



The Economic Impact of Henderson Industrial Plants on Southern Nevada

and

Race Relations at the World War II-era BMI Plants

a panel discussion with

Former Governor and U. S. Senator Richard Bryan

Former Nevada State Archivist Guy Rocha

and

Former Nevada State Senator Joe Neal

moderated by

Dr. Peter La Chapelle, Associate Professor of History, Nevada State College

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MODERATOR: I'm the moderator for tonight. My name is Pete La Chappelle. I'm the Associate Professor of History at Nevada State College just down the road, and I want to thank all of you for being here tonight. Before we get started, our mayor is here to say a few words. So without further ado let me introduce Honorable Mayor Andy Hafen.

AUDIENCE: [applause]

MAYOR HAFEN: Well first I'll tell you what an honor it really is to be here and to be the mayor of this great town. I welcome you here. I'm grateful for what Lou [LaPorta] and all have done for this historical society. You know, I'm preaching to the choir here I'm sure, but this is our 60th anniversary as a city this year and it's such an honor to be the mayor of this great city, a place where people can live, work, play, retire; we have it all here. And I probably should just stop you with one story because I could go on for a long time; I don't want to take you away from this distinguished panel. But you know, what I'm about and the thing that really makes me feel good is when—I don't know them, but they'll come up to me and just complement our city, what a great city we have, Parks and Recreation, what a great town that we have. It's a big town, but still a small town. And as you know now, we have actually grown to the second largest city in the state of Nevada. But, yeah, I still feel like we're still that town going back to the 1950s. So welcome and I look forward to listening to these 'young' men tonight.

[laughter]

MODERATOR: Thank you, Mayor Hafen. Okay, so I'm pleased to have with us here tonight the State Archivist—and I'm actually starting on the left—State Archivist Guy Rocha, Senator Joe Neal, and Senator Richard Bryan. Our topic tonight is the industrial labor and racial history of Henderson. We're focusing specifically on the World War II era, but I hope that we can kind of

get into the 1950s and 1960s as well. The format I have planned is a simple one. I'm going to turn the floor over to each of our guests here for a short period of time. After that, I'm planning on asking a few questions myself and then what I'll do is I'll turn the mike over to the audience and I would hope you all have questions or maybe you'll develop questions as we're talking, and I would love to have a lively discussion.

I know you all want to hear from the panelists and you don't necessarily hear from your moderator, but I was asked to kind of present a brief sketch of Henderson history to kind of get us started. So I'm going to start with that. In the 1930s, what we call Henderson today wasn't really on the map culturally or geographically; I mean you couldn't find it. And I actually consulted a source, the 1940 WPA Guide to Nevada. I don't know if you are familiar with the WPA Guides, but they are just amazing sources. A lot of these were written during obviously the Great Depression, part of the—one of the New Deal agencies, the Works Progress Administration under President Franklin Roosevelt. And what they did was they hired young writers, young unemployed writers to write for this agency and they put together guides to every single state, and they are really a truly amazing resource. And what I think is kind of interesting, though, is that despite the fact that they are this amazing resource, they aren't without flaws.

When we look at—actually I tried to; I looked up all kinds of sources and all kinds of subjects in here related to what might be Henderson around this period, in that late 1930s. I looked up Jericho Heights, which is one name that we might use to refer to the general area. I looked up Midway. I could not find—maybe Guy Rocha could correct me here—but I could not find one reference to anything related to Henderson in this book.

GUY ROCHA: That book has its shortcomings.

MODERATOR: It does. It certainly does, okay. And I think that's interesting and maybe it's not to be completely unexpected in some ways. One thing you have to do, keep in mind when you talk about this book, is it's the same book that when it described Las Vegas on page 183—I'll pull it out—I won't pull it out, I'll use my notes here instead—it actually praises the city of Las Vegas for placing—and I quote here—“relatively little emphasis on gambling clubs.” And it also praises it for its tendency to avoid, quote, “cheap and easily parodied slogans to publicize the city.” What happens in Vegas...well, we know. Also it avoids, according to this, “pseudo-romantic architectural themes”—think about what the Strip looks like today—and “artificial glamour and gaiety.” Wow. So as we can see, the WPA Guide wasn't exactly a harbinger of what things were going to come, as you might imagine.

We do know that by the early thirties, a plot of land called Jericho Heights—today we kind of know this general area as Pittman—was mapped out and designated for homes as kind of a midway point between Las Vegas and the construction going on out at Boulder Dam. And then the whole area here was popular among the workers of the dam in the early days before the homes in Boulder City were built as a place to camp out while they were working. So it had that sort of. And interestingly, you know—I teach at Nevada State College up the road—we actually had a camp there. There's some archeological evidence that people were camped out there in the thirties, probably workers on the dam.

The start of World War II brought demand for war materials. And obviously here in this area, a big important metal was magnesium, a light, incredibly strong metal. You could use it for aviation parts. You could use it for bomb casings. I spent a little time researching this. It's

interesting. Without magnesium, the bombs likely wouldn't have been able to fall as far down and hold themselves together to actually implode on German targets or whatever. So there's an interesting component here. Two ores were being mined about three hundred miles north of here in Gabbs, Nevada, and they were called brucite and magnesite; both of these ores could be used to make magnesium.

And so in 1940 we have a British magnesium producer and an American furnace maker join forces; realize that in this area we had plentiful water, we had plentiful electricity because of the dam, obviously hydroelectric power, and that it would be in their best interest to build a plant here to produce the magnesium. The plant was called Basic Magnesium, Incorporated, or BMI, as probably a lot of us have heard the phrase going around. And it's interesting: plant workers lived in camps, in tent cities in the early days just like the dam workers did, but by 1943 construction was complete on homes in the original Basic Townsite.

And they use the word Basic at that point, yet another name that Henderson has got; let's see, Jericho Heights, Basic, Midway, eventually we'll get to Henderson. It takes a while here. What was also built eventually were two segregated housing developments: one, Victory Village; and, the other, Carver Park. And our speakers tonight will be dealing with these, their history in some degree.

When I found out I was going to be moderator—so then I went immediately to the Henderson Public Library, the amazing Henderson Memories website and started doing some research, and I found—because I'm very into Halloween. I don't know about you all. Halloween is coming up. There was a Halloween story printed almost to this day seventy years ago in a newspaper called the Las Vegas Tribune. It talked about a Halloween parade where

young school children were getting together and getting their costumes and parading around town. It talked about the fact that all of Henderson was involved. And so this is the way they put it. Quote, all Henderson children whether from the Townsite, Victory Village, the trailer park or Carver Park will be participants. So I think it's interesting: they were getting at some of this geography of what the city was like at that time.

By 1944 obviously this Townsite had come to be called Henderson after U.S. Senator Charles B. Henderson; it's named after him. By 1950, the once uninhabited burg now contained about six thousand residents. So this brings us to our first speaker of the evening, Guy Rocha, who will speak about the life, labor, and political conflicts in this Southern Nevada burg. And let me introduce him first, because he definitely deserves an introduction.

Guy was raised in Las Vegas and graduated from Clark High School. He got his bachelor's degree from Syracuse and a master's degree from San Diego State before moving on to do graduate study at the University of Nevada, Reno. Guy is probably best known for his twenty-eight years of service as the Nevada State Archivist. As State Archivist, he not only managed records, images, and micrographics for the State Library & Archive, but he also worked passionately to infect the Nevada public with a love of history. And one of the ways he did this was by writing a monthly column about state historical myths. It eventually also appeared continuously it almost seems on television and radio to promote the state's history as well. His "Historical Myth a Month" columns first appeared in a Carson City newspaper—or actually now you can find them actually on the State Archive's Web site. And what they did was they corrected and clarified different aspects of Henderson history, but they also brought the history to life.

And as a history professor, I should really know about Guy Rocha, because I regularly receive e-mails or comments from students about, quote-unquote, this cool thing I found on the Web about Henderson history. And almost always I go and look it up and guess who authored it? Guy Rocha. Not only is Guy important in documenting the state's history, but he received the Ethics in Government Award from Common Cause of Nevada in 1997, and in 2007 the American Association of State and Local History awarded him its prestigious Award of Merit for Leadership and History. Please join me in welcoming Guy Rocha.

GUY ROCHA: This old man has to stand up. I'm the youngest old man up here and I'm the only one that doesn't have a school named for me in the Clark County School District. So I will be talking about Lieutenant Governor Vail Pittman. He got one, too. So maybe they could talk this over with the superintendent. I need a school, okay? One reason I actually need to stand and take off my glasses, I have some glaucoma issues but I can read this. I've got some big print here.

You know, I'm coming home in a way. I worked here in the city of Henderson in 1974. I worked for Henderson Parks and Recreation. I worked for a man by the name of Dundee Jones and the late Willie Davidson, who just died. And I just got to see Dundee up in Sparks at the celebration of life of Willie Davidson. It's been some forty years. But I ran an elementary school in the Basic High School gym in the summer of 1974. So I have Henderson roots.

Now, my love of history dates back to my elementary school days. Dick and I have John S. Park Elementary School in common and a number of teachers and principals: Ruby Thomas, Sam Cock, et cetera. But he was there when it opened; I came later. I didn't go until about 1945. So I guess I couldn't foresee at that time with my interest in Southern Nevada that one

day I would go on to get multiple degrees and become director of the Nevada Historical Society before I was appointed State Archivist. But it's been a wonderful ride. I've tried to really understand Nevada history not in a surficial way but in a complex way and set the record straight. There's a lot of BS that passes for history and sometimes people believe what they want to. Many times people choose to believe whatever that might be. But I try to set the record straight and get the facts right.

Now, tonight I'm going to share with you something I think—and I'm going to ask—very few of you may be aware of. But I want to talk about complex labor and race relations here at BMI, Henderson, Las Vegas, that surrounded the 1944 Democratic Primary election for United States Senator of Nevada, incumbent Patrick McCarran. Every time you go to pass through that airport, whether where it is now or where it used to be on the Strip in the early days, that's who we're talking about. Let's talk about Patrick McCarran.

He experienced his toughest political race since his initial election in 1932 in that year. Now, the battle was with Lieutenant Governor Vail Pittman. It badly split the already divided Democratic Party. But more importantly, in the annals of Nevada history, the large BMI workforce numbering in the thousands, especially African-American employees living in Henderson and Las Vegas' Westside essentially dictated the outcome of the U.S. Senate election on September 5th. And I'm saying this is when Henderson makes its mark in Nevada history, its first mark.

Now, at the time of that 1944 senate contest, Joe was nine years old and living in Mounds, Louisiana, and Dick was seven and living in Las Vegas. Now, Lou LaPorta had moved to Henderson in 1945 and I suspect he probably heard about this contentious political battle.

But I want to ask the crowd today, is there anybody here that remembers this divisive race that pitted the American Federation of Labor against the Congress of Industrial Organizations in Henderson? Any long-time union people here? Jack, how far back do you go? I know you represent us in the legislature.

JACK JEFFREY: Well, actually when we came here I was four years old. I didn't choose Henderson; my parents did.

AUDIENCE: [laughter]

GUY ROCHA: That's usually what happens at four.

JACK JEFFREY: And I'm not familiar with that primary. But I am familiar with the problems between the AFL and the CIO.

GUY ROCHA: Right. They merged in 1955. But before that there were tremendous labor wars throughout the United States and one of the great labor wars was in Henderson.

JACK JEFFREY: I can remember, I was yelling favorites and they hated it. I think I was five or six years old and there was a riot down there between those two unions.

GUY ROCHA: There were riots. There were beatings. There were police.

JACK JEFFREY: In fact, in one case, one guy got the hell beat out of him and [unclear], somebody asked him [unclear] beat up. And he was asked why he didn't intervene and he said because he was a CIO guy.

AUDIENCE: [laughter]

GUY ROCHA: Absolutely. You know, [unclear], you're the one person in this room that has some taste of the dynamics and the violence associated with organizing the workforce at BMI. Now, let me pick it up here, because in order to understand—the first great what I call major

event in Henderson's history as it relates to Nevada history and I argue its impact on American history—because re-electing Patrick McCarran would mean a lot of different things during the time that he served for the next ten years—Patrick McCarran, I argue, was the most powerful United States Senator in Nevada history until our current senate majority leader.

Pat McCarran. Pat McCarran was born in Reno in 1876. He was elected to the state assembly in 1902, representing Washoe County in 1903. McCarran voted for laws establishing an official Nevada Labor Day holiday and an eight-hour day at mines, mills and smelters. From that session forward in his political career, he aligned himself with the American Federation of Labor and supported the Western Federation of Miners. It's important to keep the score card straight here as you get it into labor relations and who the players are.

When McCarran was admitted to the Nevada Bar in 1905, he moved to Tonopah and was elected Nye County District Attorney in 1906. During the labor troubles in Goldfield and Tonopah in 1907, 1908, which included Governor John Sparks' call for federal troops, he supported the AFL and the WFM and was adamantly opposed to the radical Industrial Workers of the World, commonly known as the "Wobblies." McCarran's exposure to the IWW would later color his view of the CIO after its creation in 1935, specifically its communist faction.

McCarran returned to Reno to practice law and was elected a Nevada Supreme Court Justice in 1912, but was not re-elected in 1918. McCarran was unsuccessful in the U.S. Senate bid in 1916 and again in 1926. He was considered a maverick politician and an outsider in the Democratic Party. He was among the best defense attorneys in Nevada and received national notoriety as the divorce attorney for silent-screen actress Mary Pickford in her controversial Minden divorce in 1920. And that divorce went all the way to the Nevada Supreme Court.

McCarran found a loophole and he made it stick. She was very grateful. She spent fifteen days instead of six months and then went on to marry Douglas Fairbanks, Sr.

In 1932, McCarran upset incumbent Tasker Oddie in the U.S. Senate race. The workers at Hoover Dam overwhelmingly supported Franklin Roosevelt's presidential candidacy and swing in the U.S. Senate election for McCarran. McCarran, a Catholic and ultra conservative was Nevada's version of a Dixiecrat; he rarely supported FDR and his New Deal. He was also at odds with FDR supporter senior U.S. Senator Key Pittman from Tonopah. He had run against incumbent Pittman in 1916 for the U.S. Senate seat. The Pittman faction of the Democratic Party did not support McCarran's political ambition, but mounted no challenge to McCarran in 1932, believing he couldn't beat Tasker Oddie. McCarran was openly an isolationist before the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor and the United States entrance into World War II. His political rivals questioned his enthusiasm supporting the war effort. However, McCarran was also a shrewd pragmatist and opportunistic with the onset of the war in 1941.

Arguably, Senator McCarran could be considered the father of Henderson for his efforts that resulted in Basic Magnesium, Inc., BMI. According to McCarran's biographer, the late Michael J. Ybarra, in *Washington Gone Crazy: Senator Pat McCarran and the Great [American] Communist Hunt*, "Two summers before the town site was nothing but a two-lane road cutting through the sagebrush... Pat McCarran wrote a letter to Franklin Roosevelt. The Office of Production Management, McCarran pointed out, has recommended increasing magnesium production, and Nevada just happened," to be—bear with me—[turns page] "to have one of the largest deposits of ore in the country," as mentioned before in the Gabbs area up in Nye County. The president replied Nevada would get a plant. In July of 1942, the

government's Defense Plant Corporation signed a contract with a new company called Basic Magnesium. The government would fund construction of the plant and own the operation while BMI would manage the \$150 million project. Quote, "The biggest thing given to any state," Edwin Watson, Roosevelt's secretary, assured McCarran. This is called patronage. Even though McCarran hadn't been supportive of Roosevelt, he's still trying to win him over.

McCarran wanted to transform Nevada. The state's economy was nothing but extractive; it took things—rocks from the earth, money from the pockets of gamblers, lawyers' fees from divorcees—but never made anything. McCarran wanted to change all that. He wanted to dream of new Nevada, a place that made things besides fortunes for absentee mine owners and sold things besides sin and attracted residents for longer than six weeks. Yes, that's the way we did business for a long time.

AUDIENCE: [laughter]

GUY ROCHA: Vail Pittman was born in Vicksburg, Mississippi, in 1883. Managing the family's plantation in Louisiana in 1903, he first visited Tonopah where brothers William and Key were practicing law and promoting mining stock through Nevada's second great mining boom. In 1904, he relocated to the silver mining town, established the Pittman Coal Company in 1905, and was joined by his brother Frank who would also practice law in Tonopah. Through his connections, Vail was appointed Nye County undersheriff in 1907 and served in that capacity for four years, the first two years while Pat McCarran was district attorney. If you're picking up a pattern here, our political elite came through Tonopah, Goldfield and Ely for many years in the turn of the century, both Republican and Democrat.

Vail campaigned for brother Key when he made his first unsuccessful try for the U.S.

Senate in 1910 and again in 1912 when Key was elected to the senate. In the meantime, Vail became the business manager of a mining journal called the *Tonopah Miner* in 1912 and began his long career as a newspaperman. Vail used the *Miner* to promote Democratic politicians and particularly his brother Key. In 1914 Vail supported the women's suffrage resolution on the ballot, which Nevada's male voters supported by a substantial margin, giving women twenty-one and over the right to vote and hold office in the Silver State; that's six years before the federal government granted it. In 1916 he supported Key over Pat McCarran at the state Democratic nominating convention. Remember, people bear grudges politically. It is all true. And this is going to play out between the Pittmans and McCarran.

In 1920, Vail moved to Ely to establish the *Ely Daily Times*, a Democratic newspaper. He supported Key in his 1922, 1928, 1934 and 1940 campaigns. Vail was elected a White Pine County State Senator in 1924, but chose not to run again in 1928 because he did not want to be on the same ticket with Key. Instead, Vail openly campaigned in the *Ely Daily Times* for Key's re-election as U.S. Senator. In 1936, Vail lost a three-way race for White Pine County State Senator and seemingly lost interest in politics.

However, the death of brother Key shortly after his winning re-election to a sixth term in 1940 stimulated Vail to ask Democratic Governor Ted Carville to appoint a U.S. Senator in his brother's place; he felt that the office was rightfully his as Key's brother and long-time supporter. And if you see this, many times wives are elected for the deceased senator; the wives are appointed and then sometimes elected. In this case the brother wanted that same courtesy extended to him.

Patrick McCarran, now Senior U.S. Senator from Nevada because of Key's death,

worked against Vail's appointment. According to Vail's biographer, Eric Moody, McCarran, quote, "was adamantly opposed to any appointment for the young brother of his deceased rival." McCarran ran the party. He took over the party. Once Key died, it became his party. McCarran also wanted a Southern Nevadan appointed to the vacant seat.

Governor Carville appointed Assembly Speaker Berkeley Bunker—of Bunker Brothers Mortuary—Berkeley Bunker of Las Vegas to finish Key's final year of his fifth term and again appointed Bunker to serve two years as Nevada's junior senator until the next election in 1942.

Undaunted, Vail Pittman decided he would run for the Democratic nomination—

RICHARD BRYAN: Forty-two or '46?

GUY ROCHA: Who?

RICHARD BRYAN: The next election. He appointed Bunker on the death of—

GUY ROCHA: Key Pittman for two years. He was appointed for two years until the next general election, 1942, and he lost to Governor James Scrugham, who had been serving in the House at the time. Continuing—Governor Carville appointed Assembly Speaker Berkeley Bunker of Las Vegas to finish that term [unclear: until] the 1942 election. Undaunted, Vail Pittman decided he would run for the Democratic nomination for lieutenant governor in 1942, winning the six-way race in a landslide. He defeated the Republican candidate in the general election by an even larger margin.

By 1944, Vail was considering running for U.S. Senate against his brother Key's long-time rival. Vail declared his candidacy on July 29th during the State Democratic Convention, proclaiming, "The rank and file of the people in this state, I am convinced believe

that Senator Pat McCarran, in his opposition to [the] President and the war effort as a whole, must be replaced with a Nevada citizen who is sympathetic to the course of [the] war and the specific effort to bring peace about as soon as possible.” The stage was now set for Vail’s whirlwind five week campaign to unseat Nevada’s senior senator and vanquish the powerful and ruthless McCarran’s political machine. Okay, set the stage. These are the two players. These are the sequence of the events, the elections that they’ve held.

Now, back to McCarran’s biographer, Michael J. Ybarra. I worked with Mike— unfortunately he died hiking in Yosemite, a man in his forties [Editor’s note: Ybarra died June 30, 2012, in a climbing accident on the Sawtooth Ridge]. He wrote that in 1942 with the opening of the BMI plant, quote, a two-year brawl between the conservative AFL and one of the communist dominated CIO unions, the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers, would escalate into a national fight threatening McCarran’s political survival as never before. It was one of the last and least known of the great labor clashes of the New Deal. That happened here in Henderson. That is your history. It is national history, not only local history or state history. This was a big deal figuratively in terms of labor relations in the United States. If Frank Case, Anaconda Copper Corporation official and manager at BMI, would have had his way, the magnesium plant would have been an open shop with no unions. However, the CIO’s International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers had beaten him to the punch; IUMMSW organizers were able to get forty-nine signatures from BMI workers and Local 629 was chartered in October, 1942.

Anaconda had worked with the IUMMSW and its predecessor, the Western Federation of Miners, for decades at the copper mines of Butte, Montana, and elsewhere. The declining

industrial union was rejuvenated in 1934 after winning a five-month strike against Anaconda in Butte. It was among the first unions to join the newly formed CIO in 1935. When BMI manager Case was approached by IUMMSW organizers about passing out fliers at the front gate, he adamantly refused. Case wanted nothing to do with a labor union that had among its leadership the rank and file card carrying members of the Communist Party. He said as much in a meeting with an IUMMSW organizer in November.

Reluctantly, Case turned to the AFL, who he had earlier told to take a hike. On December 16th, 1942, he signed a contract with the AFL recognizing it as the primary union for the BMI workers. Senator McCarran would have no problem with that arrangement given his long-time support of the AFL. Despite [unclear] at the hands of BMI workers enrolled in the AFL, IUMMSW organizers convinced more BMI employees to join the CIO union. Many of these workers were African Americans. The IUMMSW convinced the National Labor Relations Board, created after passage of the Wagner Act in 1935, to order an election on May 7th, 1943. The CIO beat the AFL 1,422 votes to 683.

Initial efforts to contest the election by the AFL were unsuccessful. The regional NLRB office in San Francisco, following an investigation, upheld the results of the election and recommended it to Washington—the board certified the winner. After some foot dragging, the NLRB on July 15th certified IUMMSW Local 629 as the victor in the election. The battle had just begun. And the last thing Senator McCarran wanted was the CIO to represent the BMI workers. At the same time, BMI manager Frank Case refused to recognize the IUMMSW local as the bargaining unit for the plant workers. He claimed the AFL contract was still in force and argued that it would take a U.S. Supreme Court ruling to change his mind.

McCarran had met, communicated and socialized with Case numerous times. The senator's shadow loomed large over the bitter labor dispute. One female IUMMSW organizer charged that, quote, McCarran was behind our difficulties as of yore. Note, many of the BMI workers among them were women. On August 19th, 1943, U.S. Senators Harry Truman of Missouri and Monrad Wallgren of Washington State held a hearing at the downtown Las Vegas Federal Building, focusing on defense waste and profiteering at BMI. Anybody heard of Harry Truman?

AUDIENCE: [laughter]

GUY ROCHA: "Give 'em hell Harry." He did it. He was looking to be a nominated Vice President of the United States. The CIO took their labor jurisdictional case to the Truman Committee, officially the Special Committee investigating a National Defense Program. The IUMMSW's lead organizer testified that the plant was discriminating against blacks, paying them less money than whites for the same work. Doctors and nurses at the BMI hospital were being fired if they didn't return sick workers to the production line. Food poisoning plagued the cafeteria. Exorbitant rent was charged for shoddy housing. [unclear], charged the organizer, I know hundreds of cases of workers both white and colored who have left that plant feeling that their lives are being endangered. No one from the AFL testified, but [unclear: Ragnall Fahen], the top AFL official in Nevada, countered in a written rebuttal, quote, there could be no greater act of sabotage, the industry, production and a coordination of effort than to create [unclear: strident] suspicion and distrust among people.

The Truman Committee refused to get involved in the labor dispute between the AFL and CIO. However, its final report on BMI was damning. Quote, this was one of the most

unjustified contracts which was proposed in conjunction with the war program, the report charged, and represented a wholly unwarranted advance of government funds to a newly organized corporation which had no financial resources and only the most meager experience and talent. In 1944, Senator Truman would run for Vice President of the United States on the Democratic ticket with FDR. The following year, he was sworn in as president with Roosevelt's death in place. This committee was the springboard to his political ambition.

The lead IUMMSW organizer found his way to Washington, D.C. in late September 1943 to meet with Senator McCarran and plead the case. His pleas fell on deaf ears. The organizer called on the War Labor Board Chairman to intervene. The answer was no unless a strike was called by the IUMMSW local and there was potential for disrupting production at BMI. In late October, two hundred black workers walked off the job at BMI rather than accept segregated dressing rooms. IUMMSW organizers met with angry protesters at a Westside church in Las Vegas. The challenge for the organizers was to sustain the no-strike proclamation of the CIO's national leadership during the war. [unclear: It'd still give] the IUMMSW local at BMI officially recognized. Instead, the local CIO organizers supported the workers for a strike call. However, the strike hope failed. The War Department refused to get involved and then BMI fired all the workers that walked off the job. IUMMSW Local 629 collapsed after only one year of existence and the AFL celebrated their victory over the CIO union.

Just the same, McCarran supported the AFL and BMI had made an enemy of the CIO. More than a year before the September 1944 primary election, the CIO had created a political action committee, and on its hit list was Pat McCarran, the AFL's best political friend in Nevada. The battle lines were clearly drawn between the warring labor unions in the 1944

Nevada U.S. Senate race. McCarran had vowed to drive the CIO, particularly the IUMMSW, the locals at Ely, Henderson and elsewhere out of Nevada. In turn, the CIO vowed to drive McCarran from office.

They showed down in Reno at the State Democratic Convention in late June 1944 between the McCarran faction of the party and those opposed to his heavy-handed control, set the stage for Lieutenant Governor Vail Pittman's CIO-backed U.S. Senate candidacy. While Pittman was present at the convention, McCarran did not attend, choosing to headquarter across the street from the State Building at the Riverside Hotel, where he was generally comped everything. He was never known for paying his bills, anyway.

McCarran complained that it looked like he would have serious opposition in the primary. Quote, "The CIO was sent out to find a candidate to run against me, and they are flirting with the Lieutenant Governor, Pittman. So I may have to put up my sword and buckle. It doesn't seem to make a continental bit of difference how hard I work or how much I accomplish when it comes to getting something for myself. I have to take on the battle, but I approach it without fear, with a hellish determination."

The VP of the IUMMSW wrote a letter while at a CIO packed meeting—this was in Ely—which made it clear where the Industrial Union stood. "The record speaks for itself," he said, "It is a record that even a most reactionary Republican would have cause to be ashamed of. McCarran must be eliminated in the primary. Labor cannot afford to allow McCarran to return to the senate." The letter was leaked to McCarran who then shared it with his political ally [unclear: Al Callan], editor of the Las Vegas Review-Journal. The R-J editorialized, "Who's running the Democratic Party, the Democrats or the CIO? In this state, it's common knowledge

the CIO committee has consulted with several leading Democrats trying to persuade them to make the race against McCarran.”

Among those leaders was Nevada’s lone member of the U.S. House, Berkeley Bunker and Vail Pittman. Pittman announced his candidacy on July 29th at the State AFL Convention in Ely. He directly responded to the charges by the R-J that the CIO was financing his campaign to the tune of ten thousand dollars. Quote, “I take this occasion to brand that statement as completely false and without a semblance of fact or truth. No one in the CIO has offered me a dime and I am under no [more] obligation to the CIO than I am to the AFL.” Well, that was true. The McCarran forces knew that the CIO was working hard to support Pittman and characterize Pittman as the CIO man.

At the same time, AFL President William Green made it clear he supported McCarran’s re-election. Pittman’s newspaper, the Ely Daily Times, shot back, “It doesn’t mean anything. Green is a great labor leader, but he should learn from his experience at least that he can’t run the west from the east. Despite significant opposition, the AFL convention voted to support McCarran. A battle royale ensued. McCarran practically labeled Pittman a communist and Pittman personally called McCarran a fascist.

AUDIENCE: [laughter]

GUY ROCHA: The AFL and CIO funneled money and personnel in support of the respective candidates. The McCarran forces clearly had the upper hand when it came to campaign resources and unsolicited support from the communist-tainted CIO dogged the Pittman campaign. Just the same, Vail Pittman enjoyed the support of Nevadans who had long supported his older brother Key when he was United States Senator that wanted to see

another Pittman return to Washington, D.C.

The principle focus of the fractious senate campaign was Clark County and on the uncertain vote of the BMI workers, many of them black and most of them residing in Las Vegas's Westside or Henderson's Carver Park. On August 25th, the Carson Chronicle observed, "Indications still are that this other country will decide this contest." Woodrow Wilson, a black BMI worker who was the first African-American worker elected to the state legislature in 1967 as a Republican, noted in his oral history, "Most of the members were the workforce who really went all out for the CIO and minorities. The CIO program is attracted to blacks because the CIO would promise them anything but the moon. The AFL hadn't been actively participating with their membership in doing some of the things like eliminating segregation that would reduce the possibility of the CIO taking hold."

Segregation—that was the key. Pittman made a swing to the Westside in August 1944; McCarran didn't take the time. Neither candidate had a good record on civil rights. McCarran had voted against an anti-poll tax in the U.S. Senate, and Pittman had voted for a poll tax while serving in the Nevada Legislature. Pittman was a southerner and still had a southern accent and was not about casual racism. The R-J observed, "Several hundred people, perhaps as many as a thousand newcomer citizens of this county will cast their vote for the first time in Nevada. Coming from the Deep South, most of these men and women have never been allowed to register and vote before. Here they are not 'allowed' to register to vote, but are encouraged to do so." The CIO thought they could capture most of the black vote. Multimillionaire real estate tycoon and McCarran political operative Norman Biltz of Reno, bemoaned, "We have every reason to believe that we will lose Clark County quite heavily."

However, BMI management not surprisingly supported Senator McCarran and some of them openly campaigned for his re-election among the workers. Also, it was announced that the plant would close in November and workers were told that perhaps Senator McCarran could reverse the action through his influence in Washington. The AFL was doing everything they could to get its members at BMI to the polls.

On September 5th, 1944, one of the bitterest political campaigns in Nevada history came to a close with the Las Vegas Review-Journal endorsing Pat McCarran and attacking Vail Pittman as a CIO puppet. Black voters in Clark County expected to overwhelmingly support Pittman surprisingly gave McCarran a majority of their votes. Two Westside precincts in Carver Park went for McCarran by more than two to one, 241 votes to 148, although almost 400 registered voters didn't vote. McCarran's majority in Clark County was 1,528, in the state only 1,241. Clark County carried McCarran.

With the help of Norman Biltz' fund-raising, McCarran easily outspent Pittman by about four to one. Most of the campaign money was spent in Clark County. The R-J bombarded its readers with full-page ads attacking Pittman every day. Pittman believed that the McCarran forces had bought votes and particularly the votes of black voters: "There was no doubt about this. Proving it is another thing." Biltz in his UNR oral history years later obliquely noted, "He found a way to get the Negro vote." Pittman, angrily seeking answers to losing the black vote in Southern Nevada wrote, "There are about twenty-five Negro leaders, mostly preachers, who control the thinking of their respective flocks. So you can easily understand how a presto change could come about all of a sudden."

Pittman's biographer, Eric Moody, perhaps summed up the 1944 U.S. Senate

Democratic Primary the best. “There was not then nor is there now any proof of vote manipulation. But it is a fact that the districts of Clark County where the black and other defense worker votes that were concentrated went overwhelmingly in a heavy turnout for McCarran and that something unexpected by the Pittman forces occurred in the closing days of the campaign.” In the end, the newly created town of Henderson and the BMI black workforce found its enduring place in Nevada’s history by playing a critical role in re-electing Patrick McCarran to the United States Senate in September 1944. McCarran went on to easily beat Republican George “Molly” Malone in the general election in November.

Postscript: Patrick McCarran would be re-elected to office in 1950 and then suddenly died in Hawthorne during a political rally on September 28th, 1954. A statue of McCarran is in Congress’s Statuary Hall. And arguably, he was the most powerful U.S. Senator, as I said before, in Nevada’s history until the ascendancy of Harry Reid as the Democratic Senate Majority Leader. Vail Pittman would be elevated to lieutenant and acting governor of Nevada in 1945 after junior U.S. Senator James Scrugham died in office. And Pittman appointed former governor Ted Carville U.S. Senator as his first act in office. Pittman was elected governor—

AUDIENCE: [unclear]

GUY ROCHA: Well, that’s the Key Pittman story in 1940, another story for another day. Okay, so here we are: Pittman was then elected governor in 1946, but lost re-election bids to former Republican U.S. Representative Charles Russell for governor in 1950 and again in 1954.

Pittman died in Las Vegas on January 19th, 1964.

What I want to say in closing—just raise your hand. How many people knew this story I just told you in your history? [unclear] What I’m trying to do in introducing this to you today—

this was big. This is not Chamber of Commerce history. This is not lightweight history. This was big history. It was contentious. But in the history of Nevada and even in the history of nation, if you track Patrick McCarran's [career] ten years after this and what he did on the House Un-American Activities Committee and what he did to a lot of people's careers and how he conducted himself, his getting re-elected, him pulling this off, we had another fifteen years of—in my opinion—of his tyranny, not that Vail Pittman was any kind of enlightened man by any means. But fundamentally we elected some of most reactionary people to Congress at this time. It's unfortunately—I'm a progressive, so I give it away. Anyway, thank you for listening to me today and I hope you've learned something very powerful about your history.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Guy. That was really enlightening and interesting. Our next speaker is Senator Joe Neal. Senator Neal has lived in Nevada since 1954. He graduated from Southern University in 1963 with a degree in political science and history. He was a history major. Yea!

AUDIENCE: [laughter]

MODERATOR: He is a graduate of the Institute of Applied Science in Chicago, where he studied civil and criminal investigation. Neal was elected to the Nevada Senate in 1972 and remained in that position until 2004, serving the second longest tenure in the state's history. During his senate career, he was a member of every senate committee, chaired key resources committees and was a ranking member of Finance, Taxation in Government Affairs Committees. In 1991, both political parties elected him Senate President Pro Tem. In 1992 Senator Neal received the prestigious Elijah Lovejoy Award from the order of Elks Grand Lodge, an honor that he shares with previous recipients including Martin Luther King, Ralph Bunche and Thurgood Marshall. Senator Neal ran for governor twice, in 1998 and again in

2002. During his 2002 race he made history by being the first African American to receive a major party nomination for that office in Nevada. Please join me in welcoming Senator Neal.

JOE NEAL: I guess—with that introduction, I guess I should get up and leave now.

AUDIENCE: [laughter]

JOE NEAL: But in listening to Guy Rocha recite some of the political history of Nevada, I will now attempt to try to fill in some of the things that he probably left out relative to the race issue that existed at that particular time. Henderson community, as far as race relations is concerned during the thirties and forties, particularly during the forties, cannot be divorced from the larger community of Las Vegas or the state of the nation. You were a microcosm of the activities that was happening at that particular time.

The backdrop for race relations was a Supreme Court decision in 1896 entitled *Plessy versus Ferguson*, which created a separate but equal doctrine. Also, in 1919, as far as labor relations are concerned, there was a Supreme Court decision creating what we call an at-will hiring of individuals. As you heard Guy mention about blacks striking—and that was in 1943, and they were fired as a result of that—that was the reason, because they were supported by law, by the Supreme Court decision. They could fire an individual at will. It was tough at that time in the community of Henderson and particularly the Basic Magnesium community that once you were fired, you could not get a job anywhere else in this particular area.

I guess what I'm saying is that Henderson was a government town; it was owned and operated by the Basic Magnesium, Incorporated. They had their own newspaper organ called *The Basic Bombardier* and *The Big Job* that notified the people of what was going on within this community. It was not until 1941 when President Roosevelt issued what he called the

Executive Order 8802 to integrate all of the defense plants across the country including that defense plant that operated as Basic Magnesium here in Henderson, Nevada. As a result of that the plant sent out recruiters to such places as Fordyce, Arkansas, and Tallulah, Louisiana, a place only eleven miles from where I was born, Mounds, Louisiana. They were giving tickets to individuals to come and work for this particular plant. Of course, a lot of individuals who were only making two dollars and fifty cents a day—some were making much less than that. If you were offered twenty-five dollars a week, that was a bargain worth taking this trip out here in the desert of Nevada to seek employment.

That was by no means the first generation of blacks coming into this particular area. Blacks were here during the San Pedro Railroad that ran through Los Angeles into Vegas; they worked on that and many of them stayed in Las Vegas during that particular period of time. Of course, I had family to come here in 1932, an uncle of mine who came in 1932. He was running from the law. And when the population increased, he moved up to Tonopah—not Tonopah, but up to Hawthorne, where by that time the Navy was moving all of their ammunition dumps from the West Coast inland and he went to work for the Navy and stayed there for fifty-two years. I finally caught up with him in 1965 over in Brisbane, California, and he was still running from the law; he thought I was there to arrest him. But that was not the case.

Of course, in 1942 I had other family that came to Nevada from Louisiana that was handed a ticket and they decided that they would come out and see as to what was going on. I had a great-grandmother who came here for a short time, about three weeks. That was when they were living in the tents. She didn't like it because leaving the green grass of Louisiana and all the desert sand here, and she did not like that, so she decided that she would come back to

Louisiana and stay and her husband stayed for a short time after that and he came back. My mother came out here in the late 1940s and went to work for one of the, I think, three hotels that was listed in Vegas here—the Desert Inn and I think the newly—well, she worked at the Desert Inn. They had the Desert Inn, Frontier and I think they were building at the time or had built the Sahara Hotel. So that was my introduction.

Of course, I did not come out here until 1954. I stayed in taking all my school until I finished high school, and a few days after finishing high school my mother sent for me to come out here, too. So my brother, Willie, who had come here shortly after my mother, came back and picked me up and that started my trek to Nevada. I tell you the truth, as a young eighteen-year-old coming across that hill with Boulder Dam there and looking down into the valley of Las Vegas, I had to ask myself, where in the hell am I going?

AUDIENCE: [laughter]

JOE NEAL: I could not see nothing but, you know, they had that caliche there, that white dust that the trucks and cars would kick up as they drive. The roads were not totally paved then. We lived in a little place on the Westside that you would take a bath and when you step out in the street and a car pass you, you had to go back and take another bath because you got all messed up because the streets were not paved.

But anyway, the issue of race, as I indicated, was one that mirrored the country at that particular time and the same thing that happened here in Henderson. Guy mentioned about Carver Park and the development of Carver Park. Carver Park and additional homes that was built in what they called the Basic Magnesium site was designed by a black architect named Paul Revere Williams. He lived in L.A. and he was known as the architect for the stars. He built

homes for Lucy Ball, Frank Sinatra, Tyrone Power, Bert Lamb, Lou Paley of CBS News and many other stars. Anthony Quinn was one of those that he built homes for. He also built the La Concha Hotel, a motel downtown, the Guardian Angel Shrine. The Catholic Guardian Angel Shrine that's out on the Strip today, he built that. He also built the project in Berkley Square, homes in Berkley Square and Cadillac Arms. Carver Park, Victory Village, homes that he designed, were—Victory Village was for whites; Carver Park was mostly for blacks. I say mostly for blacks because the whites could live in Carver Park, but blacks could not live in Victory Village. So you might say a black guy built and designed houses for places where he could not live, and that was the case of Paul Revere Williams.

He was an outstanding architect. He had a Ph. D. from Howard University, also honorary doctorates from Lincoln University and Tuskegee Institute. He was very well qualified. They selected him in 1941 to design and lay out the Basic Magnesium site. Some of those homes that you see, older homes in Henderson today were built by this particular individual because he had a knack for building homes in the desert that were livable and survivable and that people could appreciate. If you go to his website you can see that. I think Henderson has a website; the historical society, I might say, have a website about him. If you Google Henderson you will see something there about Paul Revere Williams.

Now, Paul Revere Williams, as I indicated, was from Los Angeles, but his family was originally from Memphis, Tennessee. His mother and father moved from Memphis, Tennessee, when he was just—well, he had not been born yet. He was born two years after they moved from Memphis, Tennessee, to L.A. Two years after his birth, at two, his mother died and two years after that, his father died. He was an orphan that was reared by the state of California,

and he went on to become a very, very successful person. I think that Paul Williams died in 1983, I believe. He is mentioned in the annals of architectural history throughout the country. So that was a part of that history that you should know about that involved the early days of Henderson.

Now, as I had mentioned earlier, the company was the owner of your town in the early days because you did not take over as citizens until 1953. Basic Magnesium operated under this doctrine of separate but equal. That sent the message that those who had the greater influence at that particular time were white, because these were people who had the authority to make decisions. Your first theater that was built in this city only allowed for white patrons. Your museum, centers that was built that had bowling alleys, softball and other things that was associated with only was for white patrons. The only sport that blacks were allowed to participate in was in 1943, Labor Day picnic, they had a boxing match including a black fellow. And I tried to look up his name, but they only had a picture of him in the paper, and I could not find him. And the reason for that is—I was just talking to the lady from the Henderson Historical Society about that—but that history of Henderson is very much controlled within your own community here. You cannot access it from, say, a library in Las Vegas or—unless you go to, say, the university. I think they had some film that I discovered too late to make a copy of that to bring to show you.

But anyway, getting back to Carver Park—and that's what I was asked to address here—Carver Park had their first black resident in October 13th, 1943. It was the Williams family. It was about four members of that family, they moved in, and there was a big thing made about that. And that's a part of your history here, too, that some of the archives they

have that young family that was moving into Carver Park. Also, that same year, in 1943, you had what you call the Baptist Conference that met here in Henderson and they had about three or four hundred black people that met here at that particular conference. And I wonder by looking at this—because I looked at the organization of your city beginning prior to 1953—I wanted to see where those people had gone that actually lived in the community. And most of them had disappeared, had left and gone somewhere else, either moved up to Vegas. And then some of them that I know moved to Vegas went to work as we began to develop more hotels in that particular region of the state.

We find that a lot of them actually moved from Carver Park and moved into West Las Vegas, into some—many of them, like Woodrow Wilson who worked out here, moved into the housing track that was designed and built by Paul Revere Williams, Berkley Square. He moved there and he stayed in that home until he died. And those were good homes, very good homes. Those homes still exist today. And Cadillac Arms, which was built adjacent to that community, was a very good apartment complex and they still exist today, but not in the shape that they were when they first built. In fact, my first job in this area was watering the lawns of Cadillac Arms: getting up early in the morning, going down with a friend of mine who also came from Mounds, Louisiana, a fellow by the name of [unclear]. We shared a job together in watering the lawns. They didn't have the sprinkler systems at that particular time. You had to take the hose and hook it up to a pipe and spray the lawn that way. That's what we would do early in the morning.

But as I said, the black people of Henderson did not participate in the development of your city. They did work here. But when it came to establishing Henderson as an independent

entity, black people were not part of that entity. I don't know what happened, whether or not they were not invited. The history is a little bit short on that point as to why that did not happen or why the absence of blacks in state played such a major role in the jobs and working in the area.

Now, Guy had mentioned about the two hundred workers that were striking, had struck innocent black workers. The reason for that strike or protest was because of the working conditions in the plant. If you look at that history at that particular time, the most menial jobs that blacks filled in the plant were the dirtiest jobs and the most dangerous jobs. They worked in the area mostly where they put the pellets in for the magnesium and they would—by there, they'd have to wear the masks; it was always dusty. And sometimes you could not tell if a white person or a black person was working there because they're all covered with the ash of the dust being generated from the equipment that was being used to crush the rocks and things of that sort.

But that other part of that history that he mentioned about the unions—let me just say something about that, fill in something about that from the black side of that. The black community did participate in that election that Guy talked about. Well, one of the reasons why they didn't vote for Vail Pittman was because he was from Mississippi. He was from Vicksburg, Mississippi. And coming from Louisiana and Arkansas, as most of the blacks did at that particular time, they knew what an atrocious atmosphere it was to live in in the state of Mississippi. So that was attributed to Vail Pittman at that particular time, and they did not support him because of that. Well, not totally because of that, but that was one of the main reasons that they understood who Vail Pittman was over and above McCarran.

It was not—and as he indicated that one of the persons that said that it was the first time that blacks had voted in that particular area—that was true, because in Louisiana, particularly from that particular region where most of the people came from, they did not get the vote until 1963. That was when I was in college at Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, with all the protests. Call suggested for them to come in and bring a suit and they sued to get the vote. And that vote—blacks had not voted since 1890 in the state of Louisiana; they had taken those rights from them. Even though we had had the 14th and 15th Amendment to the Constitution and we also had the 1868 Civil Rights Act that's supposed to guarantee these rights, those rights were summarily taken away from the black community.

And so that was the framework in which Vail Pittman appeared here. Of course, I guess he came here looking for opportunity just like blacks did, you see, but blacks had a tendency to hold it against him from where he came from, because of the state of Mississippi. And those of you who've read about the history of Mississippi and the Medgar Evers case, Schwerner and Goodman and Chaney case of Philadelphia, [Mississippi] where they were killed trying to seek the voting rights, you can understand why that that was the case. I will stop there. If you have any questions, I will try to answer them. I haven't said everything, all of the notes that I got here. But I will stop here so we can get some questions.

AUDIENCE: [applause]

MODERATOR: So I'm asked to give a brief introduction of our next guest, former governor and U.S. Senator Richard Bryan. Senator Bryan started his career in 1964 as a district deputy attorney in Clark County and then was named the county's first public defender in 1966. He was elected to the assembly in 1968, served two terms, served eventually two terms in the

state senate and was elected to the attorney general's. He was elected to his first of two terms as governor of Nevada in 1982. And in 1988 was elected to the U.S. Senate where he served two terms. Please join me in welcoming Senator Bryan.

AUDIENCE: [applause]

RICHARD BRYAN: After hearing that erudite discussion by Guy and the insights that Senator Neal has given, a lot of you are going to wonder why I was invited here today.

AUDIENCE: [laughter]

RICHARD BRYAN: So I thought I better tell you what the real story is. As most of you know, I grew up in Las Vegas and it seems like odd for a person like me to join this distinguished panel. But it dates back to May of 1966.

I was in the District Attorney's Office and the State of Nevada has just created a public defender system that each of Nevada's counties could adopt if it chose to do so. John Mowbray played a leading role in persuading the Ford Foundation, which was interested in the criminal justice system—this is right after the very famous case of Gideon v. Wainwright, which for the first time declared that people who were charged with felony offenses, not necessarily death cases, but all felony offenses were entitled to attorneys. Nevada was really way ahead of that. It generated a lot of discussion about the fairness of the criminal justice system and the Ford Foundation offered money as an incentive to various counties across the country to establish public defender programs.

John Mowbray was a guy that many of you recall was a District Court judge, later a Supreme Court judge. He was a very, very powerful presence. He was a Silver Beaver recipient, an Irish Catholic that loved all the Irish stories. On Saint Patrick's Day when he sang "Danny

Boy,” even a member of the Ulster Defense League [Association] would be brought to tears; that kind of a guy. And so Mowbray was really the horsepower behind of getting the Public Defender’s Office going and the Ford Foundation was—the person in charge was Charles Decker, who is a retired judge.

So what does that have to do with me? I was in the D.A.’s Office and I thought—I was twenty-eight—I could get appointed to the public defender’s office. It was going to be a new office. Nobody had ever seen it. There would be a lot of interest. There’d be an opportunity for me to present myself to the public and maybe there could be good things that happened after that. And so the first vote that I got was Ralph Lamb.

Ralph Lamb was in the 1960s stronger than dirt; I mean he was a powerful guy. And his brother, Darwin, who was called Dar, was on the county commission. I knew Ralph. My father had been an attorney here in town. He passed away some years before. But I had seen Ralph a lot as a deputy D.A.; we were officed on the same floor. So I went to see him and I asked for Ralph’s support. Ralph had known my father who had been the sheriff mounted posse and he said, “I’m for you.” He said, “You go see Dar”—that’s Darwin—“and he’ll be for you, too.” And sure enough, I saw Darwin and I had one vote. The next vote—and this was a key vote—was a fellow who was on the county commission for Henderson. Some of you may know him, Lou LaPorta. I think he’s still around.

AUDIENCE: [laughter and applause]

RICHARD BRYAN: Lou is still around. So I went out there. He had an office on Water Street, as many of you know, and he had kind of an administrative assistant by the name of Bea Campbell. And Bea had been a friend of my father and I think probably—I think maybe Lou

knew my father, as well. But anyway, I went out there and talked and Lou committed to support my candidacy and I was ultimately appointed public defender. And lo and behold, people took leave of their senses and invited me to various offices.

So when Lou called—he never asked for anything, never, not in the—whatever the intervening number of years would be, something like thirty-three years that I held public office; Lou never asked for anything. So when Lou said, “Will you come here this evening?” Lou, I couldn’t say no. In politics Lou LaPorta always had a due bill for me. So Lou, thank you very much for the invitation.

AUDIENCE: [laughter and applause]

RICHARD BRYAN: Now, do I know anything about the events that have been discussed? Probably far littler than I should and not enough to be considered an expert, but I do have a tie here. My father graduated from Las Vegas High School in 1927. His sister and her husband lived on Main Street where the new City Hall is in Las Vegas. After my father went on to college and during the Depression years—the word *patronage* is mentioned here. Let me tell you a little bit about that, because that’s what part of our history as well.

In those days, in the 1930s during the depth of the Depression, primarily young men, very few women, went to law school there. The only way of getting a legal education would be to get a job in Washington, D.C. during the day and go to law school at night. And so my father, like others of his generation, kind of waited their turn. My father was not a McCarran; he was a Democratic. But my father was a [unclear] man. And so in 1936—now, my father worked for four years in the highway department as a rod man. For those of you who think that involves any talent, that’s the guy that holds the stick and with the surveys—move left, move right.

Even I could have done that; that was his job. And they said that they had positions—a patronage appointment to the Department of Agriculture as a purchasing agent. These are very low-entry jobs, but pay during the Depression it was not that bad, about twelve hundred a year; I've seen his pay records.

Anyway, he went back there and met my mother from Virginia, who worked for the Bureau of Reclamation, and I was born, and now my father's finishing law school and we are returning to Nevada in January of 1942 and my father worked at BMI. He was in the legal office. This is before the 19—well, that was 1943 and '44. He was there and worked there until he passed the Nevada Bar the following year. My mother transferred to Bureau of Reclamation and worked in Boulder City and made that [commute] every day during the summer of 1942.

And I do recall—I was only four and a half, so I can't tell you that I have profound understanding of what was occurring because I did not—but there was a decal on the right windshield of our 1939 Plymouth. It was a big yellow decal. And my father told me that was what allowed him to get onto the plant site. I'm gathering during the war there must have been some kind of security; not everybody could drive on in because it was an important—the defense history. My step-grandfather who had married my grandmother who was somewhat of a rodeo queen—we never really knew every place that she lived; maybe she was fearful of creditors, too. I don't know.

AUDIENCE: [laughter]

RICHARD BRYAN: But she arrived in Las Vegas with her new husband. She was not exactly the Zsa Zsa Gábor of her time in terms of number of husbands, but I never as a youngster could count all of them on one hand. [laughter] And the fellow that she married that I remember

was the fellow named Troy Armstrong, very wonderful. He was a carpenter on the Townsite homes. He built the Townsite homes as a carpenter. So that was kind of the linkage and the tie that I had to Henderson.

And then kind of fast forward—John Gibson was in my class at John S. Park and later Las Vegas High School, and his father, Fred Gibson, Sr.—Gibson Road—Fred Gibson, Sr., played a major role on December 7th, 1941, that day that Franklin Roosevelt described, “that will live in infamy.” Fred Gibson and others were heading to England to learn about this process to produce magnesium through what is called and I could never describe an electrolytic process. That was what was going to be built here in Henderson. And so Fred Gibson was very much involved with that and became very much a part of the community and the BMI efforts.

And then fast forward something—and I know Guy probably knows a lot more about—the Townsite homes were built without a foundation. There was real concern among the Chamber of Commerce and others that after the war this would be in competition with other real estate developments. So the idea was that this was not necessarily going to be a permanent residence. BMI was a war industry project, built solely because of war, as Guy, I think, pointed out. But the availability of magnesite at Gabbs, the availability of the power generator at Boulder Dam dictated the location together with the effect of Congressional representation, as Guy has recited. But it was by no means clear that this was going to have the survival afterwards.

I am old enough to remember that—and let me just fast forward—the plant was so efficient, such an extraordinary effort, that by November of 1944, it had produced all the material needed for World War II and the domestic production. It was an extraordinary thing.

And so the real concern and the concern not only in Henderson but in Las Vegas generally—what happens after the war? When Las Vegas had been a town, when I came, of eighty-five hundred people. What is now Nellis, Las Vegas Army Air Corps Base, as it was called at the time, closed. BMI's production ran out. And so there was real, real concern that Las Vegas could kind of retrogress to a community like it was in the 1930s. It seems somewhat preposterous to believe that today, but that was a real concern.

And so the effort to get these facilities transferred to the State of Nevada so that they could be used for some private development and retain the infrastructure—BMI owned everything—the phone company, the water company, the hospital. Many of you know the story far better than I do. But what the future portended was very serious. A couple of people in the private sector played a considerable role. Herb McDonald, who in my time was a publicist for the Sahara Hotel and later ended up [promoting] the special events for the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce—Herb hasn't been dead all that long, probably twenty, twenty-five years at most—and a guy in Reno who was a real powerhouse who Guy Rocha would know a lot about, Johnny Newland, they were big political operatives. And McCarran played a key role, as did others—the governor and others—to in effect get these plants transferred in a way. It was transferred to the Colorado River Commission, which was designated by the state legislature in 1947 to be the agency of the state government—Guy, as I recall—you correct me if I'm wrong—he's done the research, and at my age I don't recall what I had for breakfast this morning. [laughter] I think I've got this somewhat accurate; Guy can interject.

In any event, that was a major accomplishment. The legislature came down here to take a look at it and they voted in 1947 to do that. And that kind of paved the way for the

infrastructure, which became the Henderson in the post-war years and assured that it would continue as a community and grow as it is today. So that was—McCarran deserves considerable credit.

Let me comment on a couple of things we mentioned and then—because I believe that every event should conclude the same way it begins—you all ought to have an opportunity to ask some questions of all of us rather than us pontificating about everything that we know—a couple of thoughts.

I knew Pat McCarran. McCarran was a powerful person and vindictive. I mean you were for him or against him. And if you were against him, he didn't just dislike you, he wanted to destroy you. He was very, very powerful. My father's law partner was Cal Cory, whose son Ken is a very able District Court judge. McCarran was a very smart guy. McCarran was seeing that Nevada was growing. By 1940 we had a hundred and ten thousand people in this state and he recognized that by using his patronage appointments, he would build, in effect, a political infrastructure in Nevada. Grant Sawyer, former Nevada governor, came to D.C. under McCarran's patronage. The late Ralph Denton also came to Washington on McCarran's patronage. John Collins, former district judge in Reno, later a Supreme Court judge and the Collins in the Lionel Sawyer and Collins Law Firm of which I'm a member, and many, many more—Virgil Ledge and Jay Sourwine and others. And so for this patronage system, he was able to develop this infrastructure. And they used to meet periodically; they called them the "McCarran Boys" and they became district attorneys. Grant Sawyer became a district attorney in Elko County and Ralph became district attorney—not district attorney, but he became county commissioner here in Clark County after serving as a deputy district attorney in Elko

County. And so that was very powerful.

So as a youngster, when my father was with Cal Cory, when McCarran came to town—I do not want to be irreligious, but I've got to tell you it was like the good Lord had returned to Earth. I mean everything was put aside. They had no staff here in those days, no staff. I mean he was in effect McCarran's aide, although he—and McCarran reworked those people. Cal Cory was an able lawyer, but the year he got out of law school, Pat McCarran got him the job as general counsel for the Union Pacific Railroad—not a bad [deal]. And so as a child, I observed all this thing when McCarran came to town. It was a big, big deal.

McCarran was, as Guy and others have described here, a man who was unenlightened when it came to civil rights. We hear a little much about the McCarthy era. McCarran was a McCarthy addict; he was a person who saw a communist behind every tree and he was very much involved with some of the more outrageous things that occurred that destroyed reputations, but he did not get the national publicity and notoriety that McCarthy did. He was a big supporter of Franco, a very big supporter of Franco.

When I was a youngster—probably now I may be twelve, thirteen—The Branding Iron, which was the local press club, put on every year a spoof of all the shortcomings of the people in public life. Thank God they'd abandoned [it] before I became an elected public official. But I remember one that was described to me. They had a marionette for the men to control, and in it, it was Franco controlling every bit of McCarran's moves. It was a pretty harsh thing, but it was true. [laughter] It was very true.

But having said that, let me just tell you to be fair about it, I do not favor the proposal that has been advanced recently to take the airport and rename it for something else.

McCarran deserves credit in this sense and everybody that lives in Nevada ought to recognize this. After World War II there was a reform movement that swept the country that wiped out gaming in various places of the country that had operated illegally, whether it was Steubenville, Ohio, Miami, or Hot Springs. And there was a real movement to impose confiscatory taxes on the only place where it was legal: Nevada. McCarran, through the strength of his personality and the stature that he had, nearly single-handedly held that legislation in abeyance. If that had passed, what we have in Nevada and the Las Vegas Strip would not exist today. So he deserves enormous credit for that. That's on the good side of the ledger.

A couple of words about race relations. Growing up in Las Vegas, I think it's important—and Joe, I think, has been very fair on this—it would be unfair to suggest that somehow in the early day that Henderson was this isle of bigotry in this sea of progressive, benign, thoughtful—that's just not true. I mean there was bigotry throughout—and Nevada, not Henderson, was referred to as the Mississippi of the West.

Now, living in Huntridge, there was not a single black family in Huntridge. I do not know and I have not done the research. Guy may very well have done so and Joe may have known. I don't know whether it was because of restricted covenants until the Supreme Court in the late forties struck this down; some deeds had provision in them—when you'd buy your house, there was a restrictive covenants that said you could not sell to an African-American family. And in other instances and I suspect that this is probably more true of Huntridge, although I've never looked at our family's deed—we moved into Huntridge as a brand-new development in 1943—it was kind of a de facto thing; you just don't do that.

Although the schools were integrated, the theaters in Las Vegas—they did not exclude African Americans, but there was kind of a section for them and I recall that as a youngster. I'm often quoted on this note. Living in this world that I did when my dad was an attorney, although we didn't live an affluent lifestyle, I mean things were pretty easy for us. I didn't have any real worries. I always knew I was going to go to college and I always knew I wanted to be a lawyer. So I had never really given any thought—I'm in the seventh grade—had never really seen any discrimination.

But in 1950 I was selected to go to Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, the first Boy Scout National Jamboree. And the African-American troop was Troop 67 and Hoggard's son was one of the representatives that was to go. And so there was kind of a troop of Valley Forge-bound scouts that represented the various scout troops of what was then the Boulder Dam Area Council, about thirty-five of us. Hoggard was the only one.

We rehearsed right next to the City Hall in Las Vegas—this is where some of you old-timers may recall the Boy Scout offices. There were kind of little huts there. We kind of camped out there. It was in June. We finished early one afternoon and we were all headed over to the municipal swimming pool—it's still there on Bonanza—the first time I ever saw it. Hoggard was black. The Las Vegas municipal pool in 1950, not 1920, 1950, prohibited African Americans swimming there. And I can still remember as we were kind of walking away and he's kind of leaning on his duffle bag and he was the only one that couldn't go, I have to tell you that was the first time that it really registered to me that, wow, gosh, that's not right; he's one of us. He should be able to go. Thank you so much for listening to me.

AUDIENCE: [applause]