Erin Cunniff: This is Erin Cunniff with the Montana Feminist History Project on August 28, and I’m in Billings.

Pat Regan: Pat Regan in Billings, and I’m flattered to be asked to be part of the project.

EC: Okay. Pat, could you tell us how you got involved with activism and feminism in Montana?

PR: Well, I think probably my activism goes back to my, my family. I was born in Oak Park, Illinois, and my father was an Irish immigrant. My mother was of Irish heritage, but I think she was truly the feminist, although she didn’t ever give that outward impression. I just look back at her as a role model because of how strong she was and what she did. When I was very young, my father had two strict rules. You went to mass every Sunday, and you voted every election. And there was never any question about it. Well, I continue to vote, and won’t comment on the other. But, when I came out to Billings, I was a schoolteacher, and I taught for many years in the district.

I was urged to run for Con Con, and I just...Who, me? sort of expression. When men are asked to run for office, they take it as a matter of course I think. They just say, Oh yeah, that’d be neat. I don’t know whether they’re used to male models that they see every day, or whether they have this...an inherent ego and sense of power. I think women do not really perceive themselves that way, and I did not run for Con Con. But the pressure the next year when they voted to send the legislature to implement the new constitution. My husband came home and said, “Pat, you’re going to get some phone calls, and I want you to pay attention to them.” Then he went and he mixed up a bunch of martinis. Now, I probably shouldn’t tell you this. When I had a nice glow on, the telephone began to ring. It was Skip (John) Sheehy, who was later Supreme Court Justice. (Unintelligible) his employer. A number of people called and wanted me to file, and in this good old glow, I said, “Sure. Why not?” Well, I went to bed that night, and the next morning...or no, midnight I woke up, and I thought, What have you done? I mean, you know, to run for office is very risky to the ego. Because you run to win, and to be defeated would be just terrible.

I was very concerned, and I went to the Democratic headquarters the next day, and I said, “My god, I filed. Now what do I do?” Sheehy said that you go out and buy three pairs of shoes. When you’re on the third pair of shoes, you’re elected, because then we ran at large, and I was running for the House of Representatives. Twenty-eight people. They were going to send 14 representatives, and I hoped to be one of them.
Well, there was a mathematician at Eastern who was a Democrat, and who had done profiling of districts. He said, “These are solid Democratic. You have their vote. Go in there, but don’t spend a lot of time. These are solid Republican. Don’t spend a lot of time. These are the swing districts. This is what you’ve got to look at.” Well, what I did was really take both the swing and Republican districts because, let’s face it. Fourteen people running for office. Not all of them are really top-rate. I figured I was better than some of those Republicans by far. So I went door to door, and I went at five o’clock at night, and it was the ideal time to, to run.

There were other factors. For instance, there was the rise of the feminist movement. There was Watergate, and Nixon and the Republican Party was in deep trouble, and women were mad. They perceived politics as, as being somehow dirty. Maybe a smoke-filled room kind of thing. I don’t know. They looked at women as bringing a new voice, speaking for them too and not as interested in a political career per se, as interested in service. So I ran at the ideal time. It also was a good time for me too, because at that stage, 1973, I reached 50. That’s pretty traumatic, when you realize even if you’re an optimist, your life is half over, because I don’t expect to live to a hundred. God, I hope not. Anyhow, I got the three pairs of shoes, and I went off. The first couple of nights I came back and I could have cried because my feet hurt, and I didn’t want to do this. But I put up this huge map and every night when I came home, I crossed off the streets I had been on. I could see these streets, these blocks were being filled in.

I would also say that we had four kids. Before I ran, I talked to the kids about it. Two were in college, and two were home. The youngest was fifteen maybe, fourteen. You know, they said, Go for it. It would be a neat thing to do. I think the quote that I read about...I copied it down. It’s a quote during suffragette days, and the quote is spoken by a man, no doubt. “No woman could possibly find time for politics”—that is either to vote or hold office I assume—“without neglecting her family.” Well, there’s a certain amount of truth in that. You have to trade time. Women, I suppose, who are single, or women whose children are already grown are more inclined to enter than younger women with young children. You can tell in the press how they treat women who are young and have young children—what they do to them. So, you know, you ask a simple question, and you get far more than you intended to get. But that’s how come I came to, to run. Oh, well I think also—

EC: (Unintelligible) you mention that you had a, a great political advisor, Angie Jordan, (unintelligible).

PR: I already did talk.

EC: Oh, (unintelligible).

PR: I also point out though that having taught school in that district for so long, I had a reputation with this district. They knew who Mrs. Regan was. They knew our kids. They knew my husband, so all these things...You have a history of work outside the home, and in fact I look at women, and in the long run, they—if you look at them—they have a history of service. They
were the ones who were the social reformers, the abolitionists, in early days addressed the question of children and, and what to do with the insane. These were social issues that women were long concerned with. They were the ones who came out and the first thing they established were schools and churches. However when the dedication came, it was a man’s name that was on the cornerstone of the building. I always thought that somewhat ironic. I think women were the backbone of political parties. They did all the real work. They did the phoning. They still do. They’re the ones who put on the coffee, get out the vote, all this kind of thing.

Max Baucus, his first year, came down here, addressed this group, talked about women being involved in politics and made reference to canvassing, phoning, all that kind of thing. I went up afterwards and I just ripped him, and I said, “Max, don’t you ever give that speech again. If you’re going to talk about women being involved in politics, why can’t they run? Why shouldn’t they run?”

He apologized, of course, and then the next time he spoke, he said, “I used to say something different, but boy, was I corrected!” I think it was a thing that had to be said and done. Women while they bring a different experience to the legislature—and I’m speaking mostly of the legislature—their votes pretty much paralleled men’s votes. There were some issues that were very different, but I think...Having run for office and serving in the legislature’s one of the greatest experiences I ever had.

I went there at the right time, as I say, it was...the E.R.A. was being discussed. So I introduced a resolution to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment, much to the consternation of a group of women who were outside—I didn’t know this—in the lobby discussing whether it would be better to have it introduced in the House or the Senate, and which prominent senator were they going to have sponsor it. I walked out there, and recognized some of them, and they said something about this, and I just looked at them, and I said, “Hey, it’s already done. I already requested the drafting of it, and I’m going to carry it in the House.”

It’s funny, when I carried it, I had all kinds of, of strange reactions. One guy got of the phone. His wife had just finished calling him. He said, “Pat, is it true, if we vote for that, men and women will have to sleep in the same room?”

I said, “No, but vote for it anyhow.” It helped to have a little bit of a sense of humor. Of course it passed, but it later was rescinded, to my great despair. Of course we don’t have it today. But, another time, I guess when the far right runs its course maybe. I won’t live to see it.

But you know, when we talk about the E.R.A., or women, or political gains, I think we don’t give credit to those who came before us. Because we have built on that—the suffragettes for instance. I’m reminded of a woman who lived in Helena, Belle Winestine. You may have heard of her. She was the daughter of a very, very prominent businessman. He was very wealthy, and Belle was hardly five feet tall. In fact my grandmother went to the University of Wisconsin with
Belle as a roommate. Belle and Frieda. They refused to pledge a sorority, because they wouldn’t take Jewish girls, and they were Jewish and therefore couldn’t join. She said, “I wouldn’t belong to anything.” This is way back in 1917, something like that. Anyhow, Belle would go downtown at lunchtime when all the men were emptying the offices to go home and have lunch. She got on a box and would begin to lecture, and people came to listen to what this woman had to say. Several of them mentioned to her father that “Belle is downtown, on a soapbox, talking about this women’s vote business.”

That night he came home and at the table he just lectured her something awful and absolutely forbade her to do it again. “If you do it again, don’t bother coming home.”

So she did it again, and she checked in the Placer Hotel. Said, “Send the bill to my father.”

Of course, Belle was at the Placer. He asked where she was. Her mother said, ‘Well, I think she’s at the Placer and going to stay there tonight, and you’ll be getting the bill.”

“For god sake, tell her to come on home.”

Those were women that I admire. I admire my mother, who I made reference to. My father was an attorney. He had read the law. He’d had actually come out to Butte. He had a cousin out there. He went to work in the mines as a young lad. The cousin said to him after about four months, “Tom, you don’t have to stay here. I’m married, I got a wife and some kids, and this is my life. But it doesn’t have to be yours. You’ve got another cousin in Chicago. Going to write a letter. You go see him. He’s an attorney. Because you can be an attorney.”

So he went there, and he read the law, and passed it, and that was it. Married my mother. But, he also was a very prejudiced man. Being Irish, he hated the English just with a passion. Would carefully instruct my mother how to vote. I must have been ten or twelve. I heard this, and I said to her, “Are you really going to do that?”

She had this Mona Lisa smile, and she said, “Patsy, that’s why they have a secret ballot, don’t they?”

I went away thinking, Right on Mom. You’re going to do for us what is good. So we look to the past to build today. When I went and presented the Equal Rights Amendment, I can tell you I was filled with fear and trembling. But it was a very interesting experience. It passed the House, went over to the Senate. This guy in the Senate...Now would you turn that off for just a second?

EC: Yes.

[Break in audio]

EC: All right, go ahead.

Pat Regan Interview, OH 378-037, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
PR: Well, as I was saying, the Equal Rights Amendment passed the House handily, and went over into the Senate. I was simply appalled at the kind of debate that went on over there. There was a Senator Jack McDonald who later has run for governor in this last election, the minority party. I think he has little credence now. He sort of got religion, and has become a pastor, a very conservative one. But he argued against the Equal Rights Amendment on the basis that if God wanted women to be equal, he would have appointed six women apostle, not completely ignoring of course the historic setting of the times. I was furious. I just thought that was about the stupidest thing I ever heard. I thought, I’m going to get him someday. So every day when the bills were dropped on the floor, I would examine the Senate sponsors to find a McDonald bill to find out what he was up to. Sure enough I found the perfect bill. He introduced a bill which was perfectly legitimate and important for Montana ranchers which provided for the continuance of blood lines, even though artificial insemination had been used. That was important for registry of cattle and, and (unintelligible). So I thought, Aha! I got him.’ Saturday late the bill was on the floor. The press was leaving, and I went up and begged them to stay. I said, “Stay ten more minutes. I’ve got a story for you I’m sure you’ll use. Quick story. Stay just ten minutes.”

So the guy got up in the House that was carrying the bill, and I’ve forgotten his name. He presented it, and I immediately walked up and said, “Mr. Chairman, I move it do not pass.” There was just this gasp. I mean, here are all these ranchers, ‘What’s the matter with the bill? She doesn’t want it to pass? We got to have it.’ I said, “Now, wait a minute. If you will carefully examine the author of the bill, and then the title, you will realize that if God wanted those cows to be pregnant, she would have provided for it herself.” Well, the place exploded in laughter. That was the end of the discussion. It was just a jab. So they voted, and all the liberals voted no.

Then, “Has anyone (unintelligible)? Does anyone wish to change the vote?” Well, when anyone changed the vote, a whole bunch of them changed their vote, so the bill passed. But I continued to vote no, and thought it was pretty good. I understand it was the front page of almost every paper in the state. It was really hilarious. He was really bent out of shape Monday morning. “Who is this woman who is mocking me?” I thought, Hey! You know, you had it coming. Come on.

Serving in the House was interesting. I went in with a pretty bunch of liberal people, so that you had hardcore liberals coming in, riding the wave of the new Constitution. Then you had the old timers there. Dorothy Bradley was a wonderful legislator. It was her second term. She brought a bill to me that she wanted me to co-sponsor with her. It was to buy what is currently The Windbag Saloon in Helena. It used to be a house of ill-repute. It was called Big Dorothy’s, I believe. She wanted me to sign this. I said, “Dorothy, I’ll vote for it in a minute. I think it’s a wonderful idea. It’d be a terrific tourist attraction. People would come to see what an old time house of prostitution would look like, and...But I’m not going to sign it. I’m (unintelligible) of freshman.” Well, obviously the bill didn’t go anywhere. The old timers felt it was a direct
personal slap at them for some reason or other. I can’t examine their conscience, but they thought it was terrible.

Well, sometime later, Dorothy [Bradley] was chairing the Committee of the Whole, and normally you get up and say, “Mr. Chairman,” because that’s what they had done for years and years and years. Suddenly here is Bradley in the chair. There is Madame Chairwoman, Madame Chair, you know, all kinds of terms of address that they hadn’t really settled on how to address. Finally, Gorhan Swanberg, who’s very funny, was from Great Falls. Good guy. Stood up—friend of Dorothy’s as a matter of fact—and said, “My name flew off the record, and out of the journal.”—of course without objection—“Well, we’re having a hard time back here deciding how to address you. So if there’s no objection from the members of the House, we think we’d like to address you just as Madame Dorothy.”

Of course, Dorothy turned red, terribly embarrassed. It was just hilarious. It took some time to get the House settled down. Of course, they didn’t use it as a term of address, but I’ve often thought about, What a good sport she was. Then while there was two kinds of discrimination...There was that kind of good joshing, good...you know, and then there was another kind that was very overt and sometimes very cruel. Sometimes they didn’t even understand what they were saying. I’ll refer to that later on.

Anyhow, I served on the House of Representatives in the Appropriations Committee. The chairman, Frances Bardanouve, really didn’t want a woman on, because he had had a woman on once before. I don’t know how many years earlier. Put her on the subcommittee for institutions and they had to go and travel to each institution, examine it, set a budget for them, hear the testimony. So she would go off, and she was about forty, not married or whatever. She went out and when she came back, he always had lost her vote. Voted with this young Republican man that was also on that committee. Francis swore there was probably some hanky-panky going on there, and she’d go off as a Democrat, and come back as a Republican. He didn’t want any more women but, I served anyhow. I think probably the highest compliment I got was at the end of the session. I was packing up my stuff. Tom Haines, who’s from Missoula, dear of the House Republican side, came down the hall. He had arthritis with a cane, and he was coming down the hall, down the aisle I should say. Said, “Pat, I really enjoyed serving with you. I want to tell you, never once did I think about you as a woman.” He was saying that I stood up and debated and held my own.

I said, “Gee Tom, I really appreciate that. I enjoyed serving with you too. Never once did I think of you as a man.” Well, he got that spark, and he went chortling down the aisle, and I thought, What a nice thing for him to have said. So, that was my first experience in the...Oh, no!

There’s one other thing. On the subcommittee, we had to hear budgets of the agencies. Time after time, I walked into the hearing room, and there would be all men. They were all heads of departments, and their right hand man. When they wanted a new position they’d say, I need a man who...I need a man who...Finally, after three or four days of this I thought, I’ve got to speak
up here. So the next time it was said, I said, “Pardon me, Mr. Chairman, may I question the witness?”

“Yes.”

I said, “Now, do you need a man, or do you need a person?”

“Oh, I need a person.”

So then I said, “I want you when you prepare your budgets coming in here to tell me how many women are grade 12 and above, how many men are 12 and above, how many men are 12 and below, and how many women are 12 and below.”

Well, you know, what the statistics would show, obviously. So I asked this day after day, never making any comment, just, “May I have the statistics?”

Finally Gary Acklested turned around to the chairman and protested, and he said, “I’m tired of Mrs. Regan always talking about discrimination.”

I said, “Mr. Chairman, never once have I used the word. I’ve never...I haven’t mentioned discrimination at all. I am delighted if Senator Acklested has perceived there is discrimination here, boy, I think certainly there must be.” That’s when they (unintelligible) introduced the comfortable words, no, and other stuff like that. Anyhow, that’s enough about the House. You want to go on to the Senate?

EC: Sure.

PR: Hey, that’s only two years, and I was there 16...I was there 18 years. We haven’t got time for this. But, it was interesting when I went over to the Senate, there was an interim committee appointed. The chore of that committee was to examine the new constitution in reference to existing state law. There was a section of the new constitution, Article 2, Section 4, Individual Dignity, which says there should be no discrimination based on sex, among other things. So, they had to go through all these laws, and make them gender neutral, or if they were discriminatory to address them, because there were some discriminatory laws. Well, they appointed...let’s see...a 12-member committee. Three House members Republican, three House members Democrat, and the same in the Senate to meet. Lo and behold, when the committee appointments were made, they were all men. There wasn’t a single woman on that committee. Well, the women’s groups down here and...you know, the women’s lobbyist groups were very influential. Did really good work. Diane Sands was excellent at it. So they just raised holy Ned.

Well, a couple of people resigned in the Senate, one Republican and one Democrat, and Senator Russell and I were appointed as the alternates. It was great. It was fun to go in and do this. But among the bills was one dealing with prostitution. Senator Turnage was chairing the
committee, and I maintained, “Senator Turnage, if we’re going to do this right then, this means that we should address the issue of the ‘john’ and make it gender neutral.”

“I’m not going to address that. It’s outside the purview of this committee.” Bang, with a gavel, and that was the end of the discussion.

I said, “Senator, you may not want to address it, and this committee may not want to address it, and indeed the legislature may not want to address it, but I will introduce a bill.”

Toni, bless her, stood up, or spoke up and said, “Pat, if you introduce it, I’ll co-sign it with you, and we’ll see.”

I’ll skip ahead to when the bill came up. I didn’t sleep the night before because it said, “If you addressed a prostitute, the john’s equally guilty.”

I made a good argument. All the men were giving me grief over this and said, Just wait till that bill comes up.

“Well, we’re ready for you.”

They said, Fine. Paul Boylan, who was in the chair, was an old time senator from Livingston, and he was sort of...or Bozeman...he was kind of asleep at the switch. He stood up, and there’s a regular form you use, Ladies and gentlemen, you now have before you Senate bill number so and so. What is your pleasure?

The clerk had read the title of the bill, and then he said, “What is your pleasure?”

I immediately knew what I was going to do. I stood up and I said, “Senator, if you would reread the title of that bill again, perhaps you would like to rephrase that question.” But never mind, it’s a good bill. I won’t give you a...I won’t give you a hard time if you don’t hassle me.”—which had some naughty connotations in that—“it’s a good bill. Vote for it.” I sat down.

They looked at each other. Does she know what she just said? What is she doing? Of course I knew what I said. I just sat down and presented a stoic face. Boylan, by that time the place had calmed down, said, “Is there any further discussion?” I expected to be given really this hard time. Not a word. They voted and passed it. And going out that night, it passed.

A newspaper reporter caught up with me and said, “Senator Regan, do you know what damage you have done to families in Montana and this state?”

“Well, what do you mean?”

“Well, publishing the—“
[End of Tape 1, Side A]
PR: —kind of discrimination. How time and time again in the legislature, and I’ll give you some examples and then... Fact, we had four, four women in the legislature, and the presenter of the bill would just stand up and say, “Gentlemen,” and then go on. Well, there are four women sitting there. He did not...This is Pete Story. He’s not asking for our vote. So I went to the other women, and I said, “Hey, I’m tired of being ignored in here. I want him to say ‘Ladies and gentlemen.’ He won’t do it. Let’s not vote for the next bill that he presents. I don’t care what it is. Just don’t vote for it. Because we can always bring it back and address it if we feel strongly about it.”

Sure enough he stood up and said, “Gentlemen.” The bill failed by one vote, and there were four votes sitting there waiting for him. But he didn’t ask for our vote. He didn’t understand what happened. It wasn’t until that evening as we were adjourning, Pete was still stewing over what happened to his bill. You know, “It should have passed.”

I said, “Pete, you stood up and you said, ‘Gentlemen,’ and you didn’t ask for our vote. And from now on, if you guys don’t ask for our vote, you’re not going to get it.” Well then, from then on it was, “Ladies” and “Ladies and gentlemen.” Just this giving you a hard time. But nonetheless, it was a case of completely sensitizing...what people who really had no idea of the kind of discrimination it was showing.

In fact when I went in the Senate, a whole bunch of people from the House—in fact 21, nineteen of whom were in the...previous in the House—moved into the Senate. They moved in because they were tired of good liberal legislation being killed over in the Senate. It was the old boys club. An old boys club you can’t believe. Even the political lines had been obliterated. It was just plain old conservative hardcore. So there were 21 of us that were Democrats that were elected. They were holding a mock caucus before the regular caucus in order to nail down chairmanships. I mean, we’ve got the power. I explained to Russell I was going to go up there and ask for a chairmanship, and she said, “Pat, I’ve been in the Senate for I don’t know how many years, and I’ve never been given...I can’t get up.” And she’s...“What are you going to do?”

I said “I’m going to go on Finance and Claims, which is the Appropriations Committee”—most powerful committee there is, controls all the money—“and I’m going to ask for chairmanship of Business and Industry.” She just looked at me. I said, “Let’s face it, Toni. I’ll do it.”

She says, “You don’t understand the political system. There’s such a thing as seniority.”

I said, “No, Toni. You don’t understand the political system. I’ve taught government. The thing that beats seniority is pure, raw political power, and we have it. And we’re going to get it.”
All the men in there got their chairmanships, and I was seeking chairmanship of Business and Industry. Senator Manning, Dave Manning, who had started sitting in 1933, said, “Surely Mrs. Regan, you wouldn’t want to be known as a pushy woman?”

I said, “Senator, how can you say that to me? That I’m a pushy woman, and I’ve not heard you say that these other people, these men, are not pushy men? Are you calling me pushy because I’m a woman? Is that what you’re saying?”

Well, I sought Business and Industry, and Jack Devine, who wanted the committee—may have even had it—was a beer distributor up in Great Falls. I let everybody talk and, and he was saying I wasn’t qualified. You know, “What does this woman know about business?”

The men were saying, Hey, she’s fine.

Finally everybody had had their say, and I said, “Now that you’ve all expressed your opinion, I’d like to make some comments. Senator Devine you indicated that I’m a woman and only a teacher, and you’re a businessman and that’s true. But you didn’t ask what I teach. I teach economics, banking, credit.” I went through the whole list of, of insurance, of what I teach. And I said, “I’m adequately qualified.”

He said, “Ah, if you want it that bad, you take it.”

I said, “No, Senator. I won’t have it given to me. I earn it. If you don’t feel that I’m qualified, then we’ll take it into the regular caucus and put it through a caucus vote. Because I deserve it, and I earned it, and I want it.” I went out of there with a chairmanship, and they couldn’t believe it. It was kind of fun.

The other big thing at the end of that session, we had four women. The men could go to the Senate cloakroom, and then into the Senate lavatory, through the Senate lavatory, into the House without ever meeting a lobbyist or anyone else. They just had this tunnel that ran back and forth. I, on the other hand if I had had to use the women’s restroom, had to go out in the lobby, wade through all the lobbyists, go into a small lavatory—and it continues to be small today—and there was no way to get over to the House. So at the end of the session, I called Phil Huck, who was the state architect, down. I said, “Hey, we’ve talked about the Capitol. It was built by men. It was built for men. They talk about man-made laws, but we’re women now. I want to have this capitol remodeled.”

He said, “What?”

I said, “Phil, where do I go to the bathroom?”

He said, “For god sake, Pat. You’ve been here for two years. You’ve got to figure it out now.”

Pat Regan Interview, OH 378-037, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
I said, “Yeah, and I’m going to show you.” So I took him on the tour, and I took him through the man side. Showed him the women. I said, “You know, if you went into the Senate...cloak room, and you took the door that went out to the snack bar, and you closed off the thing ...” I showed him how you could do it. “Punch a hole through. You can do the same thing so we would have equal facilities, and in fact I demand it.”

“There isn’t any money in the budget.”

I said, “I don’t care Phil. You’re going to find the money, and you’re going to remodel the Capitol. If you don’t, you tell the governor”—who was Tom Judge—“if you don’t do this, I’m going to charge discrimination and embarrass this administration beyond all words.”

So sure enough, they remodel the capitol, and I got the bathroom. Later on there was a plaque up there that said, “Memorial Bathroom—Pat Regan’s Memorial Bathroom.”

I also got my comeuppance because that year, when I got back, I was the only woman left in the Senate. So the Great Falls Tribune carried an article, “Woman Legislator Flushed With Victory,” which I thought was very clever.

Rather than talk about year by year, I’d like to talk about some of our accomplishments, and some of our disappointments, and that kind of thing. We did, under the new constitution and the (unintelligible) wave of new blood into the Senate, have some very good legislation passed. We had all kinds of success...oh, the unisex insurance bill, which was a really big one. I had a whole list of stuff, but....maybe I’ll talk about some of the disappointments and some of the prejudice.

I regret to say that it, it continued for a long, long time. You had senators stand up...For instance Senator Shaw stood up one day, and they wanted to appoint some architect to do some work. Shaw said, “We don’t need another architect. We...” Oh, it was to do something with men’s prison, I guess. He said, “We got an architect over there. He’s in prison. He killed his wife. Of course, she probably deserved it.” My mouth dropped open.

We had another senator. Again it was Pete Story. “Come on. Let’s all vote for”—whatever it was—“and make all those little old ladies in tennis shoes happy.” Completely unaware of really what he was saying. So I got a plush pig. A little pig. It’s a cute thing. And I had male chauvinist button put on it. Then I had little pig stickers that I found. Profile of a pig. When a senator made a comment like that, I call the page over and ask that the pig be delivered to their desk. Then that night I would put a decal of the pig on their desk. It began to sensitize them that, Hey, these comments are not appropriate.

They were talking about the minimum wage, and my gosh, the minimum wage was so small. It was I think four dollars and something. There was a bill introduced to raise minimum wage, and you had Senator Keating get up and say, literally, “Why raise the minimum wage? The people
that work for minimum wage don’t know any better. They’re either young kids, or women.” I could’ve killed him.

The other funny thing that happened...I did not go into the legislature as a feminist. I went in to do a good job. Indeed when you look at my record, while I’m talking only of women’s issues because they were terribly important to me, I did a host of other things dealing with banking, and credit and all kinds of stuff. I found that almost immediately, when some issue arose that affected women, and particularly adversely, all eyes automatically after bill was presented turned around and stared at me. It was as though they had adopted me as the loyal opposition. As I went over there, I became a firmer feminist. I think I was pushed by the times, the E.R.A.

Sorry about that. The airport is right behind us, and that’s what you’re hearing.

Anyhow, I was pushed by the times. I was pushed because I came to realize that our daughters—we have three of them—also became more feminist as a product of the times. They pushed me...I think pushed me beyond what I would have normally been expected to do. But then I thought, I was sent to represent people, and 51 percent of the population is not being represented. Unless I stand up and speak, who will? So I came to feel as though I filled sort of a void.

These comments were not confined only to the floor. For instance, we went into caucus, and Jack Haffey, who by the way is part of that Touch America that got all the money over in Butte...Jack Haffey was a senator. He wanted this bill passed, and he was urging the caucus to pass it. He was giving this impassioned speech in caucus and he says, “Come on! We all got the balls to vote for this.”

I raised my hand and said, “Mr. Chairman, I don’t have any balls, but on the other hand I have no problem with the bill.”

Dorothy Eck said, “Neither do I, Mr. Chairman.”

Judy Jacobson from Butte said, “Me too. No balls, but I’ll vote for it.” Well, of course, he was terribly embarrassed, but there was a complete lack of understanding of how to deal with ordinary people.

I don’t want to say women. I don’t mean that I want the door opened for me. I had one woman House of Representatives member say, “I’ve never been discriminated in my whole life. I’ve always been treated as a perfect lady.” That’s the problem. I mean, if I come to the door first, I’ll open the door and let whoever’s behind me in, man or a woman. All I want is common courtesy. But not this kind of thing. We had successes like the unisex insurance, and the comparable worth study. Oh, I demanded that they examine comparable worth. I couldn’t get it passed, so I co-authored a study, and every year the legislature received a report from the department of personnel as to what was happening in men and women’s jobs. Sometime after I
left there they discontinued the study because the study had no teeth in it, and it really was not doing the job I had hoped it would do. I carried the domestic violence bill. It required arrest—no questions—and no, the battered spouse does not have to bring charges. It’s just automatic. The state steps in and is the person who brings the charges.

EC: Is that law pretty liberal compared to other states?

PR: Yes, it was then because it—

EC: It is now. I heard in Oregon, if there’s a domestic abuse, both people get arrested automatically.

PR: Well, that was one of the arguments that they were going to make. How do you decide? Generally speaking, you look at who’s being battered and who’s been calling, and there’s perfect evidence. Once more, the kids are there. You have to break the cycle of violence. This has to be done. In fact, there was a terrible editorial in the Billings paper, which just castigated me for this bill. Said, “How are you going to make up your mind? The policeman’s going to be the judge?”

I had the police chief stop me in the street, and said, “I want you to know that that was to me the most important bill that was passed in the whole session, because no longer are my officers under threat of being killed. There was a man, an officer”—what triggered it was the shooting of a policeman—“killed in an answer to a domestic violence.’

EC: Oh, yes.

PR: Yes. So there was no question about the need for it. Later on I also sponsored a bill that dealt with...redefined rape, spousal rape.

EC: Oh, yes.

PR: I carried that. I could not believe what was happening. I saw something placed on everybody’s desk, but not mine. No woman got one, but the men did. One of the men, who’s a good friend of mine, said, “Here, Pat. You better read this before you present the bill because it’s always nice to know what’s going on. I think I’ll send you a copy of this. But it says, ‘Due to a situation in Oregon, where a man is on trial for raping his wife, and another man is charged with rape of his wife, the following consent assignment is furnished to Montana males as a public service. It is recommended that no sexual contact be made until the following form is filled out and signed. Remember, she may be willing tonight, but tomorrow she may charge you with rape.’ And then it’s an agreement, and ‘I hereby on this day beg, ask, agree, reluctantly agree, please pull my night gown down when you’re through, to have sexual relations with my husband between the hours of...Please note, this is a one time agreement. Any sexual contact other than the above time and date will require a new agreement.’”
These guys were passing it around. Then there’s a P.S. “Additional copies of this form may be obtained from Senator Pat Regan.” I didn’t even know the thing was being distributed. It’s a good joke, but it played right into my hands because when I stood up to present the bill, I told them I understood that they had copies, that if they were in any trouble, they could of course go to that. But that actually the copies of this did not originate with me, nor did I think it necessary. And went on, and I did have opposition. Stood up and said, “How do you prove this?” etcetera.

I said, “Believe me, there are instances where there is no question of spousal rape, and it’s not covered in the law. Must be. And therefore vote for it.” It passed.

We had at that time still an aura of success. We had good lobbyists. It sounds like I did it, and this sounds terribly egotistical. I don’t mean to make it sound that way, but I am relating my experiences, and only telling it from my viewpoint. I don’t know. There’s a lot of things we could talk about. I think there were things that were defeated for instance. The Title IX kind of legislation we introduced went down. The Montana High School Association spent seven thousand five hundred dollars to defeat Title IX. Title IX really never passed the legislature. We couldn’t get it passed. It was due to two women in Missoula. I wish I could remember their names. Maybe Diane [Sands] will have them for you, who early on in 1975 I think, ’73, were trying to do something about getting legislation passed that would fix these crazy schedules that only Montana had(117,645),(397,666) and allow better use of Title IX money for colleges sports. It’s taken years to do it, and only done, I think, through the courts not by the legislature.

I want to recount one other story about...I ultimately became chairman of Finance and Claims. That was the most important Senate committee, and first time a woman had ever chaired it. I got to appoint my own vice-chairman, so I appointed Judy Jacobson. All you-know-what broke loose with the idea they would have two women as chair. Chair and vice-chair. I said, “What’s the matter with you guys? Get out your roster. Look at chair and sub-chair, vice-chair of all other committees. They’re usually men. Nothing, you know, I can’t believe that you have any problem with this.”

Fred Van Valkenburg, who was then majority leader, or maybe...No, he was...Was he president of the Senate? He called me up, and he said, “We’re going to have a leadership meeting in my office before the start of the session, or before the caucus,” I guess “You’ll be there, and Jacobson will be there, Haffey will be there, and I’m there, and I want you to appoint Haffey as vice-chair of Finance and Claims.”

I said, “Fred, my appointment is Judy Jacobson, and that’s it.” Well, I demanded and he went on, and I said, “Fred, you want to list his name under Jacobson’s and have two vice-chairs, fine. I don’t care. But my appointment is Judy Jacobson, and that’s it.” He ranted a while and wanted me to respond, and I just picked up a book and I started to read. As a teacher (I learned) silence is a terrific weapon because if you just don’t respond, then the pressure builds and builds and

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I’ve used it in teaching. Until some kid has to respond because they can’t stand the pressure of
silence any longer. I thought, You so and so. I know what you’re doing. It’s a good court room
 technique. So I read the same page about 30 times. I don’t know. Finally he couldn’t stand it.
Oh, I mean it was his nickel. I could sit there for an hour. But finally he made some very, I
thought, inappropriate and nasty comments, and slammed down the phone. Then the following
session, Haffey came to me and he started to talk. I didn’t realize what he wanted...I thought he
wanted me to appoint him chairman of a sub-committee, which was...all those appointments
were mine to make. Instead he was telling me that I should move over and let him take over
chairman of Finance and Claims. Oh yeah! I mean, he had the balls, didn’t he? I often thought
that I wanted to write a book, You Don’t Have to Have Balls to Play the Game. But that’s kind of
naughty.

By the way, another naughty thing, when the lavatory remodeling was done, when the senators
came in they were very disturbed, very unhappy, because I had taken away from them their
access to the snack bar. Right off the Senate, they could just open the door, back out there and
get something, and back right back in. They were unhappy about this, and I said, “Well, hey.
Come on. You have to understand that the remodeling’s not complete. They’re going to do your
side too.”

They said, What?

I said, “Sure, haven’t you heard? They’re going to raise the urinals three inches to keep you
guys on your toes.” They once again weren’t very happy. There was this all-boys club, all-boys
mentality among the hardcore older ones. The younger ones were different. They cut you some
slack, and there was a good give and take. But not with these old fellows.

I had, from time to time, difficulty with them. But I also went out of my way to court them. For
instance, Senator Graham had voted, I think, against the Equal Rights Amendment. I reamed
him because he knew better than that. He was an old timer, and he was not happy. He had said
in all the times there he had never been reamed out like I (did), because I had reamed him. So I
knew I had a problem on my hands.

I had done something that nobody else had thought of, I guess. When they finally discovered
what I was doing, they put a stop to it. I ordered through the chief clerk any amendments that
were submitted on any bill, they were to automatically make an extra copy of it, and drop it
underneath the blotter on my desk. So any time somebody was going to do something to your
bill...there are different ways of killing a bill. One, you can amend it to death, or you can amend
it and change it’s...You can do all kinds of things with amendments—pull its teeth. So I said, “I
want to see any amendments that are proposed. Just drop them on my desk.” I went to the
desk one morning very early, and Graham had a bill out that was terribly important to him. He
was a wheat farmer among other things. This dealt with hail insurance. This bill that was being
sponsored I’m sure by private insurance companies got a Republican to introduce these
amendments that just would have clipped his bill to nothing. So I said, “Aha! I now am back in

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Senator Graham’s good graces.” I went upstairs immediately. He was chairing a committee on highways, I believe, and he was giving me the brush-off because he was unhappy with me. He said, “I’m chairing a committee. I can’t be bothered with this. So I can’t deal with this now.”

I said, “All right, Senator. If you want your bill killed by amendment, I guess so be it.” I turned around, walked out.

He said, “What did you say?” and got up. Turned the chair over.

I said, “Senator, I am up here to help you. I know you have this hail bill. It’s terribly important to you. And you’re about to be blindsided. And I thought it only fair to show to you.” I gave him the amendments, and he was most grateful because he was able to work the bill and work against the amendments before the bill ever hit the floor, so he was, you know.

Okay. There was a lot of working the floor to get bills passed. For instance, that unisex insurance bill, women’s lobbyist group and others had determined that we were two votes shy of getting it passed. So I went to the two most prominent Republicans that they had as no votes. They both owed me, owed me in the sense that I had worked hard. I work with them. I had asked for votes on things like the Equal Rights Amendment and didn’t get it when they were ratifying it. I said, “You know, you guys have—“

[End of Tape 1, Side B]
EC: Erin Cunniff, continuing the interview with Pat Regan in Billings on 8 / 27.

PR: Eight-twenty eight I think.

EC: Oh, 8 / 28. You’re right.

PR: Yes. By the way, you do the same thing that they did. I had them so confused. They would talk about Senator Reagan, because Reagan was president. My name’s actually Regan. I would immediately correct them. So I got to the point where they began to stand up and talk about President Regan. I mean, it was really funny. I think, in fact I was told that one of the new senators coming in asked J.D. Lynch, “How do you deal with her?”

He said, “For god’s sake, don’t ever get into an argument on the floor with her, because she’ll surprise you.” I took that as a compliment.

What was I talking about before that? I was talking about...Oh, the unisex insurance. I went to both Himsl and Turnage, and they said, “Okay, you can have my vote,” reluctantly, reluctantly.

I said, “No, I don’t want your vote. I want more than that. I want you to stand up and speak on its behalf,” because if they spoke, it would drag so many Republicans...Turnage was president of the Senate then, and he was headed to the Supreme Court. When he spoke, they listened. So I said, “I want you to speak in favor of it.”

So, by golly he did. He stood up and he said, “I reluctantly have to vote for this, and I urge you to.” His argument was ingenious. He said, “We can not have discrimination based on our constitution, based on sex, yet insurance premiums are discriminatory based on sex as they exist now. Yet we mandate that we carry insurance, so we can not mandate something that is discriminatory.”

I thought, Why didn’t I think of that one? Well, it won. It passed. They had these Washington lawyers out lobbying. We were the only state in the union that passed the unisex insurance bill by legislative action. They couldn’t believe it. Then there were attempts of course to repeal it in further sessions, but they were not successful.

Once again, I have to go back. I think there’s some Freudian block here about Haffey trying to take the committee chairmanship away from me. Because it occurs to me I did not tell you the P.S. to what...When Haffey did this, I of course told him, “You know, you want to displace me, you can take it into caucus, but I can assure you I’m going to fight long and hard for it because I feel I’ve earned it, and it’s mine.” The following year Haffey was still fighting some claims, and the chair appoints the chairs of the subcommittees—be it institutions, or the university system, or elected officials, whatever it is. I took Haffey and moved him from the university system,
which was near and dear to his heart. He really wanted that, because he came from Butte, and he would bring home the bacon and claim that he brought home the bacon. I thought, Huh. And I put him on elected officials.

Now elected officials is a very...That’s the way they generally introduce early legislators to the committee, is to put them on elected officials, because it only meets two hours in the morning, and we are the first committee...that’s the first committee that finishes up. Well, Haffey was also chair of judiciary. The university subcommittee met from eight to twelve, and he had a committee chairman meeting from ten to twelve. So I yanked him off the university, and put him on elected officials. He was livid. He knew what I had done. He was smart. I went out into the lobby, and lobbyists were saying, “Senator Haffey is most disturbed, and he feels for some reason or other you are punishing him by putting him on elected officials off of university. Do you have any comment?”

I said, “Sure.” Said, “Senator Haffey has a judiciary committee meeting every morning from ten to twelve and he’s chairman of it. He has to be there every morning. So how can he be there, and at the university budget hearing at the same time? It made imminent sense to me to give him—elected officials met from eight to ten—to put him on elected officials. He could finish that budget, go to this judiciary committee, and handle both committees. That’s what I have done.” He told me he’d never forget that and he would get even, but fortunately he was made vice-president of Montana Power Company, so didn’t come back the following year, or I don’t know what might have done.

There were a couple of other things. Oh, I know. The chaplain. It’s customary the chaplain...They had the pledge of allegiance and then the chaplain leads the body in prayer, and then we open the session. In one year, they had a young chaplain who addressed...started instead of saying, “Holy Father,” said, “Holy Mother and Father,” which is I think a trend in some of the newer churches, more liberal churches, to sort of de-sex the god as a man. Senator Keating is a very, very religious Catholic, and having been born Catholic, I understood his psyche very well. He went to Crippen, who was then the majority leader, and said, “What has happened? Have you got Regan talking to the chaplain, that now he’s changed...she’s changing our prayers?”

Of course, Haffey had to explain that, “No, Tom. It wasn’t Regan that did it. It’s just sort of a new thing that’s appeared, and you’re going to have to live with it, because that’s the way it is.”

Now, I’ll talk about some of these that gave us a great deal of trouble. The Veteran’s Preference bill, the idea being that all things being equal, if you were a veteran you got five extra points and therefore you had preference in hiring, which was grossly unfair because it would pit one group against another—the veteran’s against the women’s groups because women too were trying to advance. Yet they were going to be handicapped by this quote Veteran’s Preference, and particularly it was insidious because women could not serve. They were not called up to
serve, and very few women would qualify for Veteran’s Preference. Even if they had wanted to
serve, they only took X number of women, and pretty much it was a bad situation.

But you can pass all the bills you want in the world, and very idealistic bills. You can have a
wonderful constitution. But unless you have proper enforcement, you don’t have much. That’s
one of my worries, as you’re seeing with the courts now and it’s very conservative swing in the
courts, women’s right to choose, and what they’re doing in some instances with parent
notification, or that kind of thing. Trying to bring these things back—what I think will adversely
impact women.

I think in the long run—and I’ll wrap this up because it’s time to go—I think that in the years
since I’ve served in the legislature, we’ve seen changes in public policy, intellectual changes.
The changes are in place, but there still is an emotional prejudice. You operate on two levels.
One is an intellectual one, and one is emotional prejudice. None of us are without prejudice.
My daughter came to me and was really disturbed about this and wanted to know, said, “You
don’t seem to have prejudice. Do you?”

I had to explain to her that, Yes, I thought everybody did. But that it was important for us to
operate at the intellectual level, in spite of our prejudices. While public policy has changed, I
would like to think that more women are being elected, but I’m somewhat disheartened
because I just counted up I think in the last legislative book I had, there are only seven women
serving in the Senate—the Montana Senate. Seven women, out of 50.

EC: Wow.

PR: When I was there, it got as high as five, and that was back in late ‘80s. So we are not making
a lot of progress.

By the way, there is one other story—war story—I’ll tell you. There was an issue that came up,
and a senator who was very conservative...I can’t recall his name. It’s another block, or a senior
moment, whatever you want to call it. He explained that God had told him that women
belonged at home. They didn’t belong in the legislature. He seemed to have this conversation
with God every night. I just could not let that comment go, and I stood up, and I said, “Well,
Senator. I have to tell you that when I talk to God, that isn’t what she told me.”

“She?” you know, this kind of thing. We were outrageous.

One time Dorothy Eck, Judy Jacobson, and I knew that Hager from Billings had some bill up, and
it was not a good one. It was not favorable to women. I can’t even tell you what it was. I
wanted the bill defeated. Didn’t know how to do it or what to do. So we got three cigars from
Dr. Norman. He smoked lousy cigars, by the way. They were awful. When Hager stood up to
speak, we lit up these cigars. Well, you can imagine the consternation, not only upstairs and
everybody looking, but on the floor of the Senate. Here are three women sitting there, blasé,
smoking cigars. You know, men smoked cigars all the time. Nobody paid any attention. But three women lighting up and smoking these cigars, and there was all this discussion. Nobody is paying one bit of attention to poor Tom Hager, who’s trying to present this bill. In fact, he’s having trouble himself, because he’s so distracted by what we were doing. It was wonderful. The press immediately jumped up and went running. They wanted to get the press photographer. Fortunately he wasn’t in the Senate. By the time he came back, I had said to them, “You know, we really don’t want this in the paper. When the press get a photographer in here, when you think they’re coming, make sure you’ve got somebody that’s agreed to take your cigar.” I had an agreement with my seatmate that the cigar just went over there and I just sat and looked, and there was no picture in the paper about it.

But it was a strange time that you had such push, social push for reform. And the women’s agenda, which we had, later was adopted by the moral majority and became the family agenda. But you look at all those things they’re backing now, it was the women who brought them in and had had them passed. But I look with some disappointment...more than that, consternation, at what is happening. It seems to me we fought so hard to advance, and we’re being pushed back by so many different corners in so many different ways. It’s true women have made many strides. They can go into professions that were closed to them before. In my day it was library, teaching, or nursing. Now you can be a, a banker, a lawyer, an architect, whatever.

EC: A miner if you want.

PR: Yes, exactly. But you look at how we’re doing, both in terms of the legislature and in general terms because the legislature I think just reflects what’s going on...Political power and economic power are tied together. There’s no question about it. You want to know how you’re doing? Look at the evening news. How many suits do you see there? All these meetings, always men in suits. They may have a token woman or two standing there. You look at appointments, be they presidential, or government, or governors, or whatever. In Montana we’re supposed to have a law that said, “All boards should have 50-50 representation.” It’s completely ignored. In fact, it may have been repealed for all I know. I think I worry because younger people in high school and college, you’re accepted, take for granted all those things that have been won.

EC: I don’t really agree with that.

PR: Everything from the suffragette movement to all the things we have done, and they say, “We’ve got it made. We’re not being discriminated against.” Of course they are, in so many ways and in so insidious a way that sometimes it’s difficult to prove. I think too that women who have been successful and who have made great strides have failed to help other women along the way. I don’t know why that is, because I always had a feeling that if you had a hand up, you better give a hand to someone else.
I wonder if women who have had it made...who have made it, enjoy their position of, let’s say, uniqueness and don’t want to destroy that. In other words, if they bring other women up, that they are somehow or other diminished because other women are doing it too. I think that’s horrible. I think also it’s been interesting that women who have come into the political scene are no longer homogenous. I mean, when we first came in, you know, it was the feminists, the activists that came in. Now you are finding challenges of women coming in—the Phyllis Schlafly type—who are coming in, the moral majority. They do not hold the same agenda that I hold. Perhaps that’s all right, except that I find it difficult emotionally to take. Well, I guess I’ve shot my wad. Told you more than you care to know.

EC: Okay, I just wanted to ask you a couple of questions in wrapping up. First, when you first started running, and you were going door to door, did you...What was the community reaction to you as a woman running for office?

PR: Very, very favorable. I had women tell me...They’re cooking dinner. It’s five o’clock. I did this after work, after school. They’re cooking. They’ve got hungry kids that you hear in the background. “Right on. I wish I could do it with you. We need more women. You bet you’ve got my vote.” That kind of thing.

Another one. I would go into Republican areas, and I deliberately did it. Republican women were incensed by Richard Nixon. Some of them said, I will never vote Republican again. Some of them said, I’m glad to see a nice woman running for office. I’ve never voted Democrat, but I’ll vote for you. I’ve had nothing but good response. I even went to the chairman of the Republican Party. I said, “I want to introduce myself.”

He said, “I know who you are, and I’m not going to vote for you.”

I said, “That’s fine. I’m just giving you a chance.” I would also tell him that we’ve got 28 people running, 14 on each side. And I said, “Our side doesn’t have the 14 top, nor does your side. So I’m here to present myself as an alternative, as an alternate.” They were very accepting of it. People have a compulsion to fill in all the slots. It’s not the wise thing to do when voting. If you don’t know, leave it blank, or vote just for the top three or whatever. Anyhow, and they figured, well, maybe they’d give me a scratch.

EC: The other thing I wanted to ask you is, when you first got elected and went into office, did you realize that you were going have to be as defensive as you were?

PR: As what?

EC: Defensive. You had mentioned not intending to be, as a feminist...

PR: No! I didn’t. I went in with a whole group of people, and I went in as a Democrat. My identity was based on being a Democrat, not as being a feminist.

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EC: Yes.

PR: Of course this whole thing today has talked about nothing but women’s issues. Because I was there for 18 years I could talk just as well about other issues. But I thought this more appropriate for the study. I wanted you to feel, or to sense how I felt about what was said, the kinds of things that were said to you, the kinds of things that were done. You earned your way. I think I earned my way, and I think proof of that was I became minority whip. I mean, in fact I defeated Doc Norman by one vote. He was furious. He got in the car and drove—

EC: Is that after you took the cigars?

PR: Yes. He drove home. He never forgave me for that. I didn’t intend to run for whip, but Dorothy Eck put me up to it. She went around and, and lobbied the, the caucus and said, “You know, we should elect Regan minority whip.” So I served with Blaylock, and then it was really fun. But I did not know how I was regarded. It’s hard to tell how other people look at you. I tried to keep my focus on what I was doing, and sort of let the chips fall where they may. I was pretty aggressive. Not all women were, and some of them were successful using other—

EC: Tactics?

PR: Yes. But I’ve always been very direct.

[This portion of interview restricted at the request of the interviewee.]

EC: Okay.

PR: Anyhow, that’s it.

EC: All right. Well, thank you very much. Appreciate it.

[End of Interview]