Bob Brown: Okay we’re interviewing Antoinette Rosell. Toni Rosell was elected first to the Montana House of Representatives in 1956 and served in both the Montana House and Senate. I believe you were the only woman in the ’57 session.

Antoinette Rosell: Fifty-seven, and I was not married then, so I was Antoinette Fraser.

BB: You were Antoinette Fraser then. So Toni, what motivated you to run for the legislature?

AR: To be honest with you, I always wanted to be...I read about Teddy Roosevelt for one thing. I was very inspired by him. I gave a speech when I was a junior in high school about him. I thought, “Wow that sounds like a pretty neat deal.” He was out for the right, fair and all that kind of legislation. So when I got back to Billings and was here for a while and I noted that there were no women running on the Republican slate. I thought, “Well gee, maybe I’ll try.” So I started running really in 1954 when I first got back. I think it was ’54. Of course I didn’t know the ropes then.

BB: Where were you back from?

AR: I came back from Europe. I was back from Europe. I had been over there studying in Norway. So when I came back and saw this empty of women I thought, “Wow I’ll run.” The most important thing you have to remember when you run for a new—and you probably remember that—is that you need to contact all the important, in this fact, Republicans. Then they know who you are. That’s very important. So anyway, I was quite behind in 1954. Then I ran again in ’56 because Bill Goan who had been the representative part of the straight eight, he decided he wouldn’t want to run. So he came to me and said, “Toni, I’m not running. Why don’t you try?” I did and was lucky.

BB: Most young women then, I think, wouldn’t have decided to run for the legislature. That was unusual then.

AR: It was very unusual, but I did a lot of unusual things. In a way, my dad was very independent. He wanted us to be that way. He really wasn’t sure I should run. He said, “You know, there’ll be smoke-filled rooms.” I thought, “What are they?” He knew more about politics than I did. I guess it was kind of unusual.

BB: You were inspired as much as anything by Theodore Roosevelt’s example?
AR: I was. I really was. I was very impressed in learning of his history to see what a remarkable man he was. I thought, “Wow that might be something one should do.” I did think that women should be part of making decisions that affected other people and certainly legislation does that, so that was kind of where that is.

BB: Now of course Roosevelt, T.R, Theodore Roosevelt was the trust buster. He was the guy that felt big corporate interests had too much of a dominating place in society. In Montana, when you arrived in the legislature, there was the feeling, at least on part of some, that the Anaconda Company was this big eminent power in the legislature that maybe dominated our state in the legislative process. Do you have any thoughts about that?

AR: Yes, we would hear about all the people and so forth being in different industries. You know, I never felt any pressure about any legislation. I don’t even know how much legislation they suggested. I don’t recall. Black lung was one, as I recall. There didn’t seem to be any opposition to that one. I’m sure there were others that I can’t remember offhand. The railroads also were pretty busy. I talked to a lot of people who were working for the railroads that wanted to change, such as the gandy dancers. They wanted a covered conveyance when they went from one place to the other. It was very interesting. So they weren’t the only ones. Montana Power also was one. Although none of them, I didn’t ever feel any pressure. Not that you’re asking that question, but...

BB: What I think I was asking was that Roosevelt, Theodore Roosevelt was the trust buster. He was someone who impressed you because he stood up to power and tried to do the right thing and so when you arrived in the legislature, did you notice that there was this big powerful corporation that you resented? Was it kind of invisible?

AR: I would say it was kind of invisible. As I said before, there weren’t a lot of laws that I remember that pertained directly to the Montana Power...Excuse me, I keep saying that. Certainly later on Montana Power was there, but I meant the Anaconda Company. I don’t remember anything specific.

BB: Did you get the impression that sometimes, you know obviously business interests don’t like to pay high taxes. So maybe in a general way the corporations wanted a good business climate in Montana, which would have meant few regulations and low taxes. Maybe that wasn’t so much specific legislation, it was just that it’s the direction they may have tried to point the state? I don’t know.

AR: I think that’s correct. The one big argument we had and I was sort of opposed to it at that moment because it had to do with clean air. It was a big fight. My opposition to it was that you bring in a company like Waldorf... what was that?
BB: Horner Waldorf—they were a timber company [paper mill] over in Missoula.

AR: Exactly. They brought them in. They gave them land. All of a sudden they discovered that there was a lot of smoke coming from the factory. They were going to add on a million dollars or something that they’d have to pay. I didn’t think that was fair. Obviously I was in the minority. I did feel that if you were going to bring somebody in, you better give them all the information. Of course it meant jobs. Years ago, the Anaconda Copper built downstream—downwind—because they knew exactly what was going to happen. The paper company was not allowed to do that. They were put in another place, which was ridiculous. So it added to all the other things like the burning of the wood and all that kind of stuff.

BB: There was some competition between Kalispell and Missoula for that facility. The people in Kalispell grumbled and grumbled about it when it ended up being built in Missoula. Then after they had gone down to Missoula a few times after the thing was built, there was a feeling: “Well, maybe this wasn’t that bad after all.”

AR: I do believe in clean air and I think recently the Republicans did too. What I felt was wrong is that you don’t bring a company in and then spring that on them. You give them an idea that, “Look, this may happen. You better think about it.” So that was the only one big thing that I wasn’t in agreement with the Republicans on.

BB: So when you first got there, there you are a young woman, 1957, you’re the only woman in either house, right?

AR: No there was Bertha Streeter. She was a wonderful senator.

BB: From Lake County in the Senate.

AR: She had been the president of the county assessors I think. She was great.

BB: Did she take you under her wing a little bit?

AR: I would sit in the Senate and listen to all the information. Then when I first came to the house—this is interesting—we had one microphone for two. The Senate has a microphone in the middle of the aisle and they had to go down from wherever they sat to give any information to talk. You can imagine some of these older fellows that are from the rural areas, they left it up to the lawyers and others who were speakers. I always thought that was kind of sad. You didn’t always know what they were thinking.

BB: I wasn’t aware of that. Eventually, of course, the Senate was wired so that there were more microphones. Then if you wanted to speak from a microphone, you had to go to a central location in the chamber to speak.
AR: Exactly.

BB: Wow. So that obviously would mean some people would just never say anything.

AR: Yes, and so what we basically had was the lawyers talking about most everything and others would agree or disagree.

BB: So it was a very male dominated world in the House of Representatives. You were the only woman there.

AR: I was treated so fairly. I was a colleague and of course I had one vote like everybody else. They couldn’t have been nicer to me. They were great. I didn’t feel any sense that they were upset with me or anything else. I had one of the guys from—legislators—from Yellowstone County, Crist—Charlie Crist. He said, “Now Toni, I want to give you a word of advice.” I said, “Okay.” He said, “The thing for you to do when you’re a freshman is sit down and listen and don’t do a lot of talking.”

BB: Well that’s time honored advice. A lot of us have received that same advice, that’s for sure. So there were hospitality rooms then.

AR: Ah, yes.

BB: I think the Anaconda Company had one. The railroad had one at different times. Perhaps the petroleum industry and that sort of thing had one. As I remember, the Anaconda Company hospitality room didn’t include women.

AR: Actually we were invited. Bertha and I were invited if they had kind of a celebration for somebody’s birthday. They’d have a huge prime rib, which was wonderful. We would go up and join in. then we’d go on our merry way. I don’t remember the other ones. The other groups like Montana Power. They would have a big dinner. I can’t remember about the railroads or not. John Willard, as I remember, was a lobbyist for the railroad.

He was a wonderful guy. He was very influential on knowing all about Montana. He had been a newspaper man and then was a lobbyist. I don’t remember that. I did not go by myself to any of the rooms because I wouldn’t do that. Number one, I thought you had to be really careful as being the only woman. There had been other women before obviously. I think I was the 13th. I’m not sure. You just had to be careful. I didn’t think you should be seen drinking or smoking even. So you had to put up a good image.

BB: And did you introduce a bill?
AR: I did not. In fact, I was not a chairman of the Committee of the Whole, which you have a choice to do. I just was a little bit nervous about that. So when I was in ’61 and ’63, it was no problem or when I was in the Senate. Somehow, I just couldn’t get myself up there.

BB: Now you came back in the House in ’61 and ’63.

AR: That’s correct. Then in ’61, there were three of us. There were three Republican women. There was Helen Johnson and a lovely lady from Missoula. I can’t remember her name. Maybe you could. She was very highly regarded in Missoula.

BB: Bess...

AR: Bess Reed, perfect. Thank you. I tried to think of her name. Then in 1963, there were two of us, both Republicans—Joy Nash and I. Joy Nash was the one who had a legislation that made one of the units out there in the—I can’t think of which building it was—into a DUI recovery type of situation. She was very responsible. She felt that it was true alcoholics are becoming a real problem. They were no longer considered drunkards. They were considered “alcoholics,” people who could not control their situation. So this was great to have a public facility they could go to.

BB: That was her special legislation?

AR: Yes.

BB: Now in 1961, I believe, Ted Schwinden was a legislator. Is that right?

AR: Or was it ’57?

BB: Do you remember serving with Ted Schwinden?

AR: Yes I do.

BB: He might have been there in ’59 and ’61. Or it could have been ’57 and ’59. I think it was ’59 and ’61. [Schwinden was first elected in 1958.]

AR: Yes okay. I’m trying to think now.

BB: You served with him anyway.

AR: I believe so, yes I did.

BB: Any impressions?

Antoinette Fraser Rosell Interview, OH 396-029, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
AR: No; I don’t know. It was amazing. The Republicans and Democrats got along very well actually. I don’t remember any problems at all at any time. I just can’t help you out there.

BB: You served also with Tom Judge.

AR: Yes I did. Tom was a good legislator. I liked Tom. Tom was a good governor. When he agreed to sign the Equal Rights Amendment it was good. Schwinden, I thought, was a very fine governor also. He had his doctor’s degree I think. I never discussed it.

BB: He was a political scientist I think. He went to the University of Minnesota or something.

AR: I don’t know the background. I just know that someone said, “He has his doctor’s degree.” It could have been an educational degree.

BB: Let’s see; were you in the legislature with Tim Babcock?

AR: Yes. In fact, my first session in ’57, Tim and I were seat mates. He was wonderful. He was very helpful. He and Betty were so nice to me. They would take me to lunch because here I’d be by myself. Actually, in those days, I was not invited out to lunch. I would bring my own lunch, which would be an egg salad sandwich and carrot strips. I wondered where everybody went.

BB: You think that the lobbyists were just kind of uncomfortable because you were a young woman?

AR: I don’t know. I’ve never asked how come they didn’t invite me, kind of thing. You know when you take something from someone, you feel that there’s an expectation. I would not have been in favor of that. I think you really had to...This is one big problem I see today with running in politics is that you have to ask people for money. That makes you a little beholden. I remember when I first ran I paid for all my own. In those days, it wasn’t quite as expensive. You ran county-wide. Consequently, we had a lot of help from the...Once we got into the Republican Party and we were the nominee and so forth, we got a lot of help. It’s very hard to run on your own money because there isn’t enough anymore.

BB: Oh yes, now. In a big medium market area like Billings here, it would cost you 15 or 20,000 dollars.

AR: I used to have like 57 seconds and stuff like that where you give them 25 words. That’s changed.

Antoinette Fraser Rosell Interview, OH 396-029, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
BB: That’s for sure. The cost. I think politics has become more partisan and has become more expensive.

AR: It has. I will say this: now going back to women and my interest in it, what happened in 1972 with the new constitution and the equal dignity clause effect, we had 10 delegates—10 women delegates out of 100. That made a very big difference. Actually our own constitution has an equal dignity clause, which is equal to the national Equal Rights Amendment. Since that time, I’ve noticed like in ’67 was my first term in the Senate. There was a lady from Dillon. I can’t think of her name. She was a very nice lady. She was having trouble walking. I don’t know if she had MS or not. Anyway, she did not run the next time. So in 1969 I was the only woman in either house. Then I think in...I’m not sure when Dorothy Bradley was there.

BB: Seventy-one was her first session.

AR: Yes she was the only woman in the House and I was the only woman in the Senate. I’m not sure about that being. There might have been a lady from Great Falls in the Senate.

BB: There was a lady by the name of Boots Hall?

AR: Barbara, that’s right. Boots Hall, that’s right.

BB: I don’t know if that’s her or not.

AR: Yes I think that’s her. Then they gradually kept increasing, which was wonderful. Now I don’t know what the—

BB: Now when was the Equal Rights Amendment in the legislature?

AR: That was 1973 and ’74. We had annual sessions. It was introduced in ’73. It went through the House. The prime sponsor there was Representative Regan. It went through the House simply. It got into the Senate and I was a co-sponsor with a gentleman from Great Falls. AAUW was pushing this amendment. We didn’t pass our amendment. It was tabled. In fact everything was tabled. So the two legislative pieces were tabled in the Senate. Then Bill Mathers came back in ’74. He said his daughters had given him some very interesting advice, or explained to him the circumstances that maybe he wasn’t aware of. He gave a big newspaper article to one of the huge newspapers, Christian Science Monitor. So he stood up in the Senate and said he thought it was a good idea.

BB: So he had been voting against it in ’73 and switched to vote for it in ’74?
AR: Yes actually there was really no vote on it, see. It was tabled. So with his advice, he may not remember this himself, but I’m sure he will. With his advice, it came off the table and was passed into the House. It passed the Senate with a Senate bill, I do believe, it passed the Senate and went into the House and was passed there. You were there. Weren’t you in the House then?

BB: Yes. I didn’t remember the details.

AR: I’m sure because it was annual sessions is probably the one big reason the amendment passed and the big help of Bill Mathers. He was so highly respected.

BB: For some reason I’m thinking that it surfaced again in the late seventies?

AR: Here’s the thing: a lot of people were upset with it because they felt it was going to make a huge difference. It didn’t make a difference to Montana because we already had that in the state constitution. They were upset about it. So what they tried to do is rescind it. You don’t do that.

BB: That’s what happened.

AR: My husband even came over to testify against the rescinding that.

BB: There was an effort to rescind it. When would that have been?

AR: It was probably a couple of sessions later.

BB: Seventy-seven or seventy-nine maybe?

AR: I think so. It could have been ’75. I think it might have been. I can’t remember now. Yes I think you’re right. I think it was later. They kept bringing it up. Then we did, according to our own constitution and the equal dignity clause, we equalized all of the genders. So that was the bill where promiscuity came up as a fact that if it’s a guilty act, both parties are guilty. That passed through the House. Senator Regan and I introduced that bill. There wasn’t much conversation about it actually on the floor.

BB: In fact I think I remember something about the joke: what should we do with the prostitution bill? Well maybe we better pay it.

AR: Oh that was good.

BB: Do you remember that?
AR: Oh yes, there were a lot of jokes. I wish I could remember them all. I remember Pat Regan said, “Don’t say anything unless you have to. If the Republicans say something opposed to the bill, maybe you should respond.”

I said, “Okay.”

So anyway when the chairman of the Committee of the Whole said, “The bill is before you. What is your pleasure?”

Pat said, “Would you like to rephrase that?” She’s got that Irish humor.

BB: She really does. So did you work with Dorothy Bradley on any legislation, do you remember?

AR: I didn’t. I thought she was a very outstanding legislator because she introduced a bill dealing with abortion. I said, “Dorothy, are you sure you want to do that because there’s a lot of feeling about it.”

She said, “Toni, if my constituents think I should, I should.”

I said, “Good for you.” I mean that shows you’re a real true legislator. She was someone who believes in their constituents and upholding what they believe. She had a lot of threats on the phone. She had some real unfortunate responses to it. That was about the only legislation we had a conversation about. We were pretty much for everything else.

BB: That was in 1971 and I think the legislation she introduced would have in some way legalized abortion in Montana. That preceded the 1972 constitution and the *Roe v. Wade* decision. Her legislation was defeated, but then later on—

AR: Oh I got you. It would have allowed abortions to take place legally.

BB: I think that was what her bill would have done. If I remember, it was defeated pretty overwhelmingly in the House of Representatives. Then three or four years later, it became the law of the land as the result of the *Roe v. Wade* decision in the U.S Supreme Court.

AR: See, the thing about abortion is that nobody’s for it really because you…but it’s a personal thing. It should be done on a personal level for the doctor, husband, and so forth. It’s the kind of thing that will go on. We don’t stop it. It will go into—like they used to say—the alleys. People would use unfortunate ways of aborting. So that’s the big problem. It will continue to be the problem. It’s not going to be something that will be solved very easily.

Antoinette Fraser Rosell Interview, OH 396-029, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
BB: In fact, I think it remains the most divisive issue in the country as we conduct this interview right now. The Supreme Court has a vacancy. Sandra Day O’Connor has resigned from the Supreme Court and both sides are saying they want a mainstream person on the Supreme Court. The real issue is whether the person is likely to vote to rescind or repeal—whatever the right terminology is—take back the Roe v. Wade decision or reaffirm the decision. That’s really the only real issue.

AR: I’m sure it is and it devastates both parties in a sense because there is no real answer to it in a way. As long as you have that kind of opposition growing all the time, sometimes it just gives stimulus to certain groups to react. I don’t know what the answer is.

BB: Our party, the Republican Party, tends to generally be pro-life on the abortion issue, and the Democratic Party tends to be pro-choice on the abortion issue. Any thoughts on that? Has that made you uncomfortable?

AR: When they had the platform group here...What was that? It was at the beginning of five years ago or more when Bush was elected, they had a meeting here and I was asked to present the pro-choice attitude to the Republicans. So there is a group of women, and men too I’m sure, who are pro-choice. My position was, what they wanted me to say was, “No matter your position on it, it should not be a plank in a political platform.” That was the main issue right there. That made sense to me. I can remember when I ran for office one time that I was asked, “Are you pro-choice or pro-life?”

I’m going, “Well I’m kind of for both. I believe in pro-life, but people have to make their own choice,” which is pretty much where the issue is at.

BB: I think that’s where the general public generally is too.

AR: It’s such a delicate question for people—couples, young women, men too. It’s hard to be able to decide how that’s going to finally go. I think Judge O’Connor certainly...By the way, she was serving in the Senate in Arizona the same time I was serving in the Montana House. So she’s an outstanding person. She made some very nice comments on the Today Show. I thought they were very good when she was being interviewed by Katie Couric.

She said how responsible she felt to be the first woman on the Supreme Court and that this was a scary part of it in many ways. When you ask me about being the only woman in 1957, it wasn’t really scary. The guys were so nice, pleasant, and gentlemen. Of course, that’s what they are. They’re gentlemen. Of course I will say that Tim Babcock was a very good friend and was very helpful. He also, by the way, was a legislator in Miles City. He had that kind of outstanding background.
BB: He had some additional background. Now if you were approached by a young woman today and told by her that she was interested in running for the legislature as a Republican, what advice would you give her?

AR: My suggestion would be: find out where you’re going to be running and how they vote in that area. That’s what it is. The district thing is so much different than county-wide. You know when you have to pick up 500 votes or something and you’re running against somebody and...I think it’s more difficult right now to run in districts than it was, in a sense, to run in the county because you kind of knew where you were going.

BB: I think also, the partisanship that we’ve discussed is more intensified in the single member districts because if you get a district that’s more or less safe Republican or more or less safe Democrat, then if you got them, you could follow your extreme tendencies and get away with it. If you’ve got to represent all the people in Cascade County or Flathead County or Yellowstone County, you’ve got to be a little more...take a little broader view of some of these issues.

AR: That’s exactly right. I remember when I ran the first time and won, there was a big thing that said, “Open meeting at the Labor Temple.” I thought, “Oh, that would be a place to go.” So I presumed everybody was going to be there that I would know. I got there and I didn’t know anybody. Willard Fraser wasn’t mayor then, but he was the big supporter then of Democrats. He spotted me in the back and he said, “There’s a namesake,” one of my namesakes, because it was Antoinette Fraser when I first ran. So he had me come up and speak. The questions were: Do you believe in the right to work? What do you think of the Fjare, which was the Yellowtail Dam?

I said, “Well I think everybody has a right to work. I kind of agree with Mr. [Orvin] Fjare, Congressman Fjare, that the Yellowtail Dam is questionable. I don’t know if they’ll be able to do all the four things that they planned to do, which right off hand I can’t remember. I used to work at Eastern [Montana College] and the geology teacher said, “Toni, those walls are porous, they’re going to have a heck of a time keeping that water in there.” I think we know that. Anyway, I picked my experience there because after the meeting, several of the members asked me to come down and have some Coke. I had a Coke with them. They said, “You’re right. We work beside people that don’t do the same job we do and we get paid the same thing. So we believe in what you said that everybody has a right to work.” Anyway, I do believe I got some votes there.

BB: You didn’t necessarily tell them what they wanted to hear either.

AR: No I didn’t. See, that’s a good point. You have to do what you think is right. When I vote, I was the only one of our delegation that voted against the resolution for the Yellowtail Dam.

Antoinette Fraser Rosell Interview, OH 396-029, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
BB: That apparently, that was considered an issue that really hurt Orvin Fjare.

AR: Yes it did.

BB: His reluctance to support Yellowtail Dam.

AR: Yes, I think he was correct, what they found out now. Actually the water goes down to Wyoming, which is interesting. When the water is up, it’s a beautiful area to fish and have sports and so forth. I’m sure it helps all the farmers down the road there.

BB: Do you remember the big labor leader in the state at that time, Jim Umber? Any recollections of him, the AFL-CIO, or their presence in the legislature?

AR: Oh yes. I did not see them in the House, but when I went to the Senate, now this would be in ’57 I think.

BB: Fifty-seven is when they started in the House.

AR: Yes it is. I’m trying to remember. They were quite in evidence. I will say that. I do remember them when I sat there in the Senate one time and I was still in the House. I looked up and there were these three people above the clock. I said to my friend, “Who are they?” Now I did not notice them.

BB: They were labor leaders.

AR: They were labor leaders, right. They said, “Oh those are the three labor leaders.” I said, “Oh.” They were quite ominous, if you want to know. They just were sitting there looking at everyone. They made a mistake. I’m not sure this should be something that I could say. It was hearsay actually, but they threatened one of the senators. From that point on, they never appeared. It was interesting. It was the Democrat senator. It was one of the things you learned very quickly is that you did not discuss your colleagues with anyone and that you certainly...The lobbyists knew that you did not ever attempt to use any kind of force or verbal—

BB: Was it a result of some sort of an issue that he was bucking them on or something?

AR: Yes. I can’t say what it was. I don’t remember now what it was. It was actually, he was a doctor and he was from Helena. I don’t remember what it was about to be honest with you. In fact, the doctor—

BB: [William] Cashmore was the doctor from Helena.

AR: Yes that’s exactly it. He was the one, I’m pretty sure.
BB: Then let me think here, Umber was someone I never actually knew. I think he was there in the fifties and sixties, but Jim Murry replaced him.

AR: It may not have been Umber. I can’t remember who it was. Was Umber a truck driver?

BB: Joe Crosswhite and Jim Umber and Jim Murry were all kind of there at about the same time and kind of crossed over each other.

AR: I don’t know for sure which one it was and what the circumstances exactly were as to who said what to whom. The story was that you just don’t ever call a senator and suggest they made a mistake. A constituent can do that, but lobbyists really can’t with all integrity.

BB: You remember, there was quite a contest in 1964 between Tim Babcock and Ted James for the Republican nomination for governor...excuse me, 1968. Ted James was elected lieutenant governor in ’64 and Babcock was elected governor in ’64. In ’68, Ted James challenged Tim Babcock for the Republican nomination. Any recollections of that?

AR: No. I tell you what, I was always so much for Tim. I toured for Tim as I recall at that time.

BB: Tim was defeated in ’68 by Forrest Anderson, but he had a primary against his own lieutenant governor, Ted James, that preceded that.

AR: I’m sure that’s where we campaigned for him. One of the reasons I think he didn’t win that for whatever reason it was, because he said he was going to stick in there as governor. Then he ran for the Senate seat.

BB: In ’66 yes. He said in ’64 that—or at least he gave the impression that—he wouldn’t run for the Senate in ’66 and he did. Of course the big issue that affected Babcock was the sales tax. That was an issue that recurred a lot of the time that you were involved in politics. Any observations or thoughts on that?

AR: Actually, I remember the first caucus and I believe it was ’67, and one of our members said that there was one thing he would not do and that would be vote for the sales tax. He was a fellow from up in the northwestern part. He had Christmas trees. Do you remember who that was? Anyway, he did not budge from that. We needed one more vote.

BB: That was in ’67? See, I should know that too.
AR: He was a Republican, and he just simply said that he was not going to vote for it. Then they got a couple of fellows, but they couldn’t quite make it. He said he told his constituents he would not vote for the sales tax, and he was not going to do it. He kept loyal to that.

BB: Toni, I’m thinking George McCallum but that would have been in ’71, wouldn’t it? George and I got there in ’70 and we had a big fight on the sales tax again.

AR: Then it was ’71. You’re exactly right. Then we had the special session, remember? We passed out a bill that the people could vote on and they voted it down.

BB: Jim Felt from here in Yellowstone County was the speaker in ’67. He was pushing for a sales tax with Governor Babcock’s support. I think the unpopularity of the sales tax probably contributed to Babcock’s defeat also.

AR: I’m sure it did because people were very upset about it. It made sense. It’s still an issue as you know with your experience. It probably still would be one.

BB: I voted for it in my first session in 1971 and I became persuaded in the wisdom of trying to reform our tax system with the sales tax as part of it. I don’t think it’s ever gotten me any support. It’s probably always lost me support.

AR: You can only be honest about what you think is important and what you think is necessary to be done. The biggest problem is, when you see these states with the sales tax, they just keep going up and up. Then they also add in the income tax, which they maybe have not done before. So I don’t know.

BB: You know the interesting irony there is we have an upper limit in our state constitution of four percent on any sales tax that we’ve never had.

AR: That was passed.

BB: Yes, that was passed. So Montana is about the only state in the nation that has a constitution that guarantees the sales tax can’t get beyond four percent. At the same time, we’re one of the states that has no sales tax.

AR: A little confusing there. Maybe the next legislature will do that.

BB: You were an educator.

AR: I was an educator and that was one of the things that I didn’t always agree with the Republicans with. It seemed like in 1957, they put the thing [a drape] over the clock. We
would argue, debate, whatever, where to put the money to colleges or to public education.

BB: When you just said you put that thing over the clock, just to clarify here, the constitution in Montana then said that a legislative session couldn’t last longer than 60 days. So it was customary rather than to, if the legislature wasn’t done with its business by the 60th day, to just hang a cloth over the clock. So the 60th day might have lasted three, four, or five days until the legislature got its work done.

AR: It seems to me that in ’57 it lasted a week. At that time, you’re not paid for that. That reminds me of what we were paid on those days, 10 dollars a day excluding Sunday because we didn’t meet on Sunday. You see it wasn’t until we got into the Senate and Luke McKeon decided that it was unconstitutional to put a cloth over the clock. That could certainly be debated in a court of law whether any of the bills passed at that time are constitutional. So that’s when they decided to close it off and have a special session.

BB: I interrupted you. You were about to tell about public education and so on.

AR: That was always an argument. The legislature really wanted to do that. The foundation program was pretty explicit. One of the big lobbyists in those days was MEA.

BB: Dee Cooper was the lobbyist.

AR: Dee Cooper was one of the big lobbyists and he was very straightforward in what he thought we needed to do. The Foundation Program, at that time, seemed to be the logical thing to follow. It had to be explained to everybody because it was not as clear and I think it was explained to me at least 50 times every time we had a session. It was just hard to understand how it was dealt with. Now to find out that it was unconstitutional that I was very definitely for education and I did not always agree with the Republicans on education.

BB: That’s because you felt that maybe we could have afforded to spend more money for education than we did?

AR: Exactly. The one thing about the Foundation Program, which was very important, was rural schools got an equal amount so they could get teachers. They would have enough money to pay those teachers’ salary commensurate with some of the public city schools in the number of students going. The colleges, you see, needed money. So you had that big problem of: what do we do with this money at the end? To whom do we give it, public schools or colleges? The other debate was kind of interesting where the University of Montana, see at one time, the University of Montana was Montana State University. Then it was Montana State College, I think.
BB: Bozeman was Montana State College and Missoula was Montana State University. Then Missoula became the University of Montana and Bozeman became Montana State University.

AR: The reason for that is that they would get more grant money if they were universities. Before that then, Bozeman and Missoula were part of a greater university system. Of course our university has grown so much I wouldn’t recognize it being an alumna. It’s different. Now are you an alumna of...

BB: Of both places. I was an undergraduate at Bozeman and a graduate at U of M. I went to both places. As you look back with the legislators that you served with, you served with Jim Lucas, Bill Mathers, Frank Hazelbaker, Bill Groff, any thoughts on any of those people?

AR: They’re people that you remember because they always...They kept things moving, and I liked Bill Groff. He was the fellow that knew about finances. The one thing that always amused me—we could argue forever on such things as pro-choice/pro-life, equal rights, but when it came to the budget, we could complete that in about one session. We’d just be handed the information and they’d say, “This is it.” See years ago, we used to make trips into these various institutions and see what they were doing and so forth. They always had this special committee working on the budget and it didn’t take long to go through that. It took an awful lot longer for these other things. I always thought that was a little bit strange.

BB: You were on the Senate Finance Committee?

AR: No I wasn’t, but I just noted that’s what it was.

BB: I think too that sometimes I notice this with my own experience in the legislature: if you had a big bill with great fiscal implications—either it appropriated a lot of money or it had big consequences in terms of lowering taxes and it was kind of technical—most legislators would keep away from it. They’d let the people who supposedly knew something about it talk about it. If it had to do with liquor, if it had to do with coyotes, silver dollars, firearms, everybody had an opinion. Sometimes the debate would last for an hour and a half or two hours. Everybody would have to give a speech on it. We might turn around then five minutes later and pass a bill with a 14.3 million dollar price tag on it that was kind of complicated and it would go through in ten minutes.

AR: I think that’s exactly on target. It was because you felt like you had more understanding of the firearms bill, for example or whatever.

BB: Bill Groff of course is chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, was the man who had the best handle of anybody in the Senate.
AR: He was a banker, so he knew he knew about money.

BB: So generally he was deferred to on some pretty major pieces of legislation. So I guess we all believe—and still do—that he didn’t mislead us on anything important.

AR: I think they did a fine job with what they had. It was always kind of unusual to think we would spend so much time on these minor things, which don’t affect people as much as money, income, and so forth.

BB: Do you remember Bill Groff strolling down the center aisle to the water cooler?

AR: Oh I loved that, yes. That was very good. We knew he was getting ready to say something. He was getting organized there.

BB: It was kind of a ritual. I remember it very well. He sat fairly near the back I think. He’d get up and ceremoniously stroll down the center aisle...

AR: Yes very elegantly. So you knew that he was there.

BB: He walked in a way to be noticed. He’d go to the big water coolers, a big jar of water. He’d drink the paper cup full of water and throw it in the waste paper basket and kind of stand there and look carefully at the whole Senate from the front. Then he’d stroll back to his seat. Then seconds later, he’d rise to be recognized.

AR: Yes I think he was a kind of figure that you’d remember.

BB: Anything else that you can think of? Do you have any impressions of people or bills, lobbyists, the system, or anything that you’d like to mention?

AR: You know I think it’s a great system. It doesn’t always work fluidly, but it’s a great system with checks and balances. That’s so important. I’m sure there are many things that if I could think of them at the moment, I would.

BB: I was going to ask you about a few people as we conclude our interview. They are people that many people would have known. Just to ask you, did you ever meet Senator Mansfield?

AR: I never met Senator Mansfield, but for some reason back in 1964, I ran in the primary—Republican primary—to try and be elected to run for the U.S Senate. Actually that was when [Alex] Blewett won that. I have never met—

BB: So if you had won that primary, you would have ran in opposition to Mansfield?
AR: Exactly, because for some reason, they thought there was a chink in his armor, which of course was ridiculous. He was so smart. Whoever was working for him—they would send cards to everyone on their birthday. There was no way you were going to defeat him. He was a fine man anyway. You know how you do, the Republicans think, “Ah, we have a chance here.”

BB: Maybe the woman angle would be (unintelligible).

AR: I traveled the state of Montana. It was fun. It was very interesting because you went to all of the county meetings and so forth. There were three of us running and I was third. It was a wonderful experience. One of the things you get out of—and I’m sure you feel this way—you don’t always win an office, but it’s the experience of running that is so enlightening.

BB: Did you ever meet Senator Metcalf?

AR: Yes, I met Senator Metcalf for some reason. He was a friend of my father’s I think, at one time. I never met Jeannette Rankin either, which I’m sorry about. I don’t know why. You think our paths would have crossed.

BB: Any impressions of Metcalf from that meeting you had with him?

AR: No, just very friendly and, like a lot of politicians are, outgoing. I didn’t notice anything specific however.

BB: There’s a new biography on Jeannette Rankin that you’d probably be interested in. I don’t know when it’s coming out. I know that there are a couple of professors at the University of Montana at Missoula working on it. A couple of biographies are out on her already. What are your impressions of her even though you didn’t meet her?

AR: Oh, I think she’s a fantastic woman. Actually, one of my very good friends, Fran Elge, was her administrative assistant when she went there the second time, which I think is amazing that she was re-elected each time during the war, which I think is prominence, myself.

BB: I met Frieda Fligelman, who was her administrative assistant when she was first in Congress.

AR: Oh, and she was a doll

BB: I never met Francis Elge. Was she a federal judge?
AR: She was. She was an Indian judge and I don’t remember exactly. There’s a different name for it, but anyway, she worked with the Indians.

BB: One of the first women lawyers.

AR: Oh yes. Her class, I have her class photo and she’s there in this photo at graduation day at the law school. Everybody’s wearing a dark suit and she’s dressed in white.

BB: Now your mention of her reminds me of Louise Replogle and of course her first husband was Wellington B. Rankin. He was an eminent personage in Montana politics and Republican Party politics. He was a big rancher and that sort of thing. Did you ever meet him?

AR: I did meet him. In fact, they were having a big deal at the Placer Hotel. I’m not sure what year it was. He was the National Committee man. They were trying to defeat him, this little group. They even flew in certain people from the counties. I don’t think he was defeated at that time. Later on, I don’t remember how that worked.

BB: What do you remember about him that would have made him controversial?

AR: He was very stately and he was at this meeting. He didn’t say a lot. I don’t know that I had any big impression of him really. He was a very interesting man and quite different than Jeannette, which is amazing. When you think about the two and their political views, they were different.

BB: They were both brilliant.

AR: I believe so. I believe they were brilliant. Of course, Jeannette Rankin was totally unusual when you think about a woman doing that. When she voted against the war in 1917, I think it was, it was okay because a lot of people from Montana were opposed to the war. Of course, when she voted against the war when we were attacked, it was a whole different kind of philosophy. That was too bad, but she believed in peace and she kept that in her mind.

BB: She stuck to her principles. There’s no question about that.

AR: She was outstanding in that respect. It was not easy to do because she had to run into a phone booth to protect herself, which almost seems unbelievable. Politics was pretty wild in those days.

BB: I’m sure that’s true. Jim Battin?
AR: He was a nice guy. He was a class ahead of me at Senior High. He was a very fine man. He married a good friend of mine, Barbara Battin. I thought he was a very good congressman. I’m sure as a federal judge, he was too.

BB: I only just remember him a little bit in the sixties when he was a congressman. He seemed to me to be kind of a low-key kind of a guy.

AR: He was.

BB: I remember him at Republican State Conventions a time or two and he was a very tall man. He was kind of slow moving, kind of slow talking, kind of thoughtful. That’s at least how I remember him.

AR: That’s correct. When he would come, he would give his information about what was going on, which was... He didn’t try to influence us with anything political. He said, “This is what’s happening. You need to be aware of this.” I liked that. I thought that was a very good thing to be informative. To me, that’s the best kind. You know what’s going on and he would do that. You had him right on. He was very methodical and a thinking guy. I’m sure he was a very fine federal judge also.

BB: Senator John Melcher?

AR: Oh I like Melcher. He was always very pleasant. He served in ’57 I think when I was there in the House. I think he got into some kind of a problem, I don’t know exactly what it was. Whenever I would meet him, he was always very sincere and I don’t have any other comments in that, except that I think he tried to be a good congressman.

BB: He was in the western congressional district, but he was also attorney general for a while. Did you ever know Arnold Olsen?

AR: I knew Arnold Olsen. He became a lobbyist later. Arnold was an interesting guy. Let’s see, how did that work? It was about an oil controversy at the time when he was attorney general, along with a lady who was the superintendent of the schools. A lot of public lands were involved. I don’t know. Didn’t he run for governor?

BB: No, Arnold Olsen, maybe Harriet Miller?

AR: No it wasn’t Harriet Miller.

BB: Mary Condon?

AR: Exactly. Let’s see, it wasn’t Mary Condon.
BB: She preceded Harriet Miller as superintendent of public instruction.

AR: That’s correct.

BB: I think Arnold Olsen probably would have been attorney general during the period that they both were in office then.

AR: That could have been.

BB: Then Olsen ran for governor in ’56 against Aronson.

AR: Oh yes, Aronson. Aronson was a great guy. When I was first running, he said, “Oh, come on, Toni. Come and join me.” We would travel over to Laurel and Jim Felt was one of the members. They would take me around. They were very nice. You learned how to handle that kind of thing. The Galloping Swede, on the go with Hugo.

BB: If you were going to describe him to someone who had never met him, how would you describe Hugo Aronson?

AR: He’s a rugged-looking individual. He was very mannerly. His ability to speak English fluently, you didn’t mind that because he said the most important words and you knew what they were. There are some great stories about him going through. He knew how to say “ham and eggs.” So he had a lot of ham and eggs. He was an amazing man. In fact, Phil Gowan had...his brother, I can’t think of his brother’s name. Both of them were in the legislature. Their sister, Nancy Gowan-Duggan (?) was big in Republican. We went to a convention one time and stayed in the old mansion when Rose and Hugo lived there.

BB: Oh my.

AR: That was a pretty good experience.

BB: It’s a museum now.

AR: Phil and Bill, Bill Gowan—an interesting thing. He was flying his daughter and a friend around Yellowtail Dam. Something happened to the plane. He must have hit something. He saw a bit of land some place. He went down to where that land was where he could land. Before he landed, he said to his daughter, “Jump out. You and your friend jump out.” So they jumped out. He was close enough and then he crashed.

BB: He was killed in the plane crash, and they survived.

AR: Exactly.
BB: They landed in the water?

AR: I’m not sure now that you’re asking. I don’t think they landed in the water. I think it was some little area they could land in. He was highly regarded. He was a terrific guy. He was a good friend of Jim Haughey I think. He liked to drive fast, that boy. I always admired him for that because he was very calm. He just said, “When I get to a certain point, you jump. Don’t argue, just jump.” It would take a lot of guts to do that.

BB: You also served in the legislature. I think you were in the House when he was in the Senate. I’m not sure about that. You were in the legislature when Don Nutter was governor. Did you meet Don Nutter?

AR: I met Don Nutter and worked with his campaign group. I was in the House when he was in the Senate. He was big on keeping taxes down and he was an outstanding governor, I think, for as long as he served. I never could figure out what happened to that plane. It was a very strange event. He was a lawyer and he was able to speak. He was pretty much really kind of a shoe-in for governor I think. He and Tim were. Tim was very well liked too, he always has been. It was tragic that Nutter would go.

BB: Nutter, of course, was controversial in education circles because as you mentioned, he was a real fiscal conservative.

AR: Yes he was. I don’t remember too much about that though, to be honest. I don’t remember. I just know that he was definite on taxes and he wanted to be sure not to raise them. Of course when you talk about funding schools, you often talk about taxes.

BB: You have to talk about those things at the same time that’s for sure. Anything else you’d like to mention?

AR: No, I appreciate the opportunity. What happens with this now? What do you do with this?

BB: We’ll turn this tape over to the Mansfield Library to the state archives. It will be on file there for the opportunity.

AR: It doesn’t matter how many mistakes you make, it’s going to be right there.

BB: I so much appreciate your public service and so much appreciate your willingness to do the interview.

AR: It was my pleasure and thank you for thinking of me, Bob.

[End of Interview]