099. It was a comprehensive bill aimed at tighter management and regulation of those facilities and putting limits on where they could be established. That [bill] actually survived and it was added to with some complimentary legislation on waste reduction and recycling, [so the bill addressed reducing waste] as well as restricting how the waste would be managed. So that was really a signature achievement and that was passed in the first Legislative Session. And it was a hard-fought bill.

**EL:** Now tell me about that fight, because I know one compromise was that originally she had wanted a two-year moratorium and then it ended up being a hundred and twenty days.

**SR:** Something like that, yes. But it was a moratorium [intended] to stop [permitting] until we had stronger rules in place. It was never

intended as a permanent moratorium. [The idea] was to wait and not issue permits until they could be issued under tighter controls or more appropriate controls. It also depended on her appointments to the regulatory agencies at the time. One of the first things that we had to do, of course, was to make appointments to manage all of the many state agencies. That was a huge job: identifying people, interviewing people, making decisions about people. So part of the thinking was that a moratorium would be in place until we had better rules and we had our own leadership at the regulatory agency and that [agency] at the time was the Texas Water Commission. We achieved that.

She appointed John Hall and he brought in his team and immediately started looking at the whole hazardous waste regulatory environment [and programs] at the Texas Water Commission. We worked with John on the legislation, because Ann was also very practical and wanted government to work efficiently. She was sympathetic to arguments that it took too long to get permits from the state. She wanted to make sure that we weren't setting up something that would be impossible for people to meet the standards for. So that's how that happened. It was [working] with this sort of first set of new appointees to the environmental agencies.

**EL:** Now passing that bill through, did it encounter—what kind of opposition did it encounter?

**SR:** Oh, all kinds of opposition mostly from the companies that would be affected. That was mostly expressed through their lobbyists, and they hired the best top lobbyists at the Texas Legislature. It made it very difficult. It was not easy legislation to pass. Lobbyists have tremendous influence there. It's been a long time and even if I could I probably wouldn't name names, but there were members in key positions that were supported by those lobbyists and those companies. We had meetings with them all, we had meetings with everybody about it. I remember one where we had, you know, the Sierra Club and the Chemical Council all together and were trying to—did hammer out a few compromises on it. Basically we were able to get a bill that achieved the essence of what we wanted to do. It could have been stronger, but [the industry] had a lot of influence on it. There's a lot of money involved in hazardous waste management.

**EL:** Were there any specific compromises that you remember as a result of that?

**SR:** I think we [reduced the siting restriction] from a mile to a half mile restriction on some things. I would have to go back and look at it to remember some of those [compromises]. We learned as we went along, too. I was certainly not an expert in hazardous waste management. I knew the basic regulatory framework. We tried to work with the industry to come up with compromises that would still be tough but still accomplish what we wanted to do while accommodating some logistical things or practicalities that they wanted. In the end, it was our bill and it did, I think, satisfy the communities that had first brought this to her attention. Some of these projects just went away forever. I'm not sure that any of them actually ever finally were permitted.

**EL:** Do you remember which ones?

**SR:** There was one near Channel View. I don't remember the name of it. It was referred to as "the Channel View Project." The big one, of course, was the Hunter Industries Salt Dome Project.

**EL:** That was my next question. Now tell me about that one, because I know that one had already been in process for a couple of years—

**SR:** That one had been in process for a couple of years and the sponsors of that project had formed their own company. It was untested technology. Most hazardous waste at the time was being incinerated and there the concerns were the air pollution from that incineration. What Hunter wanted to do was to bury it in underground salt domes. Salt domes are stable features, usually, but on this scale, hazardous waste had not been disposed of that way. So they were seeking permission from the State to do something that was new, and I think trying to get it permitted under same kinds of rules.

Well, the problem with that was that if there were a failure, it could have been catastrophic. Like I said, it was just untested. A lot of money had been invested in it already, not by the State, but by the promoters of the project.

Well, it was one that the people living in the area were particularly opposed to, and I think most of their fears were for contaminated water and not air emissions so much but the water pollution issues and the transportation issues. You know, if you're going to bury hazardous waste there, where is it coming from? What highways is it going to travel? What kind of safety measures are going to be there. What happens in the case of a spill? So on and so forth. But because of the untested nature of it, the pure scale of

it, [the Hunter project] became a lightning rod. That is one where the Legislature was deeply, deeply involved. Now, that particular case went on for a long time because after the new law was passed and rules were put in place, it still had to go through that process and ultimately it was denied a permit. It was just intensely controversial and political and the pressures on the agency were immense.

**EL:** Now, this is jumping forward a little bit but while we're on the subject of salt domes in general, there was an explosion in April 1982 in Brenham that was from a leaking pipe that was going to a salt dome. Do you remember that?

**SR:** I sure don't.

**EL:** Okay.

**SR:** I wasn't even here then. [*Ed. note: The Brenham explosion was actually in April 1992.*]

**EL:** Okay. There was another proposed, I think it was a quote, unquote, "clean" sludge dump that was proposed for West Texas.

**SR:** Oh, gosh, yeah. What was the name of that?

**EL:** I can probably find it.

**SR:** Merco? Something like that. Yes, right after the governor took office, it was a just few months into her time.

**EL:** Merco Joint Venture.

**SR:** Merco Joint Ventures. We learned that a New York company had gotten permission from the State to deposit their organic sludge at a dump in West Texas and we didn't know about it until it was happening and I think the staff at the agency just weren't really paying—I don't know if they were not paying attention, they didn't see it as a problem. Well, it was a huge political problem. Here we are, talking about a cleaner Texas and managing this waste and suddenly we have not just organic sludge coming from water, wastewater treatment plants, being dumped in West Texas, it was New York sludge being taken on trains and trucks all the way to West Texas. At the time, they had gotten a permit and they had every right under state law to do it. So that became another huge problem for us in the Governor's Office and the staff and for John Hall.

**EL:** In what way?

**SR:** I know that it was kind of in limbo for a while. I think we stopped it for a while. I think the law the Hazardous Waste Bill [may have been] changed to create more authority to regulate it and that may have been enough to discourage New York from sending it down here. It had been too easy.

**EL:** Now, in what way did it become a huge problem?

**SR:** Well politically, it was a problem and people living in the area hadn't known about it until they looked up one day [and saw the trains]. Some people probably [were aware of it], but a lot of people did not. And the idea for West Texans and most Texans that New York would be sending its municipal sludge out there was an outrage, understandably so.

**EL:** Right.

**SR:** Of course, to New Yorkers, well it's dry out there and there's nothing out there and so it's not going to harm anything. It's just going to become part of the soil, but that's not how [Texas saw it].

**EL:** Well I did read one article whereas, I guess the company and even some of the EPA administrators were trying to argue that it was a recycling effort because it was quote, unquote, "clean"—

**SR:** — compost. Uh-huh.

**EL:** My question was: well if it was so clean and it was a recycling effort, why didn't New York just take it?

**SR:** Space. Just the lack of [isolated], vast open space, which is, which is what made it seem like such a perfect solution for them to send it down here.

**EL:** I see.

**SR:** And, they would have gotten the same push back from local citizens, probably, that we did here. I mean, there was a case to be made, probably, that it was some kind of recycling or compost, but there was the toxics issue and that was real. I don't think they had tested for toxics. Anyway, we didn't want it here but it kind of was here before we even knew what was happening, so it became a matter of, "Now what do we do?" I think that was eventually managed so that stream of waste was stopped. But that is one

where I, I would want to check before I said definitively what the eventual outcome was.

**EL:** Yeah. I haven't found it yet. I need to keep digging for it.

**SR:** I think it just faded away.

**EL:** Now another issue that came up and this became an even bigger issue than just statewide because it was before they were negotiating NAFTA there were some proposed lands that were also near the Mexico border and were within, I can't remember what—

**SR:** A hundred miles of the border?

**EL:** Yeah.

**SR:** It was the NAFTA area [with regard to environmental protection].

**EL:** And there was some convention that I can't remember what it— Was in violation of some rule but it might have been the hundred miles rule.

**SR:** I don't know.

**EL:** Okay. [*Ed. note: Referring to the 1983 La Paz Conventions which stipulated a 60-mile area at the border that required U.S.-Mexico consultations on any construction that raised a potential danger to the environment.*]

**SR:** NAFTA—Richards was very much in favor of NAFTA as was President Clinton but with the caveat that it must have strong environmental provisions so that free trade just didn't mean that the Border [area] would become a dumping ground. There were a lot of groups in Texas that were very concerned about that, the environmental groups. Public Citizen and groups like that, as was the Clinton administration. So in any speech or any assertion of support for NAFTA that Governor Richards made, it was always with the caveat that it had to include strong environmental provisions and labor protections. All the parties agreed that that was a good thing. So there was set up a Commission for Environmental Cooperation along the Border, which we participated in. A bank was set up, the North American Development Bank, [and it was required] to consider environmental implications in projects that they might finance. There was an enforcement arm of it. So we were involved at the Governor's Office with EPA and with the White House and with the Department of Commerce and Trade and in making sure that in

the development of free trade, the development of NAFTA, which again the Governor strongly supported, those things weren't ignored.

I remember going to a meeting or two in Mexico, one with the Governor and once with an EPA administrator, and some other Governor's representatives, talking about those issues, encouraging Mexico to set up equivalent regulatory agencies to our EPA, so there was some protection along the Border.

**EL:** Now, but these proposed dumps that I'm not sure that they were able to get permitted, but they were—landfill dumps had actually, they caused some tension with Mexico because Mexico said these are too close so—

**SR:** Yeah, everybody was arguing and pointing fingers a lot around all those issues. I think they were [concerns about] just regular city dumps and things like that. The big one, of course, was the low-level radioactive waste dump. You probably read about it.

**EL:** That was my next question.

**SR:** That issue had been going on for years before Ann Richards took office. It was a result of Federal legislation that was intended to find a safe way to authorize storage or disposal space for low-level waste and low-level waste. A lot of it is the radioactive stuff from hospitals, clothing and packaging and stuff like that. But it includes some low-level waste from nuclear plants, as well. But you dispose of it differently than you do like spent fuel rods. Nobody wanted it, of course. So Congress passed a law which said, and this was assumed under the Commerce [Claus], "You can't keep out another state's hazardous low-level waste." It's like saying we're going to keep out any other things made in your state. [A state] can't do that under the Commerce Law. But, [the legislation said that] if a state forms a compact with another state to take care of its hazardous waste, then it can exclude other states. So it was trying to encourage and incentivize states to form these regional compacts with the idea that a handful of these sites would be established around the country. They could also take care of states not wanting to just become the [national] dumping ground. You know, "If we build one for ourselves, why should we do that because if we're first to do that then everybody else is going to send their [waste] here?"

So Texas, before Ann was governor, entered into a compact with Maine and Vermont, the thinking being [that these states] don't

produce very much. We'll have our compact. We'll be protected from taking it from every place else. And so when we took office there was [already a state] agency [working on that.] We had people from Maine and Vermont coming down here to make sure it was still a deal. But the agency that had been working on this for some time had found a site that they liked in West Texas, in Hudspeth County, and they claimed that it was safe. They had been doing engineering and water studies for years, but again, in this sort of frenzy of activity around hazardous waste disposal broadly, that became another [controversial] project because nobody wants anything that sounds like radioactive anything in their neighborhood. Now, this was a very isolated place out in Hudspeth County, [but the project] had been under legal challenge [for years]. We were playing catch up a little bit, I mean the Governor understood the Federal law and that it was intended to protect Texas from just being the dumping ground for the nation. Ultimately, I think it [was] permitted but I [believe] the site has moved because one of the many lawsuits finally got some traction by proving that there was some seismic activity in that area.

**EL:** So they—

**SR:** I think it's been moved. It's sort of like Yucca Mountain. [*Ed. note: Yucca Mountain was a high-level radioactive waste disposal site in Nevada.*] There's been effort for 30 years, longer, probably, to permit a high level waste disposal plant in Nevada and it still hasn't happened.

**EL:** Just because nobody wants that.

**SR:** Right. So the Governor took some heat from environmental groups for not just killing that project, but given the Federal law, I remember we felt like we didn't have any choice but we did push to make sure that all the right studies were done, every possible rock was overturned, before we issued a permit.

**EL:** And it still didn't get—

**SR:** It still lingered on then because of another lawsuit and some additional seismic evidence and groundwater. That was separate from all the other hazardous waste [issues], it's a whole different category.

**EL:** The—?

**SR:** Radioactive.



**EL:** —radioactive. Okay. Yeah, it's a whole additional level.

**SR:** Yeah.

**EL:** Now we had touched a little bit on some of the water stuff and you mentioned the appointment of John Hall to the Texas Water Commission. This was also when there was a kind of an ongoing dispute from the pumping from the Edwards Aquifer.

**SR:** Right.

**EL:** So were you involved in that?

**SR:** Yeah.

**EL:** So tell me about that.

**SR:** Well, the Edwards Aquifer, of course, [was then] the sole source of drinking water for the City of San Antonio. It's also home to a couple of endangered species, the Barton Springs Salamander being the primary one. The Sierra Club filed a lawsuit against the EPA [and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service]. A lawsuit to force protection of the salamander. The salamander was in danger, they asserted, when the flows got too low from the aquifer. The aquifer is always going up and down and there is tremendous pressure on it. So they filed suit to force the State to limit pumping from the aquifer in order to protect the salamander—

**EL:** Under the Endangered Species Act.

**SR:** —under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

**EL:** There was an additional one I think it was called the Fountain Darter in Comal Springs, New Braunfels.

**SR:** Yeah, but the big one was the—

**EL:** The salamander.

**SR:** —the salamander. That kind of brought [the conflict] into focus. Ultimately what happened there was the Legislature finally authorized creation [of a groundwater district] in order to deal with the lawsuit; it was upheld by the court.

**EL:** One of the threats of the lawsuit was shutting down—

**SR:** Restricting pumping from the aquifer.

**EL:** Yeah, and potential federal takeover of the aquifer.

**SR:** Well, I don't remember if that was sort of the red herring or that was a possibility, but—

**EL:** Okay.

**SR:** —it could have been, it could have been. But what came out of that was a settlement to create a groundwater district that would manage pumping from the aquifer in a way that it would protect the salamander. So we now have the Edwards Aquifer Conservation District. It has worked very well, but it was the first time that an entity had been created with specified pumping limits to enforce.

**EL:** The first time for the aquifer?

**SR:** For Texas.

**EL:** Okay. For Texas?

**SR:** Oh, yeah. Because, you know, the Rule of Capture [applies] in Texas. If you're standing over [groundwater] and you have a straw, it's yours. You can pump whatever is under your land. Well, for the first time there was now a regional entity created that had authority to limit pumping and had the responsibility to limit it to certain amounts at certain times of the year or when levels got to some threshold. And that really stirred up a lot of concerns from landowners and it sort of contributed to making the Endangered Species Act just the [most unpopular] thing in the world. It made it a whipping boy for a lot of [other issues. Some] people were using the Endangered Species Act in order to get some kind of relief, some kind of environmental action that they couldn't otherwise get. They couldn't get the City of San Antonio to limit pumping by itself. They couldn't, because there was no authority, get the state to regulate that, so they sued under the Federal Endangered Species Act to find a hook that would result in limiting the pumping.

**EL:** Because one of the issues was if someone further upstream is pumping a lot of water and there's a drought—there was also an issue with, I can't remember if it was a salmon farmer or an alfalfa—

**SR:** How about a rice farmer?

**EL:** Maybe that's it.

**SR:** Rice farmers live downstream.

**EL:** Okay.

**SR:** And so, the more [the aquifer is] pumped or depleted, the less is going to flow. So it was a huge thing. It's still—and then it became even more so, because there had to be a board named for [the conservation district] and that, because [members] were elected, they had to be pre-cleared by the Justice Department. So there was another hitch.

**EL:** So what does that mean?

**SR:** Pre-clearance under the Voting Rights Act. The Voting Rights Act passed in '64 and states that were held to be discriminating in the way they administered their voting programs have to get pre-cleared by the Justice Department when they change their voting systems, ostensibly to make sure that they're not reverting to discriminatory practices. And even today, Texas—

**EL:** Still has to do that.

**SR:** —still has to do that. This being an elected body, even though it is a very limited kind of scope, had to do that. So that was another sort of controversy. All of this was creating, in the Legislature at least, a lot of hostility towards the federal government and tremendous hostility toward anything that sounded like an endangered species, which then played out in issues related to the Golden Cheeked Warbler and the Black Capped Vireo and other species here which became a problem for land developers. But that's another story.

**EL:** We can talk about that a little bit separately.

**SR:** Yeah. That's a separate issue but politically related.

**EL:** We talked about a lot of these—now there was a point before the regional entity was developed that one of the solutions was that John Hall had the aquifer declared an underground river so that the State could declare authority over it and regulate pumping but there was a—

**SR:** That was challenged and didn't—

**EL:** There was—

**SR:** —wasn't upheld.

**EL:** There was a huge outcry over that.

**SR:** Uh-huh.

**EL:** Do you remember much—?

**SR:** We were looking for a way to deal with what was a serious and Federal issue that we needed to deal with, and since we didn't have anything on the books with which to manage groundwater, that was something he tried.

**EL:** Now you were the chair of Richards' Environmental Policy Council—

**SR:** Yes. I was the Director of Environmental Policy. We had a Policy Council which included other people in similar roles for insurance or for education and health and human services. But then I had another role as the director of the whole Policy Council.

**EL:** Okay.

**SR:** Not in terms of directing policy in those other areas, but managing how we worked within the Governor's Office and with the Governor.

**EL:** Okay, so tell me about those two roles.

**SR:** Well, as the Environmental Policy Director, I was on point for the environmental agencies, and environmental legislation. Environmental issues at the federal level—and there's a lot of Federal-State back and forth there. Citizens with environmental complaints or problems or issues, industries with problems with the regulatory system, anything in that arena and that included the Parks and Wildlife [Department] and all of that. As I said, we had other people who had the same responsibilities for Health and Human Services, or you know, name your policy area. So my job in that role was to remain in contact with all of Governor Richards' appointees and her, and other board and commission members. Staying on top of what was going on so she was informed of what was going on in those agencies, making sure that they understood what her priorities were within the bounds of appropriate communications. We paid attention to that.

Of course, during the legislative sessions, it was all about what was going on legislatively, things that we wanted, things that we wanted to stop, amendments that we thought were necessary. Identifying things that we thought were problems in the agencies

that might need the governor's help or a legislative fix to deal with. She was very concerned, for example, about the limited parkland and wildlife refuges and [preserves], and so we worked very hard to get more money for the Parks and Wildlife Department for that. One of the things I am probably proudest of is that we created the Texas Environmental Crimes Task Force—

**EL:** That was another question I had.

**SR:** It still exists; I checked this morning. It still exists.

**EL:** So tell me about the creation of that.

**SR:** That was very interesting. John Hanna was then her Secretary of State and a wonderful guy. He had a friend in the Golden Triangle Area who was a [federal] district attorney. He was right down there in the heart of the chemical and petro—just the heart of that [highly] polluted area and heavy petrochemical industry. He was frustrated because he couldn't find a way to make these guys pay attention and make them comply with the regulations they were supposed to comply with. There were criminal penalties that he could enforce but he didn't have any way to investigate them. So he came to John and said, "Do you think we could work something out?"

We all got together and said, "Well, criminal penalties are authorized in all these [environmental] statutes, but the problem is that the regulatory agency doesn't have the investigators." So we put together an inter-agency task force that involved agencies that had people who could help. We had game wardens involved in it, we had pesticide inspectors involved in it from the Agriculture Department. We had the investigators from the Texas Water Commission at the time and the Air Control Commission. The Attorney General's office was part of it—probably some others, too. We brought together a team of people that when, [for example], there was an intentional dumping of really hazardous stuff, we could bust them with criminal penalties, not just a fine that they would consider cost of doing business but something that would really sting. It exists to this day and I'm thrilled every time I read in the paper that some criminal investigation has resulted in an indictment of someone for willful pollution and it just made such sense. I noticed the other day the Travis County DA's office announced a bunch of convictions under it.

**EL:** Wow.

**SR:** Yeah.

**EL:** That's a pretty impressive legacy.

**SR:** Yeah. I don't think [the Governor] knew at the time that it would take that form, but tougher enforcement in environmental requirements was very much part of her campaign.

**EL:** Uh-huh. Now, were there any investigations when you were still there?

**SR:** Well, there were, I didn't participate in those.

**EL:** Okay.

**SR:** That was not my job and it would have been inappropriate.

**EL:** Okay.

**SR:** We liked hearing about them when they were wrapped up.  
[Laughter]

**EL:** Now I'm just kind of going through some of my questions here. We touched a little bit on ethics just in talking about Barbara Jordan. Ethics was a big point in Richards' administration and wanted to get, I think she wanted to get legislation passed and one of the reasons for that was to prevent a revolving door between regulators going in and working for industry and environmental industry was particularly kind of singled out for that. So tell me about working with that or did you have any—

**SR:** Yeah. I had a role in the selection of people to be appointed to things. I [might] help identify people who might be good candidates, but those decisions were all the Governor's. She had people in mind for key roles before I was hired. I was her liaison to people when they were appointed [to environmental agency positions]. So if they had a question of what the Governor's position was or they wanted to explain something to the Governor before she was going to read it in the paper or something, they would call me.

So it was that kind of role. The two really key appointments right off the bat were John Hall and Kirk Watson. John was a very, very strong appointee [to the Texas Water Commission] and he had had experience at LCRA and also working for Senator Bentsen. I think he even did a little time as a Fellow at the White House. But he knew a lot about water from his time at LCRA. John had a big job when he went over there to pull all that together. [The agency] had been not really focused on environmental protection before and he

had to completely reset the button on what that agency was supposed to do. It was very complex but he hired some very good people and took a lot of heat for it. If that had been popular, it would have been done before. But, [John] had read [the Governor's] agenda and knew what [needed to be done].

Then Kirk Watson was appointed to head what was then the Texas Air Control Board. That agency had a particular and immediate responsibility because there had just been new Federal Clean Air had passed. The states had to get in compliance with those [new provisions] and to do that almost all the states had to pass new legislation to create authority for them to implement the federal rules. And Texas, under Kirk's leadership, became the first state [to do that. A Texas law passed] in that first session. So we really got out ahead, an unusual position for Texas at the time. We got out ahead in being able to implement those federal rules. The goal was—particularly in Austin—to keep us out of non-attainment status. That is a very complicated thing, probably don't need to go into, but—

**EL:** No. Let's go into it.

**SR:** Well, cities who continued to violate especially ozone standards and other air quality standards, could risk being determined to be in "non-attainment" of those Federal standards. There are penalties for that and they come in the form of cuts in Federal transportation funding and other things, and nobody wanted [to face] those sanctions. So there was a great benefit to be gained in meeting the standards, staying below that [pollution] threshold. So far, [Austin] had—and Kirk was very focused on that. This actually created a lot of impetus [for passing a bill] even to telling the Legislature why this was so important, because if we didn't do it [Texas] could be facing really serious economic sanctions. That's another accomplishment that probably doesn't get as much attention because so much was about hazardous waste then, but what we did in clean air was very important.

**EL:** Uh-huh. And there was, this was later in her administration, there were some efforts to, I think it was to pass a requirement requiring tailpipe emission tests for vehicles.

**SR:** That was part of that whole package. It's a tool. I can't remember what happened with that, sorry.

**EL:** I don't think it went through right away.

**SR:** I don't remember. I really don't; sorry.

**EL:** Oh that—no, that's fine. It's about what you remember.

**SR:** I tend to remember the things that were not resolved so much at the agency level, but that got to the Governor's Office.

**EL:** Okay. That would make sense.

**SR:** Anyway.

**EL:** Now since we were on the subject of the Water Commission and the Air Control Board, those were the two agencies that later were merged—

**SR:** Right. Along with the solid waste functions from what was then the Health Department, and a few other odds and ends.

**EL:** Now, tell me what was sort of the impetus for merging those three entities.

**SR:** Texas had always had this very disparate set of agencies that had environmental responsibilities and that was beginning to be even more of a problem because you just don't draw a completely hard line between solid waste causing water quality problems and other things causing water quality problems. Or there was just too much overlap. Also because of the way the Federal agency, EPA, was [organized] and the way those programs [gave] states responsibilities and funding through those programs, it made a lot more sense, if you started looking at it, to bring the Texas [agencies] together so that the funding could be clear. You could take advantage of efficiencies, if you had water engineers over here and water engineers over there, maybe you could bring those together and get some more functionality.

Then there were just a lot of issues that were cross-cutting. And, did it make sense for the Health Department to be managing solid waste landfills while the Water Commission was managing hazardous waste landfills? There were just all these kind of historically created inefficiencies and gaps in the system. And so, we started planning for [legislation] in the first year or two, but it was introduced in the second legislative session. [The bill] merged the Water Commission and the Texas Air Control Board and the solid waste functions from the Health Department into a single entity. It was then called the TNRCC, Texas Natural Resources Conservation Commission. That was done because nobody in the Legislature really wanted to put "environment" in the name of it because that sounded too green, I guess.



**EL:** Little did they know how—

**SR:** So the Texas Natural Resources [Conservation Commission]—and that was a great accomplishment. Bob Bullock took that on as a signature issue for him, but we were very supportive of it. And Ann had proposed it even during the campaign. It just made such sense. Now, there was a lot of work involved in doing that and some of the agencies or pieces of the agencies didn't necessarily like it. But it all came together and it certainly made it easier, I think, for the State's dealings with the corresponding Federal entities.

**EL:** Now tell me about the process of merging them.

**SR:** Lots of meetings. The heads of the agencies, Kirk [Watson] and John Hall and others, worked with key staff—I was involved, the Lieutenant Governor's Office was involved, the Speaker's Office. At times, industry officials were consulted and conservation groups, environmental groups, were consulted. It was a matter of looking at the functions and just sorting them out and figuring out where they needed to go. But it was complicated. And it was complicated, too, because of funding. There were fees [for permitting]. There was Federal support for [programs, and we had to] figure out how the various funding sources were going to continue and how that would affect the whole nature of the agency. There were Human Resources issues. We're going to lose people, have to add people, what was that going to take? Where would they sit? It gets real hands-on that way. But it passed. I don't think there was much opposition to it and then it was [seen as] a very good thing to do. I don't remember when, but at some [later] point the name was changed to the Texas Commission on Environmental—TCEQ—Texas Commission on Environmental Quality to reflect what most other states had.

**EL:** So that the names make sense.

**SR:** Yeah the names make sense. Now you know what it is.

**EL:** Yeah.

**SR:** Now it does not include, of course, the more land-based conservation work that's done by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department or even the Department of Agriculture and certainly the [General Land Office].

**EL:** Okay. Well, we can talk about that, as well. It's been an hour. Did you want to pause and take a break?

**SR:** I'm fine if you want to just keep going.

**EL:** Sure. That works. Now we've kind of touched a little bit on some of working with the Legislature but I really wanted to go a little bit more in depth as far as it takes to get work done with them, especially with so much influence from industry. And especially since Ann Richards ran a lot on a lot of environment and conservation but also on really like pumping up commerce and bringing jobs to Texas. I think those two things are painted as being inherently at odds.

**SR:** Yeah.

**EL:** So I guess my question is: what were some of the dealings with industry as far as the Legislature goes or even just like more broadly politically?

**SR:** Well, I she campaigned on a platform that was very tough about improving control of pollution. But she also campaigned on an economic development platform, and she believed that those were not antagonistic goals and that we needed tighter environmental controls but we needed [regulatory]certainty, we needed efficiency. We needed to make it easy for industry to go through the process. She was sympathetic to those concerns and said so, sometimes to the point where some of the environmental interests weren't happy, but she was not at all [anti-industry].

What we did in combination with the hazardous waste bill is a good example. John Hall created something called "Clean Texas 2000," which was an effort to bring industry and we're talking here mostly [about] the petrochemical people, all the big oil and gas companies, the chemical industry, people that had a big impact on the environment. To bring them together and say, "Look, we need to be talking more about recycling, about reuse, about reducing waste." There was a big movement at the time in the industry, which I think is probably standard practice now, about waste reduction. [The idea is not just to] cover it up in better ways, and put it in better landfills, [but to] reduce the amount that you're producing in the first place. That was very much accepted by [some] companies—Dow Chemical, I remember, had an active program like that. It only made sense because it saved them money, too.

So [the idea behind] Clean Texas 2000 program [was to] get a certain number of companies to participate and cut their waste production by X percent and meet equitable laws, and basically it

was kind of a good citizen [initiative] but with real tangible environmental results. And there were incentives, too. [The message was], "We want to work with you. We can't tolerate these lax limits that may have been here in the past, we're going to enforce stronger controls, but at the same time we want you to do business here and we want to make it simpler for you to get your permits and not tied up in unnecessary bureaucratic delays and that kind of thing." So it was a double message and that was a lot of the challenge to do that.

I remember a dinner at the Governor's Office where some of the big oil and gas and chemical executives came and we talked about these things. Kirk Watson worked very hard with those same folks on the air quality side. But there was always that tension and it probably was at its starkest in the Legislature. Those lobbyists were probably even more strident than their bosses were on some of these issues and I sometimes think it was amazing that we were able to pass the hazardous waste bill. I think they knew the Governor was not going to back off on that. But there was a constant tension for anything that seemed like more stringent regulation or enforcement.

**EL:** Mary Beth [Rogers] mentioned something to me about the '94 election and I think Richards' veto of the handgun legislation, concealed carry, was kind of what was painted in the press as being what sort of what helped defeat her in '94 and what I had thought, but she had also mentioned that she said really that that wasn't the real issue. The real issue was that industry had really not liked her progressive environmental platform. Did you see that?

**SR:** I did. I was so much in the middle of it and we were getting hit in every area from the industry side. The insurance companies were mad at the Governor. The nursing home companies were mad at the Governor. I mean in every area where she was pushing what we would call progressive reforms we were getting pushed back. But the biggest, richest industry [interests] were oil, gas, chemicals, and yeah, they didn't like it. Even when they were participating in the Clean Texas 2000 program and all of that, it was not the good old days.

**EL:** So do you think that some of them were participating in that program as more of a like corporate PR thing?

**SR:** Oh, yeah. Sure. And John Hall said to me later, he said, “You know, Susan, I thought you could work with them, but I was wrong.”

**EL:** It’s all just doublespeak on their part?

**SR:** This was years after he had been in that role. Yes, and it was compounded, too, by local issues here, local environmental issues, local land development endangered species protection. That led into horrific fights over private property rights and all of that which, became like a lot of our politics right now, it’s kind of irrational, not based in fact but it didn’t matter.

**EL:** It’s all about manipulating the perception?

**SR:** Exactly. Kind of like what Mary Beth was saying. It was a little bit under the table but it was always there. She just wasn’t their kind of governor. The push back on private property rights was [initially] more local, but [then] it also became a statewide issue and a group was formed called Take Back Texas.

**EL:** And that was over some of the issues with the Golden Cheeked Warbler and the—

**SR:** Yes, it was [about] that. It was also over something that John Hall did pretty early on. There was a push from some local folks up in Northeast Texas and [other groups] to name some stretches of [a few rivers and lakes] as outstanding natural resource waters, just give them a little extra protection. Well, that came out in some East Texas paper and people went nuts, “Oh, my gosh, the Federal Government is going to come in here and regulate these,” which was not what the intent was at all but it didn’t matter. It was like we had said, “We are going to give over these five lakes to the United Nations.” And that kind of became a piece of this [narrative] that Ann Richards was taking [private] property away and working with the Federal Government to do it.

Then the battle hit over the [endangered] song birds here [in Central Texas], and we had a little bit of mischief from within the agencies too, and while the controversy was starting over what was going to have to happen here in terms of local land development to protect these Federal endangered species. Biologists at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department leaked to the San Antonio paper a map [from the federal government that showed] the big habitat of all of these birds and it [included]—I’ll never forget—33 counties. When the map came out on the front page of the *San Antonio Express*, it was as if you had said, “We’re going to take 33 counties

and turn all of that into bird habitat.” You couldn’t—in fact, that designation was almost meaningless, but there was a map and everybody had seen it with the headline. So either Ann Richards was going to be against all that, or she was for taking that land. That was kind of an impression that she never got out from under. Ultimately, she [even] wrote the President and said, “Please stop this,” or did what she could but it was a hard impression to get over. It riled up all these property rights people and the other side played that very expertly.

**EL:** Now you mentioned that there were some issues with the agencies, too, and that someone had leaked this map.

**SR:** Yeah, that one was really intentional.

**EL:** Do you have any idea why that was?

**SR:** Well, he did not support the governor. He was kind of a mid-level guy but he was tied into some very conservative groups and he leaked it. He was a smart guy, I knew him, and he did it very intentionally.

**EL:** Okay.

**SR:** [If the information and map had been released] in a policy paper, it [might have been less controversial], but it was leaked to the newspaper which just printed the big map and implied that all that is now endangered bird habitat and therefore will be taken away somehow.

**EL:** So, removing a lot of the nuance of what was going on?

**SR:** Of course.

**EL:** Okay.

**SR:** So there was a lot of [controversy involving property rights]—and that contributed, too, I think, as much as the big industry with the big money—to the perception of the Governor’s attitudes]. It just made a lot of landowners and regular ranchers and other people unhappy [and] afraid. I don’t think we ever beat that back. I’m not sure we could have.

**EL:** It was also late in the term, so the perception was that much stronger come election time.

- SR:** It was. One thing we should probably talk about [is that], we worked pretty well with Garry Mauro who was then land commissioner, on coastal legislation. Of course, Garry was very progressive on that and we adopted a Texas Coastal Management Plan, which was a federal [program that came with] money. It was a good thing that we did and there were several other sort of Coastal initiatives. We were able to get the Galveston Bay named as part of the National Estuary Program and then later Corpus Christi Bay the same thing which also brought [federal] planning money and protection money.
- EL:** I have it on my list, where is it? It must be in one of my timelines. It's in there somewhere.
- SR:** Yeah, [Ann] cared a lot about the coast. That was a good time for the coast.
- EL:** Now what was the process of getting those National Estuary Programs put in place?
- SR:** It was an application to NOAA, the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration. [States] had to [produce] a protective management plan and if [the plan was approved], you became part of that National Estuary Program. [That released] Federal money and good things happened from that.
- EL:** Now there was also some controversy around the coast around the same time because there were developers who wanted to develop South Padre Island and there was a lot of pushback and environmental concern because it was such a fragile habitat. Do you remember much about that?
- SR:** I remember more about that, actually, from when I worked before that at the Texas Parks and Wildlife. There was an issue down there about Boca Chica, I think, I just can't remember on that one. I really can't.
- EL:** That's fine. I had another question about the—there were also some programs put into place for oil spill readiness and oil spill prevention. Some of those were also kind of crossing not just state jurisdiction but also federal jurisdiction. So tell me about working—
- SR:** Normally, those would be put together by the relevant agencies. The Railroad Commission, I think, was involved, and the Water Commission, as well, and GLO. Usually, there would be a federal set of regulations or guidelines and [the state produces] a plan

[after some] back and forth on that and the relevant federal agency will approve or disapprove the plan. And with [approval], usually, comes [implementation] money. Often there will be from the Federal side, they'll get authorization to have a program and the way they'll implement it, and money, and the way they'll implement is to say, "Okay, you need to do a plan."

So Texas did a Coastal Management Plan, I think, under Mauro that was approved and it was a good one, given the limits in Texas law, like open beaches, law of capture for groundwater. It was really the Open Beaches Act, I think, that gave the Feds heartburn.

**EL:** Now what was that?

**SR:** Well, in Texas, you can drive your car on the beach.

**EL:** Yes, I remember noticing that when I moved here.

**SR:** Yes. That is not true in most places, but that's just part of the Texas history and will remain so, I guess. So there were things specific to Texas. Also Texas, being Texas, and having come into the Union as its own country, has different jurisdictional boundaries. Texas [jurisdiction offshore] goes out to ten miles from the Coast where for most states it's just three miles. So there were some things that are unique to Texas that were incorporated in that plan. The coast was always a concern and priority for the governor. She cared a lot about it. She used to go fishing down there. She loved Padre Island and—

**EL:** Well it's certainly gorgeous down there, so—

**SR:** Yeah. And she had a lot of support there. She liked South Texas and—

**EL:** Now speaking of South Texas—

**SR:** Uh-huh.

**EL:** We mentioned this before, we didn't go in depth about it. She was also pushing to get money to get sanitation and—

**SR:** Always.

**EL:** —water treatment to the *colonias*.

**SR:** Right.

**EL:** So let's talk about some of the problems that were down there.

**SR:** I think she had gotten involved in those issues before she was Governor, even as Treasurer. Well the problem was have a lot of [housing] developments where houses were thrown up without the water, and wastewater infrastructure in place. So you had these sizable communities of low income housing with no sanitary facilities. And they were just dreadful. They were also communities—and I won't know as much about this as other people would—where the financing that they had gotten from local lenders was really not in their best interests. There were shaky financial issues around there and some of these developers who had promised to do things weren't doing them. The result was you had many, many thousands of people living in just unsanitary, terrible conditions and with the developers having just absconded from any responsibilities.

It was a huge problem for the families. It was a huge water quality problem and disease problem. It was just bad and a humanitarian problem. She addressed it by advocating for money for those [communities] through the NAFTA [negotiations]. It was a way of bringing attention to the situation of the *colonias* in South Texas and near El Paso. More [federal] money needed to be put to that problem and I think that was successful in some respects. We had two people in our office, at least, that worked [constantly on helping the *colonias*] and were down there a lot trying to wring money out of the Texas Water Development Board. [TWDB] had a program and had money [for infrastructure in these communities] but they had not been effectively putting it to use.

**EL:** How so?

**SR:** Oh, probably requiring too much, being too bureaucratic about it, not flexible enough, not really perhaps getting to the heart of what was causing the problem and [understanding] it wasn't just an engineering problem. It was a bigger problem, bigger commitment. So we worked with the people there to try to free that up, but [the Governor] was down there often and this is very typical—she would come back from a trip to *colonias* or anyplace else and I would be in her office, or I would be sent little notes that she had made to herself, "Call Rosemary X about this," because some woman would have come up and told her a story and she had promised her that we would look into it or we would take care of it. So I would get all the scribbles and notes and phone numbers to do that.

**EL:** Oh, wow.



**SR:** Uh-huh. And I did it. We all did it. But [the *colonias* problems were] always frustrating and you could never fix it all, you just couldn't. But we did a lot. We put a lot of resources into trying to deal with the problems at the *colonias*.

**EL:** Something I noticed in the Environmental Policy Council correspondence box is that there's a lot of letters directly to individual citizens who were writing with concern about a specific issue.

**SR:** Yeah.

**EL:** And that seems sort of maybe not the norm?

**SR:** I don't know what the norm is for a governor's office. I had worked for a United States Senator and we wrote letters to everybody. But I [don't know what would be normal in] a Governor's Office in a state this size. But we wrote a lot of personal letters, lots, and lots, and lots of them. She wrote a lot of personal letters or she would say, "Look into this, somebody asked me about this, look into it and tell me," and then she'd write a letter based on what we'd found out.

**EL:** Uh-huh. Now, she was obviously trying to be more accountable directly to the people than I think a lot of people in office often are, so did you see any impact that that had of maybe the frustrations of not being able to change things fast enough or even at all?

**SR:** Oh, I think sure there were a lot of frustrations. But there were a lot of satisfactions, too. We couldn't fix everything and sure she was frustrated, but I know that [Ann] got up every day and said, "What are we going to do? Let's go." We maintained a very fast pace for four years. And doing this interview has been interesting for me, because I went back and looked at some things and I thought, We covered a lot of ground and we did a lot of good things and a lot of those things are lasting. Certainly she had been in politics long enough to know that you win some and you lose some and you fight another day. There were frustrations when things that we thought should have been easy to do were not easy to do. Part of that was we didn't always have the support of the Lieutenant Governor.

**EL:** [Laughs]

**SR:** But Mary Beth can speak to that better than I can.

**EL:** I've talked to her about it.

**SR:** Yeah, that was like a constant brick around her ankle.

**EL:** In what way?

**SR:** Oh just [that] we could have gotten more done had that office worked better with our office. Had [Bullock] worked with the Governor instead of against the Governor.

**EL:** Now what was your impression of why that—because they had started out as more, being at least more amiable.

**SR:** Mary Beth can speak to that better, or many people can speak better to that. I was down in the policy realm—don't know—I speculate a certain amount of jealousy. She was the Governor, after all. She was on television a lot; she was a national figure. She was very popular and crowds would come out. I have to think part of it was that.

**EL:** Although, politically speaking, the lieutenant governor has more—

**SR:** Exactly.

**EL:** —power, direct power.

**SR:** Exactly.

**EL:** But even that didn't seem to—just in talking about how fast the pace was and working so much. Do you remember much about what your typical day in the office might have been like then?

**SR:** They were always busy, with very few off-days. Maybe in the summer a little bit after the Session was past. Come in early, see what's in the in-box. I think at any given time I'd have four, or five, or six, or ten major things going on, and so I was tracking all those silos of things. Incoming calls all the time from agency people, some from the press, usually those had gone through the Press Office and might have been funneled over to us to talk to a reporter who wanted more detail about something. You'd get summoned over to Ann's office to give her a briefing about something. I went to meetings of the boards and commissions if there was something coming up that we had a strong interest in. Meeting with legislators, occasionally. Of course, dealing with the staff. I had some management responsibility there. We'd have policy director's meetings just to go around the table and say, "Okay, who's got what this week and what's up?" So we had some collective understanding of what was going on. You know, everything you

can think of in any given day. It wasn't like, "Oh, on Tuesdays we do this."

**EL:** At lot of taking it as it comes to you.

**SR:** Very much. Very much.

**EL:** I want to back up for a second because we mentioned, we talked a little bit about Garry Mauro and I'd wanted to ask you about his natural gas proposals, but—

**SR:** You know, I saw that on the list and I don't have any memory of that—

**EL:** Okay.

**SR:** —I really don't. I'm sorry.

**EL:** Oh, that's—it's about what you remember and if you don't remember it.

**SR:** You know he's an elected official. We didn't get in his business very much.

**EL:** Okay.

**SR:** And I just don't have a clue about that.

**EL:** Okay. I thought that was just an interesting proposal considering that only in the last few years they were starting to talk about it but that was controversial because of fracking. That is most of the questions that I had. One thing I did want to ask about, I've read several places that, and I also heard from Mary Beth that a lot of people in the Richards' administration were criticized more so than Richards because a lot of people were afraid to criticize her directly.

**SR:** Oh, yeah.

**EL:** Can you tell me a little bit about that dynamic?

**SR:** Well, it's like you don't want to blame [the Governor]. She was very popular, everybody liked Ann and she was powerful. So instead of criticizing the Governor directly, they would criticize somebody on the staff. I was a prime recipient of that.

**EL:** In what way?

**SR:** Well, they would want to say, “Well, Ann’s not crazy about this environmental stuff, it’s Susan Rieff.” That kind of thing.

**EL:** Oh, as if it’s all you pushing it and not you’re pushing her agenda.

**SR:** Exactly. Exactly. And that’s easier for them to do, and it discredits the staff person in the eyes of whoever they’re talking to. So yes, that happened a lot with any of us that were on the kind of firing line. Our insurance staff people got a lot of that. The Health and Human Services, not so much, because that tends to just be about money. How much is there and where you distribute it? Nobody’s against helping—well, maybe they are now—

**EL:** I was going to say well, no one would admit it then.

**SR:** In those days, nobody was against helping sick people or mentally ill people or elderly people, but the more regulatory pieces of it—yeah, we all got criticized. Annette LaVoi was our ombudsman and she would dig around. She would investigate problems and bring those to [public] attention and she got a lot of criticism. That happens in any political organization, I think, or in any political office that I’ve been around. Because it’s a little scary to criticize the person at the top—[so you don’t] criticize the Governor, criticize the Secretary or criticize the Senator [directly], but you can blame it on the staff.

**EL:** So by that point you were already kind of used to that.

**SR:** Well, I had never experienced it quite like that. That was big time, and I had not experienced it [at that level], but in a way while it was happening, we were so busy you just kept going. It was almost later that I had a fuller understanding of all that.

**EL:** As far as the way that works?

**SR:** Uh-huh.

**EL:** I see. Was there anything in particular that made you realize that?

**SR:** Well, I realized it when someone told me that Bob Bullock was making sure that nobody would hire me in Austin.

**EL:** Wow. Tell me about that. This was after her—

**SR:** Yeah, after we were—

**EL:** After the ’94 election?

**SR:** After the election. Yeah, I mean he had a few people [on that list], and I happened to be one of them. And the lobbyists could seek a little revenge on their least-liked staff people.

**EL:** Did that happen to you at all directly?

**SR:** Oh, yeah.

**EL:** How?

**SR:** Well, I just realized pretty soon that, that I had—how to say this?—a negative image among a lot of those people. That's not even it—I actually had some good personal relationships with them. We would banter about and that sort of thing but once the Governor lost and there was a Republican take-over, George Bush took over, I realized I was going to have to go someplace else to work because I was not going to find anything to do here nor was there probably anything in State government I would have wanted to do. I was not the only person who had that experience here. And again, now, that's not that unusual. You know, you go to Washington, there's a big turnover. It was very personal and again I was not the only person on the staff that suffered that. I think our education person took a lot of that. I think our budget person probably took some hits. I'm sure Mary Beth had some criticism. Did she talk about that, much?

**EL:** Yeah, she talked about it a little bit and I had read just that in general her—I mean that there had been remarks made like, "Those women that surround her."

**SR:** "Oh, those hairy-legged women." Yeah. Oh, yeah. They were worse than that.

**EL:** I imagine some of them are not fit to print.

**SR:** Some are not fit to print. It was an easy thing for those guys to say was, "All these women. How dare they? How dare they try to do this, how dare they try to change things? Do we really have to deal with them?" Yeah, it was—I think what's important that people remember is what a change Governor Richards was trying to make. I mean, just the New Texas agenda was powerful and it was a big change and there is always—I mean, the status quo isn't the status quo for no reason. The status quo had benefitted a lot of powerful people, and she was going at that in a lot of respects. And when you do that, people push back and they did, even though they liked her. Mary Beth would confirm this, but I believe that on the day of the election—and maybe even as late as when Bush was

inaugurated—she still had an approval rating of about 70 percent. She wasn't defeated because people didn't like her. I've always thought she was defeated because of some of those interests that were so powerful and because there was a white male alternative named George Bush.

**EL:** Who didn't mess up the way Clayton Williams had, maybe?

**SR:** Exactly.

**EL:** Were you involved much in the election?

**SR:** Not really. I was working for Hightower then and so I was—

**EL:** I meant the re-election campaign in '94.

**SR:** Oh, the re-election—well, yes, we all were. I mean, we had a very clear line between what was election work and what was Governor's Office work.

**EL:** Right. She was really big on that.

**SR:** And I didn't do too much of the campaign stuff, but I was the liaison to [for] the facts about the environmental record, the programs, you know, so I had to be a resource person in that way. I helped in some other ways, too, but I was not an integral part of the campaign. That wasn't my job.

**EL:** Looking back from your vantage point now, how effective would you say that the policies that were passed then have been? I mean, I know that you said some of it you haven't kept up with, but if you could still see some of it.

**SR:** You know, I think it's hard to say and I have not kept up with everything, but she changed a lot. I think that some of that change is still with us: The reorganization of the state agencies, the [environmental enforcement] task force. I think some things that were kind of revolutionary then or very progressive then are now more mainstream, [like] recycling programs, energy conservation programs, things like that.

One of my greatest disappointments is the beating that the Parks and Wildlife Department continues to take. She worked hard [for agency programs] and I was looking at her budget numbers from back then. A lot more money went into parks and outdoor spaces and wildlife resources and conservation. That just gets worse and worse every year. That's an area that has just been easy for the

Legislature to take funds away from and they have. But most of those hazardous waste facilities were never built. Once it was harder for them to get permits and the market changed a little bit and all the hoop-ta-rah about what great economic development they were going to be sort of faded away. I think that law still exists pretty much as it was passed.

It's a disappointment to me that we still have *colonias* there in such terrible shape, but progress has been made there. The Coastal Management [Protections], I think, [have remained] pretty good. Garry Mauro was a very good land commissioner with a real focus on the Coast. So I think [because of] some of the things that were elevated in [Ann's] administration—while they've been whittled away at perhaps—[things are] still better than they might have been. She was a force, too, for at least raising the bar, the thinking or the need to acknowledge ethics, more open government, more diversity in state government. There was almost none when she came in office and that was different when she left and it's much different now. Would that have happened anyway? Maybe, but she was certainly a force for that.

My favorite story, she was still in office. She was running in the re-election campaign, and I was with a friend who was a good friend of theirs. This person didn't really know Ann, but she had a five-year old daughter and some campaign ad came on from George Bush. The daughter looked at that and said, "Mom, that can't be right." And the mother said, "Well why not?" And she said, "Men can't be governor."

**EL:** [Laughter] Wow.

**SR:** The only governor's picture she had ever—the only governor she had ever known was Governor Ann.

**EL:** Wow.

**SR:** That's funny.

**EL:** That's a good example of what a big impact representation makes.

**SR:** She had a big impact, on a lot of people, on students and on girls, especially, on bringing diversity into state government, by raising the bar for that. It was a [real] change, and like a lot of people who change a lot of things, [she suffered the] push-back. And here it was mostly engineered, I think, by the big economic [and political] interests that did not benefit from what she was trying to do and some cultural—the gun issue was going to hurt and she knew it

and everybody around her knew it. But she [vetoed the concealed weapons bill] anyway, because it was the right thing to do. It was a fascinating time and I was privileged to be part of it.

**EL:** Well that sounds like a good place to wrap up.

**SR:** Okay.

**End of Interview**