

Interview With Elwood Gillis

L.B. It is the 10th day of January 1995. I am Lee Bahrych, Coordinator of the Colorado Legislative Oral History Library. With me at the State Capitol is former House Member Elwood Gillis from Lamar.

L.B: Elwood, I'm glad that you're here with me today, and I'd like to start the interview by having you tell me something about your family background and your education.

E.G. Ok, Lee. I'm very honored to be here, and I think this is a good effort on the part of the legislature, and I think they've picked an excellent person to do the project. My family, I guess, for me to tell people that I am a native of Texas, I don't have to do that because of my accent, but I've lived in Colorado since 1959. Most of my adult life, my wife and I have made Colorado our home, and when we lived in Texas we always, seemed like if we took vacations we always came to Colorado.

L.B. A lot of people do that.

E.G. Familywise, I was born deep in the heart of Texas, right in the center or.....part of the state in a small town of about 4,000 people. The name of Runnels County in Ballinger, Texas. I was born in 1934, the second of three children, the first son, My father, for some reason, chose to name me Lee Elwood Gillis. We lived there on this little farm, and my father was a sharecropper. He had an eighth grade education. He and my mother, Leola Kendrick, were married at a very young age, and we lived there in that part of the state for about four years, and then we moved up into the Great Plains of Texas where my father was, again, working on a farm for an uncle. It was at that time when we lived up there that my mother died, and it left my father with three young children, just recovering from the Depression Era, and just before World War II began. So that was, I guess, a real strain on my father. You don't know it at the time when you are just a five-year old. After we lived there, we moved out of that area back into the Jones County area down around Abilene, Texas. That's where my father and my mother had been raised. We had a lot of aunts and relatives that lived there. So for the next three or four years, my brother, and my younger brother, and my sister and I, we lived with aunts and uncles. It was very difficult for my father to find work and also to raise a family, but he tried to keep us together and he did. My sister always said that even though we didn't have a mother in our formative years as we were being raised up, we had the benefits of having many, many aunts that looked after us, and we learned from all those different aunts that took care of us at one time or the other during our younger years. And so I always remember that, and I guess one of the things that I recall about all of my family in Texas is that all of them were Baptists and that's what we are today. We belong to the Baptist Church in Lamar. And they were all Democrats. So how I ended up as a Republican, they still ask that question.

L.B. (chuckling) Um-hm.

E.G. That's one of the things that when we go back to visit relatives down in Texas that my wife always cautions me not to get into political discussions with my aunts and uncles.

L.B. Wise wife.

E.G. We, later on, moved on up to the Panhandle of Texas, Stratford, Texas, which is near Amarillo, and I entered my sophomore year in high school in Stratford, Texas. Prior to that, I think I'd attended 13 different schools from the first grade until I was a sophomore in high school. We really, I guess, took roots there and we stayed there for the remainder of our three years in high school, and then I, at the encouragement of one of my uncles that I lived with, I decided finally that I'd best go to college, so I enrolled at West Texas State, in Canyon, Texas in 1952. This was also just about the time the Korean War was winding down and is also at a time that I don't think they had grants and tuition waivers and things like that, at that time, but anyway, my uncle managed to get me a job, and I spent four years at West Texas State majoring in business and graduated in 1956. Also, at the time I graduated, I had to be in the ROTC program, because if you weren't in the Army back then, you had to serve two years. So I elected to take the ROTC program and graduated in '56 and received a commission in the United States Army, so I had two years that I had to serve Uncle Sam, and I did that very proudly. I always felt like that was a duty for us to do that. Also, when I was at the high school in Stratford, I met my, started going with my wife, Janette, and we dated for several years, and after I graduated from college, we married in 1956. After I returned from the service, I spent 16 months in Korea. I went to work for a major oil company down in Shamrock and Amarillo, Texas. In 1959 they transferred Janette and I to Pueblo, and that's what brought us to Colorado.

L.B. Um-hm. What made you decide to run for office?

E.G. Down in Shamrock, when they transferred me to Amarillo, and I was a field representative traveling all over Southeastern Colorado. I had to leave our family at home while I was gone during the week, and I really didn't like that. Also I'd always heard that the best thing in the world that you could do would be your own boss, and my dad had always talked about that because he always had to work for someone else.

E.G. My uncles were, a lot of my uncles were self-employed farmers, so I decided that I wanted to be in business for myself. So I guess I accepted that challenge. I was always motivated that in America you can be whatever you want to be, and I wanted to be a self-employed business person. So I had an opportunity to start my own business, and I did. It was good businesses, but like all other small business owners, it seemed to me like every day there were more and more government regulations, more rules, government telling us, interjecting more and more into our daily lives and also our businesses. I became very frustrated in 1973 and '74 with the free enterprise system and with government's intrusion into our businesses, especially after the interview crisis of '70, '71 and '72. I couldn't believe the regulations that were being imposed on us from Washington and also from the State Capitol. I think at one

time they were telling us how many gallons of gasoline we could buy, how many new customers we could add, what our gasoline margins should be, how many minorities we should hire, what the minimum wage should be, and I guess the straw that broke the camel's back, was what we should set our thermostats on in our businesses. So I made the comment to a friend one day, that I can't believe that this is America, that they would treat business owners like this. This person suggested to me that perhaps I should write my state representative, which I had done in the past, or write my congressman, which I had done in the past, and someone else suggested well, if you don't like the way they're doing it, why don't you run for office. So I did.

L.B. So you did. What were your feelings when you knew you had won? You were running against a long-time Democrat that had represented your district for maybe, what, 20 years?

E.G. Twenty-four years.

L.B. Twenty-four years.

E.G. I guess it's like anything else that I ever attempted to do, that I felt like that if you want to do something, and again I'd always been told that in America that if you want to do something and you believe in it, that you can be anything you want to be if you'll just go out and do it. So I really didn't stop and think too much about that, other than I wanted to have a stronger voice in some of the policies that were being made and in some of the decisions that were being made by elected officials. So I didn't even really stop and look at the fact that this gentleman had been in office and represented the area, I thought, real well for a number of years. But I did feel like, I was concerned, that he was going to be retiring one of these days, but each year he seemed to run one more term, one more term, and then I was convinced in my own mind that if he ever retired, and very seldom anyone wanted to take him on, or challenge him, that there would be all kinds of people from all over the district would step forward, so I thought, well, I'll get out on the point just a little before they do that, and I will challenge the gentleman, and I did. I had, like in my businesses, I had a plan of action, a strategic plan if you will, and I put that plan into action, and I won. I knew it would be an uphill battle. Some people said, well if you don't beat him this time, he'll probably quit after this term and then you'll be in a good position to beat him next time because of your name recognition and the fact that you have some experience. But that never entered my mind. I said that if I run, I'm going to run to win.

L.B. Um-hm.

E.G. So that was our attitude, and I felt gratified. I felt like it proved the theory that whatever you want to do you can do it if you'll get out and have a good plan and work hard, and that's what we did. I felt very honored that the people of Southeastern Colorado felt like I could represent their views and their attitudes in the statehouse.

L.B. What was your impression when you entered the Capitol after you won? Had you visited the Capitol many times before you came down as a member-elect of the House?

E.G. Well, the first time that I visited the Capitol was in 1956. My wife and I honeymooned in Colorado.

L.B. Oh, so you were here then.

E.G. We returned to the State Capitol. I told my wife years later when we were being sworn in on the first day, I said, do you remember when we were here on our honeymoon that I told you that someday I would come back here and serve in the Colorado House of Representatives? (Which I really didn't.) And she said, "No, I can't remember that Elwood."

L.B. (chuckle)

E.G. But it was, to come to the State Capitol in Denver, I think I visited one other time, and then also I visited the State Capitol when I announced that I was going to run, and had made up my mind, and the family, we had discussed it. It was a family decision to run, it was also a family decision when we decided that we would not run for reelection ten years later. But the first person that I visited in the State Capitol was Forest Burns on the House floor in 1980, and I told him that I was going to be announcing my candidacy in Lamar next week, and I wanted him to be the first person to hear.

L.B. To know

E.G. So I did tell Forest. That was my first time on the House floor.

L.B. What were your feelings when you were sworn in? Was the ceremony appropriate to the occasion or was it disappointing? And I ask this question of you, Elwood, because working with you, we changed a lot of, we have more pomp and circumstance now. How did you feel about your first swearing in ceremony?

E.G. Well, it wasn't really what I thought or expected. I thought there would be a little more, little more of a ceremony, but it really wasn't. I wasn't disappointed, I don't think, because I had never been there before, and I think I was just really honored and happy to be there. So I think that and the fact, the way you feel that what you accomplished, that very few people had done that, especially if you got to tag on a twenty-four year incumbent Democrat, the other party, who'd been very successful in getting re-elected, and also in a district where the Democrats outnumbered the Republicans. So I felt like that I'd really worked hard, and I felt very honored to be there. My family was there, and I know that they felt the same way. But as far as the swearing in, it was raise your right hand and repeat after me and that was it. Then, let's all go out to lunch and get down to business. So it has changed. I happened to be at the opening ceremonies yesterday, and I thought they were very elaborate. I watched the young Boy Scouts who were asked to participate, and they practiced and practiced. Lee, I'll bet they walked up and down that middle aisle 15 times. I was there a little early, practicing to make sure that they did everything properly. And I thought, oh, how great it is to involve those young people.

L.B. Aren't they just beautiful?

E.G. Then I looked up in the balcony area to see these young people up there in that choir to sing, and you and I both know that when that changed, I think it was in 1984 or thereabouts, when I was asked to serve on the House Services Committee with you,

L.B. 1986

E.G. and that's when we felt like that we needed to do some things differently. I know the ceremony that we did, and it was sort of a trial balloon on our part to do that.

L.B. And remember the woman that came from Lamar to sing?

E.G. Yes.

L.B. Beautiful voice

E.G. And she is still down there, still a good friend, and I still, I see her very often, we serve on a committee together, and she still talks about that. And her friends and relatives still talk about it.

L.B. And since you have left, Elwood, and perhaps I did it before you left, we now have a program for the first day, and we have the Chief Justice sign parchment oaths for everybody. I think it's very important to make that first day a memorable one, not only for the members but for their families.

E.G. I know after we sent the trial balloon up and we had the ceremonies and the reaction was overwhelming. I think that had we not done it the next year, there would have been some disappointed people. But I know that it's, I watched the ceremonies yesterday, I didn't go on the House floor because it was very crowded so I watched from outside, and I could really tell by the looks on people's faces, on their faces, the family people who were there and the new legislators being sworn in, you could see the pride and the sense of accomplishment that they had. So I think that having a ceremony like that just adds to that and it will make it an extremely memorable event for them.

L.B. I think it's important. Elwood, let's go to your bills. What was the first bill you introduced and do you remember what happened to it?

E.G. Well, you know Lee, when I went up there, I went up there because I felt like that we had too much government, too many bills, too much regulation, and I don't even know if I even introduced a bill the first year that I was up there. I was overwhelmed by the fact that after, when the session started, when I was up there we still had, there weren't any limits. I think there were 1500 bills that were introduced. There were some legislators that were bragging on the fact that they had introduced 25 or 26 or 27 bills, and I thought, oh, my goodness. We're going to pass all these bills and we're going to just heap more and more regulations and more government on the backs of the citizens of this state. So, I really didn't go up there with the intent of introducing any legislation. And also, I felt like that some of the problems that we had with our government then, and even now, is that we had too much pork. That

people would come to the statehouse, the State Capitol, and they would be measured by the number of dollars that they could bring back into their district. I certainly didn't want to be known by being a pork barreler or taking special interest type bills back to my district, and I felt like that you must represent all of the people of the state of Colorado, so I was very reluctant to carry any bills the first year. And I've got to say also, this was my first venture into any type of political process, and it can be a little bit overwhelming to come into a situation like this and then have all the special interest groups chasing you around the Capitol wanting you to sponsor bills that you know little about and you don't see how they could really actually help the business owners in Southeastern Colorado, or Denver or the taxpayers. So I didn't really go up there with any agenda other than to go up there and see if I couldn't slow down the growth of government. And you can't do that by introducing bills. I'm sort of amazed that this morning in one of the local newspapers they were talking about that the Colorado General Assembly's going to pursue the same agenda that they feel like the American people want, and that's less government. So that's encouraging, but the next story right down beneath that was talking about all the bills that are being introduced. It sounds to me like it's sort of business as usual,

L.B. (chuckle)

E.G. that special interests are still out there and there are legislators who are willing to carry these special interest bills and we're going to have, I think the limit's five now still,

L.B. Yes

E.G. so we're going to have 500 bills introduced

L.B. I like the idea of introducing five but if you get to introduce five, you get to take five off the books.

E.G. Well, they always talked about that, and that always sounded like it would be a good deal for me also. I think I tried to do that more than figure out some type of bill that we needed. But I had a lot of special interest groups that would come to me and want me to carry legislation, and I always attempted to stay away from doing that. If there were bills that were introduced by my colleagues that I felt like were good business bills, good for the taxpayers, well, I would usually be very receptive as a cosponsor, but as far as actually carrying bills, I didn't introduce too many bills in my first year in the legislature.

L.B. What major issues were you involved with? And what was the outcome of some of these issues? And we'll take highways, education, course JBC. Finances of state government was a major issue.

E.G. When I got up here and, of course, one of the first decisions you have to make, is who do you want to be the Speaker? When I got here I knew that I wanted Bev Bledsoe for the Speaker because I felt like he was from a rural area and he understood the issues that they would face out in the rural area, the same issues they face in the city, but maybe a little more conservative. There are many, many issues, and when I get up here and I look at the system

and the way it works, and I think we have an excellent system in Colorado and I think it serves the people of this state very well, and I'd hate to see it change. But it would look to me like that all these people introducing 1500 bills, that's right to the contrary of what I felt like we should be doing. That's less government, and you can't have less government if you're going to be introducing 1500 new bills and half of those are going to pass. So, I decided real quick like that the only way you can control government and to do it in a reasonably short a period of time would be through the budget process. So I immediately became interested in the budget process as a freshman legislator. There were some changes on that budget the first year. I think Senator, well he was Representative Durham and Representative Tancredo were the first two members on the budget committee from the House that were appointed by Speaker Bledsoe. Those two gentlemen are fairly conservative. They are very conservative. So I watched those two young men on the budget process and what they were able to do is force controlling government to really have an impact on government. So it was at that time that I decided that that's what I would like to try to do, and that was sort of my goal was to become a member of the Joint Budget Committee. I let the Speaker know that, that I wanted to be on the Budget Committee, and would hope that one day I would earn his confidence to the point that he would put me on, as the member of the Joint Budget Committee. Much to my delight and surprise, the next year as a returning sophomore, he put me on the Budget Committee. So I felt like that by being on that committee that I would be in a position to learn more about state government quickly, and I did. I would be in a position to bring about some of the impacts that I felt like I wanted to bring about, and that's.....

L.B. And you served on that committee eight years.

E.G. I served eight years. The first four years when I was on the committee with Bob Kirscht. Well, he was the Chairman and I was the Vice Chairman on the Appropriations Committee. Then when Bob stepped down and actually ran for Governor, I stayed on the committee and became the Chairman of the committee and Vice Chairman for the next four years, and also the Chairman of the Appropriations Committee. So at the end of the six years in the House, I was in the position, I felt like, to really impact or cause some things to happen in government that it would take maybe a lifetime to get done through the introducing bills or trying to eliminate programs through legislation or whatever. So I really felt like that I had positioned myself to cause some of these things to take place.

L.B. Now to some people it seems strange that, I think, you wanted to serve on the House Services Committee and serve on JBC.. Usually JBC takes so much time. But I remember when you first served on the House Services Committee, and the House, to say it graciously, I think you would call it shabby. Then I remember all of the different things that you did to clean up the House, and I want to tell you right now I really appreciated it because I think the House is beautiful right now and many of the changes made in the House were due to your chairmanship of that House Services Committee. Elwood, what changes do you see in state government since you've served? Do you think these changes are good or bad?

E.G. I think they're good, Lee. I want to go back to your comment about my serving on the House Services Committee and tell you how that happened. I'd just finished my first two

years as a member of the Budget Committee and I was anxiously awaiting telephone call from the Speaker after the election in November to be re-appointed to the Budget Committee. And the rumors were that I would be re-appointed and that Bob Kirscht would be re-appointed, but the Speaker kept that very close and you never knew for sure until he made it public.

L.B. That's right. No one knew.

E.G. No one knew. I like that. It was a good strategy, good negotiating, and a good tactic. But I was out at the KOA Campground in Lamar which the family, We owned, and we operated during the summer months, and this was I think in late November we were out there. And I'd gotten a telephone call from the Speaker, and I knew that he wanted me to, he was going to tell me that he was putting me back on the Budget Committee. So I hustled into the telephone and, "Yes sir, Mr. Speaker, how are you today," And you know how Bill operates. He said, "Elwood, I want you to serve on the House Services Committee this year."

L.B. That was a surprise. (chuckle) And what was your answer?

E.G. That was a surprise. I said "Well, Mr. Speaker, sir, I'll serve anywhere at your pleasure, but I was really hoping I'd get back on the Budget Committee." And the Speaker said, "You're going to be on the Budget Committee, but keep it under your hat." And I said, "Thank you, sir. I'll serve on the House Services Committee." He said, "I want you to be the Chairman." And he said, "That committee has always been one that - it's an extra committee and it seems like they, not to say anything bad about the previous House Services Committee, but" he said, "we need a business person," and he said "we need to upgrade the image of the committee." And I said "You think I can do that?" And he said, "I think you being a member of the Budget Committee will lend more prestige to the committee" and, he said, "that's what we need to do. We need to make some changes." And I said, "OK. I will do it, sir. And I'm going to be on the Budget Committee?" And he said, "Yes, you are." And I said, "OK." And that wasn't a trade-off, because he's the guy that makes the decisions.

L.B. Um-hm.

E.G. And then, by the same breath, he said "OK, the first thing we're going to do is change the Chief Clerk." And again there's silence on my end, and I said, "Mr. Speaker, you want me to change the Chief Clerk and I have been in the House four years and she's been there over thirty years and my first assignment is to change the Chief Clerk." And he said, "Yes." And I said, "OK." And he said, "I've already talked to our next Chief Clerk and that's Lee Bahrych, and she's agreed." So that's how it all started, Lee, and you and the members of the House Services Committee. Every time I see you, and it's not often enough any more, you heap praises upon Elwood Gillis for what he did, and I did nothing. I think, and that's very gracious of you and all the fine people on the House Services staff, but you deserve the credit. You did it, and all I did was I supported what you wanted to do and loaned you my credit card every now and then so you could go out to the...

L.B. And that was important (chuckle)

- E.G. ..Service Merchandise and buy things cheaper. But you and all the people that worked for you, Lee Bahrych, get credit for the House and the beauty in that House, and I just marveled at it yesterday when I walked in the Chambers and how beautiful it is. And I know, and I think everyone that's associated with the House of Representatives since you became Chief Clerk, know that that is the results of your leadership and your dedication to that State Capitol and your love for the Capitol. And to give me credit, I take just a tiny, tiny bit of credit in the honor that I had of serving in the legislature when you were there, Lee Bahrych.
- L.B. Well, you're very nice, Elwood, but without a strong House Services Chairman and a strong Speaker, things do not get done.
- E.G. Well,
- L.B. But I'm with you. I'm very proud of the House, and I always felt it was a privilege to serve there, to be on the staff.
- E.G. Well, and I think you demonstrated that. I think if you look at the House Chambers today, that everyone that enjoys today, I hope they'll remember that Lee Bahrych did that.
- E.G. Now, you forgot what you asked, you forgot what you asked me, didn't you, Lee?
- L.B. Thank you Elwood. If you could change one thing back to the way it used to be, repeal a law, relocate an office, or bring back a particular elected official, what would you change?
- E.G. Well, let's see. I would bring, the elected official that I would bring back would be Bev Bledsoe. The guy, I think, is a brilliant person and I think he was a terrific negotiator and a leader and he was a coalition builder. I think the state will miss his leadership. I think they already have. I think that when he quit that was the end of an era. That was the end of the, probably the rule of dominance of the Colorado General Assembly. And the changes that are going to be forthcoming in the future generations will certainly be reflective of the way the people live, so that's the way it's supposed to work. I still think that Bev Bledsoe and his leadership and his understanding of the political process and the fact that he was so fair, I've always thought he was a very fair person. It is probably one of the things that I'd like to see change. And if he had stayed, I don't know, maybe I wouldn't have quit.
- L.B. (chuckle)
- E.G. Or chose not to run for reelection. I didn't quit.
- L.B. I remember the day you made that announcement. There were tears behind the front desk, I'll tell you. (chuckle) Elwood, let's talk about your memories of the Capitol. What is your favorite place in the Capitol and what memories do you associate with that.....the House floor, your office, your JBC office?
- E.G. Well, that being one of the questions that you listed on this survey or this interview guide, I thought about that quite a bit. I always enjoyed being on the House floor. That was sort

of a favorite place. Then, yesterday I found myself in an area that I quite frequently found myself when I was in the legislature, and that's out on the second floor right off of the House Chamber, sort of down towards the Senate Chamber, at the brass rail. It was out there that you could talk with other legislators, you could talk with friends, you could talk with the lobbyists, and you could talk with reporters, or you could talk with reporters, or you could watch people coming and going from the State Capitol. So I'm going to have to say that my most favorite spot was right outside the Chamber at the brass rail.

L.B. Oh, along the brass rail. I think many people would agree with you. Elwood, probably some of this happened before your time of service, but legend has it that there used to be a lot more wine, women, and song in the halls of government. Do you think that was true? Do you have any stories about that?

E.G. I don't have any particular stories. I've heard a lot of stories, and I'm assuming that that used to be right. Also heard that there were a lot of decisions made in the back room with a lot of cigar smoke and maybe some whiskey being drank, and when I was there I didn't, I didn't see that happening. To me it was, and I think it was a lot to do with the leadership, Bev Bledsoe in the House. But I never did see that happening when I was a member of the House. I'm glad that it didn't, because I think it's a, I don't think that's the place for things like that to take place, and I don't think the decisions need to be made today in smoke-filled rooms and in the backrooms and by maybe just a few people. No, I didn't see that when I was in the House, Lee. In fact, I always took offense to colleagues and friends or citizens that I represented when they gave any type of an indication that politicians were crooked or that there were deals being cut. And I always took offense to that because I'm not that type of person, and I didn't like to be referred to as a typical politician, whatever that meant. I think the credibility of the politicians are very low in our country today, but I think if you had an opportunity to serve in the House under Bev Bledsoe and the people that I served with and the staff, the Lee Bahrychs of the House, that it was just an honor and that the people were very dignified and honorable people to work with, and I certainly didn't see that. I guess it could happen you know. I'm sure that some of those things did happen, but I guess it's up to the individual, you know.

L.B. I agree with you, Elwood. I think Colorado has one of the cleanest, fairest, best legislatures that's anywhere. And when I go to my Chief Clerk conventions and hear the stories from the other states, I think that Colorado is very fortunate.

E.G. I used to hear that quite a bit from lobbyists that had several states that they represented, and they couldn't believe how clean Colorado's state government was.

L.B. That's right

E.G. And then again, I'd heard a lot of stories, but I know Bev Bledsoe didn't put up with a lot of those things, and he didn't allow profanity, and I thought that was excellent. He didn't allow alcohol or booze on the House floor or in your offices or even in the State Capitol, I guess, as far as that goes. I guess there's some around if you wanted to partake or I guess you could find it, but of all the years that I served, I only had one lobbying group that I felt like, that

might have felt like that they could influence the way I might vote on an issue by maybe sending me a contribution. I challenged them on that later, and I said I don't feel like the fact that you're making a \$200 contribution to my campaign, do you feel like that that's going to, that I'm going to have to vote for your bill. And they said, "Oh no, you just vote however you want to." But, after I hung up the phone and got their money, I really felt uneasy about it because of the way the gentleman had talked to me because he said after I told him how I would vote on that particular issue, he said, "Well, we're going to send you \$200." Anyway, I sent it back to him, and then he sent it back to me. And it's in one of those 15 plus scrapbooks that I told you earlier that my wife had kept for me over the ten years that I served in the legislature. Well, that \$200 check is in that scrapbook. So that was the only time that I felt like a lobbyist might think that my vote was worth some bucks.

L.B. Turned it down.

E.G. And I've, never, ever was I approached by any one, any lobbying groups, special interest groups, that would indicate to me that they were going to give me money based on how I voted.

E.G. And I think it was like that throughout the legislature. No vote trading, that's in our constitution, and I think that's great

L.B. I've never know, in my years as Chief Clerk, I never knew or never suspected any vote trading.

E.G. And I think that's something a lot of people don't realize. They think that you go up here and you say, ok if you'll vote for this, I'll vote for that, but that isn't the way it works up here. Fortunately we haven't told our constituents, I always tried to do that in town meetings, but we need to tell our constituents that this is a good legislature and we don't do things like that up here.

L.B. And it's true, you don't.

E.G. It is true. It is true.

L.B. Elwood, people seem to be more pessimistic, skeptical, and even cynical about government, politics, and politicians than they used to be. Is that a true perception or is it just that we're looking back at the past with rose-colored glasses?

E.G. Well, I think the way that people look at politicians today is we probably deserve some of the criticism that we get. I know when I served in the legislature and I was up here with the intent of trying to hold back the growth of government, and I still look at how government grew during my eight-year tenure on the Budget Committee. I'm thinking, my goodness, I'm supposed to be a conservative, fiscal conservative person, and government still grew. And I think that some of the things that we're seeing now and the way people feel about our government, in fact, Lee, my wife was telling me this morning she'd read in one of the local newspapers, maybe in *USA Today*, about some surveys they'd made of freshman entering

college, the very small percentage of those people paid any attention to politics and our state and local governments and federal governments, and that's very discouraging. It could be that we've turned them off. That they don't feel like we serve their needs. So I think the image that a lot of, that we have at the present time or the elected officials have, is probably brought on ourselves. I think the fact that we have some of these news media now that are bringing the, CNN and C-Span and some of those, that we can actually observe some of these things that are taking place, television, etc., that people just feel like that it's out of control and that they aren't listening and my vote doesn't count. That's so unfortunate that that exists, because, I think it's our fault, that we haven't, we being elected officials or people that know about these issues, haven't communicated that to the general public. So they have that image of legislators or elected officials. I think that's unfortunate that that exists, and I think we need to do something, we as the people that are elected or that used to serve, we need to maybe tell the people out there that it isn't that bad. That this is one of the finest systems in the world. One of the finest the world has ever known, and the reason it is is because it belongs to the people. That's why it's so discouraging to me to hear about these high school or entering freshmen, college freshmen, that they could care less about their government. So that's very discouraging. So we have a tremendous message that we need to be telling the young people to try and change that image.

L.B. Elwood, do you have any stories about members or staff which would be interesting and amusing to future historians, or which would illustrate things of the past? You might want to tell us about the sale of the chairs.

E.G: Well, that was interesting, amazing, and all of the above. The chairs in the House of Representatives, when you had gone, I guess, gone out and gotten, some bids on new chairs and felt like that those that had been there had served us very well, they'd been there 25 years plus.

L.B. I think 38 years.

E.G. Thirty-eight years. And they were getting a little bit tattered. When we were going to sell those, I know how Lee Bahrych operates that she wants to gets the best for the less, and that's good, very conservative, we were getting ready to send the chairs off to the state surplus property. I did introduce one bill several years ago, to change the way we dispose of surplus property. I didn't feel like it was being disposed of properly. So we went and took a look at that legislation and changed it rather dramatically and also had prison inmates brought into the system so that they could refurbish some of the surplus property that we had or the excess property and put it back into use without having to buy new property. But I knew that when surplus property got these chairs that they would probably sell them for five or ten bucks a piece and they would end up scattered all over the state of Colorado in some warehouse or some office somewhere. And I thought man, there's a lot of history in those pieces of furniture and I, for one, would like to take that little piece of history from the State Capitol maybe back home with me. So I suggested that we sell the chairs, and it was sort of a lukewarm idea. So we introduced a little bill, and I think you're the one that drafted it, or had the bill drafted, a resolution that we'd sell the chairs for \$100 bucks a piece. I guess the reason that we decided on that is that I felt like, well heck, I'd pay \$100 bucks to get one

of those chairs, the history that goes along with it. The resolution passed and we were laughed at and people chuckled, and the press had a little bit of fun with it, and the Democrats had a lot of fun with it. They didn't think that we should do that, that we should send them to surplus property and no one would want to buy them, and as it turned out they all sold, I think for \$100.

L.B. They all sold. And I could have sold 50 more. (chuckle)

E.G. So, I think, and I still have my chair, and we were talking earlier, I plan on putting it in the Prowers County Historical Museum in Lamar, Colorado, sort of as a memory or honor maybe past legislators who had served in the State Capitol from that area.

L.B. I think that's a beautiful idea, Elwood. Everybody in your district is going to have a share of your chair.

E.G. Well, it belongs to the people in Southeastern Colorado, not necessarily to me. You know, it is a part of history and part of the State Capitol. Way out in Southeastern Colorado we're 204 miles from the State Capitol, so we, I guess if you live up here it sort of becomes second nature, but out there it's still sort of a

L.B. But I've always felt that that chair and that desk on the House floor belong to the district, not to the Representative. He's just using it. But it belongs to the district.

E.G. It does. It does. That's an excellent point. An excellent point. And that's what I intend to do with mine. It would be interesting to know, and maybe you can do this through your interviews, where those chairs are and who has them and what they're going to do with them.

L.B. That would be interesting.

E.G. I think also that you always were able to take it a little further, Lee, and so you gave some history with the chairs and also the name plate and a little memorandum that we got also, so that was a little bonus for buying the chair.

L.B. (chuckle) Elwood, is there anything else you'd like to cover during this interview?

E.G. Well, I guess one thing that I might want to cover, one of the things that I've always appreciated about the Colorado Legislature is that fact that we are a citizens' legislature, and I hope it always stays a citizens' legislature,

L.B. I agree

E.G. and doesn't become a full-time venture, even though I think some people up here have made it into a full-time job. But I was looking into the Chambers windows yesterday, and there aren't very many people on the House floor that I served with, about 16 of them, and I've only been gone four years. So we have term limitation up here,

E.G. and the changeover has always been like that, the turnover. But I think some of the constraints that we as former legislatures have placed upon ourselves to keep government small are good, and I think that a lot of people aren't aware of it. But if you stop and look at the constraints that we have in Colorado, and then people wonder sometimes why we're still one of the finest states in the nation to live in and also to own a business in, and we are, I think it's because of our tax policies that we have here in this state. I think it's because of the constraints that we've placed upon ourselves, the 120-day limit, we have a 5-bill restriction now. You only introduce 5 bills. We have the limited titles on bills, that you can only introduce, or you can't change the, or add a lot of Christmas-tree items onto a bill. We have the Joint Budget Committee, which I think is an excellent constraint, and we have the Appropriations Committee and the Finance Committees which are excellent constraints on spending and also on taxes, and we have the appropriations process and the supplemental process which, I think is a good constraint, that we go back into that budget and if the people aren't spending their money or didn't need all the money that they thought they were going to need, it isn't the old use it or lose it concept. We take the money back.

L.B. Um-hm.

E.G. So I think there are a lot of constraints that former legislators, and even that I was able to be involved in, that we have placed upon ourselves that would insure us to continue to be a citizens' legislature and with a lot of constraints built in to keep us from growing too much.

L.B. And having to have a balanced budget has been the saving grace of this state, I think, too.

E.G. I think the state of Colorado could be an example to the national government to operate. With our new majority being Republican in the legislature and to know that four of our six Representatives, or actually all six of them, or at least five of them, I don't think Pat...

(tape change to second side)

E.G. Scotty McGinnis, Joel Hefley, Dan Shaffer, and Wayne Allard. I had the honor of serving with all of those in the House of Representatives. So they can take back a lot of good examples to the new majority in Washington and say here's how we do it in Colorado. If they'll just accept some of the constraints that we have in place here at the Federal level, maybe we can get a handle on, on that form of government.

L.B. And with Scott McGinnis serving on the Rules Committee of the House in Washington...

E.G. I think that's just absolutely mind boggling to think that Scotty would get that job. And I've written to all of the delegation, at least the Republicans, three letters already. I have another letter in the computer to write to them to let them know that I think the majority of the people that sent them back up there with such overwhelming majority, 70% of the vote, are going to be behind them when they make the tough decisions in Washington that they had to make in Colorado. They need to do that and not just go through the motions and say they're going to do it and then maybe not do it. I really have a lot of faith restored just recently in the last election in our government in Washington and I'm hoping that some of

these changes that got them elected and got them the large majorities of vote, will actually take place.

L.B. Well, Elwood, if there's nothing else, I want to thank you for coming today. It's been really a pleasure being with you and talking with you.

E.G. Well, I want to thank you and the members of the General Assembly for doing this. I think it's an excellent idea and hopefully 100 years from now that people will have enough interest in it that they'll sit down and listen to some of these tapes. Maybe our ancestors, or not our ancestors, but our future generations will sit down and pay some attention to this, and maybe this incoming class of freshman entering college in 1994-95 will have a change of heart and take a little more interest in government and recognize that it's here to serve them and it belongs to them and that they need to be a little more involved in it.

L.B. I think they will.

E.G. I hope they do.

L.B. Well, thank you again, Elwood.

E.G. Thank you.