

**Minnesota Foundational Environmental Laws  
Oral History Project**

**Narrator:  
Ron Way (RW)**

**Interviewer:  
Stephanie Hemphill (SH)**

**Recorded:  
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**Stephanie Hemphill (SH):** The following interview was recorded with Ron Way on behalf of the UMD, University of Minnesota Duluth, Kathryn A. Martin Library Archives, for the Minnesota Foundational Environmental Laws Oral History Project. It took place on November 2, 2016, at Ron Way's home office in Edina, Minnesota. The interviewer is Stephanie Hemphill.

**SH:** Ron, thank you so much for giving us some of your time today.

**Ron Way (RW):** Thank you for coming in. This is a very interesting project.

**SH:** Tell me, to start with, where you were born and where you grew up?

**RW:** I'm from Alexandria, Minnesota. Actually, born in Sauk Center, but moved as an infant to Alexandria, where I graduated from high school.

**SH:** And where did you go to college and what degrees did you get?

**RW:** I started out at the University of Minnesota and got into newspaper reporting and left the University. I was married at the time and ended up moving up to East Grand Forks, Minnesota, to edit the *East Grand Forks Record*; and decided to go to school at the University of North Dakota while I was there. I got my degree from the University of North Dakota in political science.

**SH:** And you had a career as a journalist for a while, tell me about that briefly, the years and where.

**RW:** Yes, it actually started out in a very small newspaper, *The Ramsey County Review*, in north St. Paul. I moved to the *St. Cloud Times* and from there to the *Rochester Post-Bulletin*. But I wanted to get on to the *Minneapolis Tribune* staff and they said I really needed a college degree and so I looked for an opportunity to do that by taking the job in East Grand Forks so that I could go to school at the University of North Dakota. And

while there I was the editor of the student newspaper for one year and otherwise, I reported on university affairs for the *Grand Forks Herald*.

**SH:** So then you got on staff at the *Star Tribune*?

**RW:** Yes, I did. After I graduated in 1968, they gave me a three-month trial. [Laughs] And four months later I asked if the trial was over and they said, “Yeah, you’re hired.” That was basically it. It was just an interesting time and Frank Premack, the editor, the managing editor–city editor–I’m sorry, of the *Star Tribune*, kind of operated informally.

**SH:** [Laughs] How long were you with the *Star Tribune* and how did you get from there into public service?

**RW:** Okay. I learned, while I was a reporter, that I would much rather be sitting on the other side of the table. That is, I’d rather be involved in policy rather than merely reporting on it. But I was at the *Tribune*, I think, for three years and what happened was, a fellow by the name of John Heritage started the environmental beat for the *Minneapolis Tribune*—one of the first in the country, actually—and John went on to work for Senator Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin as his chief of staff and he left the beat open, but it was such a new beat and such a strange beat, in the context of the newsroom, that nobody wanted to take it. And late one night the city editor, Frank Premack, offered me the job because, he admitted, nobody else wanted it. And I jumped at the chance, simply because you have to wait around two, three, four, five years before you can even be considered for a beat and I was there less than a year and got it. And then the Reserve Mining case opened up, nuclear power coming to Minnesota, and all kinds of things. It turns out I had more page one stories than most of the political reporters, so I was happy about that. They called it the “pollution beat” then, I preferred to call it the “environment and energy beat”, and that one stuck.

**SH:** Um-hmm.

**RW:** I went from there to work with Gaylord Nelson. Not through John Heritage, who was on the staff at the time, but in reporting. I spent a lot of time in Wisconsin on things like the Wild and Scenic Rivers, and Apostle Islands National Lake Shore, and worked a lot with Gaylord Nelson’s people and they were the ones who recommended me for the job. And that’s how I got in with Senator Nelson. And I looked forward to that because I got, then, to sit on the other side of the table, that is, working to develop policy.

**SH:** Just let me interrupt you briefly, I need to make sure I get spellings right. So, how do you spell John Heritage?

**RW:** Just like Heritage. H-e-r-i-t-a-g-e.

**SH:** And the editor of the *Star Tribune*?

**RW:** Frank Premack. P-r-e-m-a-c-k.

**SH:** Okay.

**RW:** Legendary.

**0:05.06.4**

**SH:** Okay. And so you then, did you move to Washington, D.C. to work for Gaylord Nelson?

**RW:** Yes, I was with Gaylord Nelson for, I think, two years, when I got a call from Grant Merritt at the time who said the governor was going to be putting together this Environmental Quality Board [EQB] and would I come back and help them with that. And in considering all of the opportunities for, I guess, adding to my resume, I thought that would be the best career move. And so, we moved back to Minnesota.

**SH:** What year was that?

**RW:** Boy, I kind of knew you were going to ask that.

**SH:** [Laughs]

**RW:** And I can't— So, that had to be '73, I think.

**SH:** Well—

**RW:** Or '72.

**SH:** In your CV that you sent me, it says that you, and I think you told me on the phone that you were involved with the Environmental Quality Council [EQC] that Anderson set up as governor, before it was actually put into law.

**RW:** Yes.

**SH:** So, that would have been before '70, anyway. Let's see, he took office in '71, but MERA [Minnesota Environmental Rights Act] was passed in '71 and MEPA [Minnesota Environmental Policy Act] wasn't until '73. So, it had to have been between '71 and '73.

**RW:** Okay, you know better than I, frankly. Those years are kind of a blur. I guess in my mind, I think, '72.

**SH:** Okay, okay. That sounds about right.

**RW:** It's about right.

**SH:** So, you moved back to Minnesota to work on the Environmental Quality Council which Governor Anderson had set up.

**RW:** Yes.

**SH:** What kind of stuff did you do at the beginning?

**RW:** Well, in the beginning, we were trying to figure out exactly what we would do. We had a powerful group, in that state agency heads were on the board and so we had all the power, I guess, in state agencies represented. At the time, the State Planning Agency [SPA] was a very, very powerful agency, mostly part of the governor's office, but it was a very important policy agency and that's where the EQC was located. But we still had to figure out what it is that we were going to do, keeping in mind that agency heads kind of guard their territory. And it was difficult, in the front end to really get consensus on exactly what it was we were supposed to do.

**SH:** Because this was new. The state agencies had not been asked to cooperate beforehand, and sort of coordinate their work, right?

**RW:** It's always the expectation of every governor, or at least they say it, that we're going to have a good group of cabinet members who are going to work together, but frankly with the legal structure of agencies and the personalities who head up those agencies, cooperation is, hmm, kind of elusive.

**SH:** Hmm. So, were you involved in the legislation that formalized the EQC into law instead of being just a governor's initiative?

**RW:** Yes, that was one of the first orders of business, to get some statutory authority. And so, that was passed. It was fairly easy to pass, quite frankly, given the mood of the times; everybody seemed to be for protecting the environment. And if the governor wanted to showcase his agency heads in that fashion, well, the legislature was pretty willing to go along with it.

**SH:** Do you remember attending some committee hearings? And what were some of the issues that were brought up in discussing that?

**RW:** Well, as I think back on it now, there were more issues than I remembered. But recalling back, there always was a tension between the so-called “environmental community”—whatever that was—but environmental interests and agricultural interests. For example, when the Pollution Control Agency [PCA] had a Citizens’ Board, John Wefald, who was agriculture secretary at the time, came over and gave a speech before the board and insisted on a farmer being a representative on the board, and he stated why in forceful terms. And soon enough, in statute, it was written in that a farmer would be on the board. And every time we talked about environment in the legislature, senators, like prominently, Charlie Berg of Chokio, Minnesota, was always insisting on agricultural representation.

**SH:** How do you spell John Wefald?

**RW:** W-e-f-a-l-d. He went on to become president of Kansas State University, and very prominent in academics.

**0:10:15.4**

**SH:** So, [clears throat] excuse me. The agricultural community insisted on having a seat at this table. And do you remember the role played by industry in that discussion?

**RW:** Well yes, the big deal for industry was to make sure that its interests and its coziness, frankly, with the governor’s office, was maintained. And MACI, Minnesota Association of Commerce and Industry, which is now the Minnesota Chamber [of Commerce], felt that it had a friend in Governor Anderson, in a very good way, and was very comfortable with the EQB being made up of agency heads. And so, to that extent, they supported it. And I think, also, they were looking for; in fact I know they were looking for a way to smooth the regulatory pathway in state government. And so, Ted Shields from MACI was always looking out for a way that he could get his, what he called “one stop shopping,” where they go to a single place in government to get all of their regulatory permits.

**SH:** Um-hmm. And so, how did it happen, if you recall, that citizens were placed on the board instead of just having the EQB made up of agency heads?

**RW:** There were some citizens in the state at the time who were pretty noisy, although their organizations were pretty spartan, but they liked the model of the Pollution Control Agency, which at the time had statutorily a Citizens’ Policy Board. They liked that and they felt that it kind of insulated the agencies from the internal policy workings and politics and so, they stepped up and insisted, along with, you know, Grant Merritt, who was very forceful in the state at the time. He was head of the Pollution Control

Agency on the governor's staff, but he liked citizen involvement and fought for and won acceptance of that idea from the legislature, so far as the EQB is concerned. I say EQB, Environmental Quality Board, that was, I think, a later iteration of this, but EQC, EQB, they are the same thing.

**SH:** You said that these environmental organizations at the time were "active but spartan." Could you say a little more about that?

**RW:** Yes, they had only a very small, small membership, but they were very noisy. They always showed up and gave testimony, but they had no grassroots organization whatsoever. And so, their bark was much worse than their bite politically. And quite frankly, they were annoying because they were oftentimes making some pretty outrageous claims as to why they had to have citizens, and their big deal was nuclear power, feeling that that was going to, you know, destroy all of human kind, and so we heard, we heard their stories over and over again, but quite frankly, when it came to passing laws at the legislature, they were totally ineffective.

**SH:** Which groups are you talking about here?

**RW:** It was Minnesota Environmental Control Citizens Association [MECCA] was one, and one was Clean Water something<sup>1</sup>. Now, I can say that they had some pretty good members, and one was the former mayor of St. Paul, Larry Cohen, who went on to be a judge. They were articulate, but when it came to lobbying anything through, they were totally ineffective.

**SH:** Well, it's interesting to think about the process of turning something into law. So, on the one hand you've got these, maybe inexperienced citizens' groups that are asking for the sky, and other people who are saying what's more realistic. Is that the way you see it?

**RW:** Yes. And what I did, I turned to two young men at the University of Minnesota, with the Minnesota Public Interest Research Group [MPIRG], Chuck Dayton and John Herman, who were very, very good in the legislative process. They understood how to pass a law, and even though their organization was not altogether influential at the legislature, those two individuals were. They spoke the language of legislators, they knew how to negotiate, they knew how to lobby and they were very, very intelligent people who helped greatly.

**0:15:20.8**

**SH:** And did they support, if you recall, having citizens involved with the EQB/EQC?

**RW:** Yes, they did. They always felt that citizens provided a good buffer to kind of shield some of these policies from the political machinations that you always get in political offices and political administrations. So sure, they wanted to see citizen involvement, the same as we had with the PCA and then later on with the Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources [LCCMR: Legislative–Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources] and other groups would have these citizens involved with them and I agree with them; I thought it was a very good way to go.

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<sup>1</sup>Possibly Clean Air-Clean Water Unlimited.

**SH:** Well, who were some of the people who didn't like the idea of having citizen involvement?

**RW:** Well, okay, that's an interesting, let's see. The insiders in any political organization have a want to keep inside-politics inside. And now, Jerry Christenson, who was head of the State Planning Agency at the time and appointed by the governor, and spent a lot of time in the governor's office—he was part of their staff—he was one of those who, even though he's a very, very good man, he did not like putting up with all kinds of citizen involvement because it took so much time and he felt it really, kind of, well, didn't get the administration always to where it wanted to go. And this was always the tension. Ray Lappegaard over at transportation, he sure as heck didn't want citizens interfering with some of the road building projects that he had. And so, there was always tension here. I think the governor was just fine with it, but certainly Jerry Christenson did not really care for it.

**SH:** How do you spell Jerry Christenson?

**RW:** C-h-r-i-s-t-e-n-s-e-n [Correct spelling is Christenson.]

**SH:** E-n. And how about Ray Lappegaard?

**RW:** L-a-p-a-g-a-a-r-d. [Correct spelling is Lappegaard.]

**SH:** And actually, road building became one of the main, at least with MERA, with the Rights Act, that was a big cause of lawsuits at the time. I've read articles that say, basically, in those days, "You don't fight the highway department; they get to do what they want to do."

**RW:** Well, sure, and that was coming off the building of the freeways through Minneapolis and St. Paul that took big gobs of neighborhoods and just obliterated them.

I-35, think about it, going right down south Minneapolis, well that was all neighborhood at the time, and the Rondo neighborhood in St. Paul, you recall, was one of those that was really cut in half and in large measure, destroyed, by highways. So yes, highways really got their way, the highway lobby, but that did change, most certainly that changed, and I'm thinking here of the controversy surrounding I-394 going west out of downtown Minneapolis. That was very controversial. And I think that that was one of the first ones where the environmentalists were able to have, you know, some pretty good say. Ultimately, it was built, but not without some entanglement.

**SH:** And some positive changes maybe?

**RW:** I think positive changes. I'm thinking more like, I-35E going through St. Paul, which is kind of like, I think, the nation's only parkway freeway, where they slow traffic way down and one of the lowest speed limits of any freeway anywhere, and with a lot of buffers—noise buffers—and it really looks quite attractive. But, I think, there was a major influence of the environmental groups.

**SH:** Now, I'd like to get a sense, a little bit more detail, if you have it, about the hearings and the legislative atmosphere at the time that the Minnesota Environmental Rights Act was passed in 1973 and the EQB was established. Talk about some of the main players. Now, I think, in the House there was Willard Munger and in the Senate there was Bob Dunn?

**0:20:10.1**

**RW:** Okay. How it happened, the power structure in the House was centered on the people who headed up committees; they were all-important, all-powerful. And the most important environmentalist in the entire legislature was Willard Munger from Duluth, who headed up the environmental committee and whatever Willard wanted, Willard got. And that was really true. And so, in lobbying anything through the House, you would go see Willard Munger and if Willard liked it, you got it, and if he didn't like it, you didn't.

**SH:** Can I interrupt and ask how you think that happened? How did he get so powerful?

**RW:** You know, passing legislation is art. There's some science to it, but it's mostly art. And it's the art of personalities, and when you've got a guy coming out of northeast Minnesota, Duluth, that was the bedrock of DFL [Democratic-Farmer-Labor] stronghold, they were very powerful at the time, up there, the labor unions, and the political party generally. So, Willard enjoyed that support, but he had an uncanny way of getting along with everybody. He was very firm, very strong, but he could get along with people. And he always enjoyed the support of Governor Anderson and Willard just got his way. The

Senate was different, the Senate was more fractured and there were different power centers over there. And what emerged out of that, interestingly enough, was a Republican, Robert Dunn of Princeton, who was the go-to person for me [laughs] in the Senate. We had a lot of very good senators on the Democratic side, but Bob Dunn, through the power of his personality again, was the one who was really the go-to person and could move legislation through, or move it out of there.

[Both laugh]

**RW:** So, Dunn was an important person who was very easy to work with.

**SH:** This was a time when a lot of later important people got their start, including Arne Carlson. He was in the legislature at the time.

**RW:** Arne Carlson was in the House of Representatives at the time and, I think, Arne Carson was more interested in serving as the loyal opposition, and he was a very effective opponent of a lot of things. [Laughs] He was just a good legislator. But, operating in the shadow of Willard Munger was always tough to do, but at least Arne raised some pretty good questions and he was there. But, we viewed Arne as mostly an opponent of almost everything we did, I think, because he was part of the loyal opposition. So he served a good function there. Over on the Senate side, we had the agricultural interests, who at the time, then and as now, they weighed in on everything and certainly on forming the EQC and passing the Minnesota Environmental Policy Act.

**SH:** It's interesting to hear about the mix, because Bob Dunn was definitely Republican, but he was a big booster of environmental bills. Do you feel that there was a significant, a different atmosphere in those days about cooperation, or less— Okay, you take it away.

**RW:** In the early days, conservation was not necessarily a Democratic, part of the Democratic ideology; it was there, but conservation in the early days really was a Republican, it was something that the Republicans pushed as a matter of ideology. And think about that, conservation, keeping things in place, conservative, I mean, it all kind of ties in. But when the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency was created, for example, that was by Senator Gordon Rosenmeier, a Republican from Little Falls. He was the author who pushed that through, and he felt very comfortable that the Pollution Control Agency, you know, separating that agency from the Health Department, was consistent with Republican principles. And certainly Senator Dunn felt the same way. You know, to be a good Republican means that you're going to be on the side of the environment and conservation. So, they were there first, when it comes right down to it. I know that's changed today, but even, you know, this is a little bit off the track, but Planned Parenthood is a Republican organization.

**SH:** It is?

**0:25:32.7**

**RW:** Very much so, very much a Republican organization; that's where it started. So, the ideology of Republicanism has changed, certainly, but when it came to conservation matters, like the DNR [Department of Natural Resources] and, you know, lakes and fish and forests and all that, the Republicans were right there with a desire to protect things and keep them as they were, largely. But make sure there was a good regulatory process so if things had to change—and they would have to change—that conservation was at the front of the table.

**SH:** How do you spell Rosenmeier?

**RW:** R-o-s-e-n-m-e-i-e-r.

**SH:** Okay. And, can you give me a little more, sort of a time-line for you? When you came back to Minnesota, you were kind of heading the EQB?

**RW:** Yes.

**SH:** But then you also worked for the MPCA?

**RW:** Okay, once the Environmental Quality Board was established, statutorily, and we got some things going, like the Power Plant Siting Act and actually put that into effect by helping Northern States Power Company, at the time, site their next great big generating plant, which ended up, after looking at all the sites, they put the plant where they already had one, just north of Monticello. But, at the time, Grant Merritt liked the way that I was able to operate in the legislature, get things through, and he needed some help over at the PCA and so he invited me to move over there, which I did and became the assistant commissioner, actually, then it was assistant director for public affairs. And so, I was the one who did all the legislative work for the agency and worked with their PR [public relations] staff.

**SH:** And tell me about how he left the agency, because he was only there about four years, right?

**RW:** I think maybe less than that. He, Grant Merritt, was in my mind, kind of the father of the public involvement in environmental affairs, and he did it this way: he was outstanding in media relations. He could get press, and he could get on the radio, and he could get on television better than anyone in that administration, almost rivaling the

governor himself. And so, Grant Merritt kind of became the spokesperson for the environment, kind of like in The Lorax by Dr. Seuss, there was, “I speak for the trees,” well, Grant Merritt spoke for the environment and people listened. And so, he had an outsized personality. And he had a couple of things that politically worked against him, number one: he had an abiding interest in protecting Lake Superior. And so, when Reserve Mining Company came along and started dumping taconite tailings in Lake Superior at Silver Bay, Grant Merritt was there to see if something couldn’t be done to turn that around and ultimately it was. But also, at the time, there was the first round of copper-nickel mining interests coming into the state, and Grant was very concerned, and rightfully so, about the copper industry at the time. Because, at the time, in Sudbury, Ontario, they had a smelter operation that was set up and it almost entirely defoliated the place; it looked like [a] moonscape up there and when Grant would point these things out—and he even took an airplane full of people up there to Sudbury to look it over—well, as you might imagine, the DFL interests in northeastern Minnesota became very concerned about Grant taking on two pillars of mining, copper-nickel and iron mining. And push came to shove and Grant soon left the agency.

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**SH:** Would you say that he left voluntarily or would you say that he was fired?

**RW:** Okay, this is my take on it. Grant appeared to leave voluntarily; Grant did not leave voluntarily. But, he still had the respect of Governor Anderson, for sure, and so he had a very nice exit and he had a nice consulting contract for about two years, so that he could get set up in the law practice. But, he was still influential in state affairs even after he left the PCA, in major part because the governor appointed a very young person, Peter Gove, to replace him. Peter was on the governor’s staff at the time and Peter had a fondness for Grant Merritt, that remains to this day, and so, Peter was very good about contacting Grant on matters, prickly matters, and there were many of them, before the PCA, and he treasured Grant’s advice.

**SH:** Hmm. This sort of highlights a problem that the DFL has, even today, which is a schism because northeastern Minnesota, as you said earlier, is such a stronghold for the DFL, but they’re very pro-mining, overall, and then you’ve got the environmentalists, who tend to support the DFL, but they are very suspicious of mining. Do you have any thoughts about that?

**RW:** Yes, there is a clash that, where mining interests, in fact, labor, on matters that came before the Pollution Control Agency, labor was very often there in the role of opponent, feeling that too many regulations would stifle industry, and therefore jobs. You could make all kinds of arguments on that, but nonetheless, that was their position. And northeastern Minnesota has always wanted to protect their mining industry and

they did want to see new mining opportunities then, as now, with copper-nickel mining. And so, there was a clash of, there was a political clash there and sure, the Iron Rangers are very powerful. I like them, I mean, I like a lot of those people up there, but quite frankly, they're not too excited about environmentalism.

**SH:** Now, earlier you said that Republicans wanted, basically were kind of a good government philosophy and wanted to have good processes in place for, you know, projects to go ahead, and that really is what the Minnesota Environmental Policy Act was all about, was to set a process to do environmental review in order to let things happen in a way that would not harm the environment. Do you have any thoughts about that and about how well it's worked or not worked?

**RW:** Well, I think it's worked very well over time, all things considered. There really wasn't a good process for assessing the environmental effects of major projects—highway building, we've talked about—but what this did, was, at least on the front end of these projects, force everybody in government to take a step back and look at the environmental effects of what they were about to do. And, I think a lot of good things have come of that, but that was the major effect, and sure, I think that Republicans, while they are apprehensive about too many regulations, and I understand that, they at least wanted a process for environmental review. Just as they wanted to make sure that the forests were protected from over-logging and road-building and things like that. Yes, they were there and they had a good reason for being there. I think the Democrats picked this issue up as just a good issue from their political base, left-leaning folks who were environmentalists. And so, there was kind of a happy medium there that worked very, very well. But, I think overall you've seen a general deterioration of environmental regulation, to some degree. Now, one would argue that the federal Water Quality Act, the federal Clean Air Act, and things like that, both federally and here in the state, have certainly done things like cleaning up the most obvious pollutants and turned the Mississippi River through the Twin Cities [Minneapolis and St. Paul, MN] from an open sewer that smelled, into something that is actually fishable. So, some good things have come about. But, I think on some of these larger, more difficult issues, environmentalism hasn't fared quite so well these days as it did back then.

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**SH:** What do you mean by larger and more difficult issues?

**RW:** I'm thinking of issues like nitrate buildup in ground water due to excessive nitrogen fertilizer use in farm country. That's a *major, major* problem that seems to be outside the scope of environmentalism. Quite frankly, the farmers were, the agricultural interests were able to get, to exclude these "non-point sources", they call them, from the Water Quality Act, yes, of years ago. And so, they largely remain outside of

regulatory reach.

**SH:** Hmm. As I was researching for this oral history series, I came across some materials in the Legislative Reference Library and there was some newspaper articles—I've showed you some of those—the Minnesota Environmental Policy Act did not get a lot of attention, but there were tons of other environmental bills that got some attention.

**RW:** I think the Environmental Policy Act is kind of esoteric, in the sense that there was a lot of things that, quite frankly, I don't think that the public was that tuned into. And that was the right to sue major projects, major interests. You know, there wasn't really any organizations out there like there are today, and so, it was really only Chuck Dayton and John Herman who were lobbying this through the legislature, and they did such a good job of it, they flew under the radar here, in part because it was so esoteric, but also, in part, that Dayton and Herman were so darn good at lobbying that they got it through without much attention being drawn to it.

**SH:** Hmm. Interesting. Well, I've got two more questions, Ron.

**RW:** Okay.

**SH:** One of which opens up the auditorium for you to tell a lot more stories, because the question is, what have I not asked you that you want to share that's important to talk about?

**RW:** I think, I think in the whole process of environmentalism, it's interesting how everything has kind of come in waves, but the lasting difficulty here is something that I alluded to earlier, and that is, the exceptions that have been built into law that protect farming interests, to our great detriment. And there can be a lot of stories told about that, but in fact, agricultural interests have always made sure that they had a seat at the table. Statutorily, they do have a member of the Pollution Control Agency that must be from agriculture, and they did the same thing with the EQC when its citizens' group was put together. And so, that's always been a difficulty, but out of it comes something interesting, too, and that is, Minnesota does regulate animal feedlots, and that really is a nonpoint source that Minnesota regulates, and so, we've been able to kind of fight through it. But inside the legislature, there were, there were a lot of interesting things that went on that I, to this day, still think that those times are so, so different. One of the big deals was that Governor Anderson insisted that before any legislation, *any* legislation was advanced by *any* agency, you had to have at least one Republican as an author. Period. And so, we had to work with the Republican side, but you know, guys like Bob Dunn made it pretty easy. [Laughs] But that always was how we had to operate and it worked, I thought, quite well. Oh, a lot of things, a lot of things happened at the time, it was inside baseball, but Northern States Power [NSP], kind of, was always a

thorn in our side from the standpoint that they had a lot of things going on.

**0:40:05.9**

**RW:** One of them was PCBs [polychlorinated biphenyls], a chemical that is used in electricity, I think as coolants for transformers principally, but at the time, we were trying to outlaw PCBs and NSP was able to overcome, by saying we built transformers so good that PCBs don't leak out of our transformers. Well, about the time that the bill was supposed to get a major vote in the Senate, there was a flood of the Red Lake River, and up by Crookston, there was a big NSP power station, that was full of PCBs [laughs] and all of their so-called protections against any leakage, but the substation was flooded, and PCBs got into the Red Lake River and East Grand Forks had to issue a health advisory, "Stay away from the water because it's contaminated with PCBs." And so, the PCB bill passed because of the natural flood. That was, to me, an interesting phenomenon with that. I think, too, that, well, I could tell— [whispering] I'm trying to think of a good story. Oh! Well, here's one that, Stephanie, I haven't mentioned to you before, but we had a bill on chlorofluorocarbons, now, don't get me to give you the chemical breakdown of that son-of-a-gun, but the short of it is, is that this chemical was manufactured by DuPont—and I think I've got my chemicals right here—and we put in a bill in the legislature to cut back on, to reduce the use of this chemical. And what it was, it evaporated into the air and had an effect on the atmosphere, the ozone layer, and it was pretty nasty stuff, and when we, now, this is being told our of school here a little bit, but when we put this bill up before the legislature, and what we did, we said, "Here, we've got this bill. Anybody interested in authoring it?" On that bill we got Skip Humphrey, who was in the legislature at the time, as a senator; he wanted to author it. He did, and he was the chairman of the subcommittee that was the first stop for this bill, and we thought, "What a wonderful author this is." Well, before the first hearing was held, I was called to the front of the room and Humphrey pointed out here, he said, "Here's a little amendment to your bill." And I looked at it and, well, it effectively gutted the bill by putting the effective date so far out that it really had no practical near-term effect. And I told the senator, at the time, "We can't support that because it guts the bill." He said, "Well, this is the way it's going to have to be, or else it won't pass the legislature." Come to find out that the law firm that he worked for at the time, represented DuPont, so his own law firm was lobbying hard against this legislation, and Humphrey admitted to a friend later that, "You have to remember where your bread is buttered." So he kind of, effectively, killed that bill. And I still worry about that. There was a bright, young legislator from a farm district, Roger Moe, who headed up an agriculture committee that heard a lot of our bills. He was just wonderful to work with, a very, very good negotiator, very good at the legislative process, even though he was a first-termer. I was amazed by his political skill. And, of course, he eventually became the majority leader in the Senate and a candidate for governor—he would have been a good one. So, that came out of it. Willard Munger was one of those people; he was just an

interesting cat. Not only did he have a lot of power for reasons that kind of escape those that worked closely with him on the opposite side, you know, like the power industry, they thought, you know, “He mumbles too much. He doesn’t articulate his thoughts very well.” Well, Willard Munger was effective in the thing that you have to be effective with, and that is, talking with the people throughout the legislative pathway to make sure that the legislation would pass as he wanted it to pass. And so, behind the scenes-- it didn’t matter what he said in public. If he mumbled, so what? He was very, very effective in moving things through.

**0:45:07.3**

**RW:** [Whispering] See if I can get another quick one— I was going to tell you the other one and I forgot about it.

**SH:** You can take time to think of it.

[Brief pause]

**RW:** Well, here was an interesting thing that went on. During a legislative session, you know, a lot of things happen, and sometimes one of your bills drops over the cliff and it’s gone and another bill is moving ahead quite nicely. And to resurrect a bill, in this one particular case, we took the bill that was off the cliff and married it up with the bill that was moving, so in effect, we had two bills moving as one. And the Minnesota Chamber [of Commerce] was just deathly opposed to it because it had an effect, they thought, a deleterious effect, on their one-stop-shop interests. And so, they knew that whatever happened in the House, Willard Munger was going to determine the status of the bill as it came out of the House and so, one day we sat down, that is, the representative of the Minnesota Chamber, and Willard Munger, and myself, in Willard’s office. And Willard said, “Well, this is the way the bill is going to go Ted—Ted Shields—do you have any objection?” Well, he said, “No.” He didn’t mean it, but he said, “No.” “Good, then you’re on board with the bill as it is, two pieces of legislation in one.” And Ted said, “Yes, I will support that.” Well, what he really did, was to let it go in the House, because he couldn’t do anything about it anyway, but then, I caught him one day lobbying [laughs] against the bill that he supported in the House. He was lobbying against it. And so, at the time, we had a core of really good people helping us. One was Bob Dunn on the Republican side, but on the Democratic side, there was George Conzemius from Red Wing, there was Win Borden from Brainerd, and Roger Moe, there were a couple, Bill Luther, Bill Luther from Brooklyn Park, he was very good at helping us. Now, they looked at this bill, they were supporting it and moving it through, but Ted Shields was out there rounding up his Republican friends to kill everything. I caught him, and I took him in and I said, “Ted, let’s go visit George Conzemius,” who was the chief author of this amalgam [laughs]. And we went into his office and Conzemius, who, he was, I can’t call him a

hothead, but he made his feelings on things very well known, with a very boisterous voice. And he told Ted, in effect, “Ted, if I catch you lobbying against this bill, I’m going to knock your head off.” And that kind of sent a message, and that made a lot of difference, up to a point, but Ted had already done his dirty work and by the time this bill came before the Senate, it passed by, I think, two or three votes, and that was it. But it was interesting that a legislator would stand up, well, not publically, but in the quiet of his room and say, “I’ll knock your head off if you do anything more with this bill.”

**SH:** That’s a direct quote?

**RW:** That’s a direct quote.

**SH:** [Laughs] How do you spell Conzemius?

**RW:** C-o-n-z-e-m-i-u-s, I think, Conzemius. He’s from Red Wing, or Hastings, one of those two.

**SH:** Do you remember the subject of this? [Laughs]

**RW:** I don’t. Um, gosh, I wish I remembered it. But the thing that fell off was something that [the] State Planning Agency wanted, which was, I think, in general it was kind of a regulatory format, but it wasn’t the one-stop-shopping bill that the Minnesota Chamber wanted. It was something else that they didn’t want. And the State Planning Agency really wanted this passed. And at the time Jerry Christenson had moved on to head up the Minnesota colleges, MNSCU, [Minnesota State Colleges and Universities] and Peter Vanderpoel, former editorial writer from the *Minneapolis Tribune*, he was head of the planning agency, and he looked to me to pass that bill for him, but I can’t remember what we tied it up with. But afterwards, when we put it together the way we did, Peter said, “That was a real miracle job that you pulled off there.” Well, it wasn’t my idea, quite frankly, it was Chuck Dayton’s idea, as I recall, “Put them together!” Chuck Dayton or John Herman, one of the two, “Put them together! Now you’ve got something.” And everybody thought it would fail, but it didn’t. We got two good pieces of legislation for the price of one.

**0:50:43.1**

**SH:** How do you spell Vanderpoel?

**RW:** V-a-n-d-e-r-p-o-e-h-l. Peter Vanderpoehl. [Correct spelling is Vanderpoel.]

**SH:** And this one-stop-shop is kind of a catch phrase, but it’s something industry has been pushing for for a long time and we’ve seen it over the years. In fact, early in the

Dayton administration, he made some efforts to streamline environmental review and passage of projects.

**RW:** Yes, it's a dream-child. Industry wants to shorten up the process, the regulatory process, and they had already gotten, or seen passed, the Environmental Policy Act that they thought would slow things down even more than they felt they were, too slow to begin with. Because, you have to go to the PCA, [Department of] Health, DNR, State Planning, I mean, you had to make all these stops and go through their processes. And so, what they wanted, really, was one place in government where they would go, and that agency of government then would secure approval of the permits on behalf of the industry. Well, that wasn't, [laughs] that wasn't going to work, but it sounds nice. And I think, even some DFLers, including Wendy Anderson and, you tell me, Dayton, I don't remember that part of it, but it sounds good and it's something that, you know, you can be an environmentalist and still help out industry. But, when you get down into the details, it just doesn't work very well.

**SH:** Well, and it brings up the question, you were the head of the EQB for a while, or the EQC, and there was discussion and uncertainty at first, about who would do these environmental reviews. And, I think the EQB has the ultimate authority over it, but it sort of devolved onto state agencies and local governments, right?

**RW:** Right.

**SH:** So, what are your thoughts about who really does, would do those best, or what's feasible?

**RW:** Well, what they ended up doing was giving it to the, the responsibility for a particular environmental review to the agency that had the most involvement. And in some cases, that was local government, I suppose, when it came to some zoning issues—that was in the purview of county government or even township government. And so, that's the way it, I still think—and I believe pretty strongly on this—that the best way to do it is to have one group that's charged with the environmental review, and I think, ultimately, it ended up being the Environmental Quality Board, which I thought, all-in-all did a very, very good job and had an outstanding staff. But here, quite recently, it was disbanded in a late night deal at the legislature that still upsets me and others greatly. But, it was too bad. Governor Dayton had tried to resurrect this with the—

**SH:** Now, you're talking about the Citizens' Board of the PCA, at this point, right?

**RW:** Both! The EQB was taken out, I think by, Governor Pawlenty, and then more recently, it was a late night deal that took out the PCA's Citizens' Board, but that was a late night deal that was really in control, in large measure, by the DFL itself. It was not a

good deal, and I think also, they did something to the state auditor's office that limited her role in reviewing environmental permits for copper-nickel mining.

**SH:** So, do you see that elimination of the Citizens' Board of the MPCA as punishment for something that—?

**RW:** I do, I do. I have a little bit different take on this than others, a lot of people thought it had mostly to do with farmer groups. But I don't think so; I think the farmer groups have been a thorn in the side of environmentalism in this state for as long as I've been around, going back into the '60s, or through the '70s certainly. But, I think what really happened there, was that the farm interests finally found an interesting, an interested partner in the Iron Rangers, and it was the DFL that killed the Citizens' Advisory Board because they didn't want the Citizens' Policy Board of the PCA getting too involved with copper-nickel mining permits. It's easier to control a single appointed commissioner than it is to control a broader citizens' group. And I think it was a combination of interests that ganged up in the dead of night and wiped it out.

**0:55:43.7**

**SH:** So, Ron, you have had quite a varied career; you've been a journalist, you've been a public servant, you've been in business. What are you thinking at this point, about your work on these environmental issues?

**RW:** Okay, work on environmental—well, I'm obviously proud of the achievement, I'm proud of being part of what I thought was one of the most environmental activist administrations of this state's history, with Governor Anderson, and we passed a lot of good bills and it was during an era of bi-partisanship and cooperation, so we had good governance as a result. I am impressed, too, that we have so many very, very good organizations in this state, oh my goodness, the Sierra Club has a major presence, the Minnesota Environmental Policy Center, Conservation Minnesota, the big conservation group, Izaak Walton League, I mean, you could just keep going. There are major organizations that have a lot of outstanding staff, but, they've been sort of stymied here in this era of gridlock, and haven't been able to wend their way as much as they otherwise could, and so, much of their activity has had to do with filing law suits. They don't get that far in the legislature, which is too bad. So, I'm kind of sorry to see that happening. And the big deal, so far as I'm concerned, right now is dealing with climate change, which, as I tell my friends who care to listen, that, "You don't have to think about it as climate change, you think about it as controlling air pollution, unwanted air pollution, and you deal with climate change. It has to do with the carbons going into the atmosphere, and you just don't want them there." But, things can't move ahead now because ideology has taken over and gridlock has prevented even minor things from moving ahead, let alone major issues of the day, including climate change. That's too

bad. When I step back, I have to say that there are many times that I think there isn't a lot of hope. I hate to say that, but, in truth, I think that dealing with climate change is so important that if we can't deal with that we're— We've already seen the effects of it and I don't know why people don't stand up and take notice. Good governance would deal with it, but we don't see it anymore, unfortunately. I'll tell you one thing here, too, that's kind of off the subject of environmentalism, but I can tell you this: yes, I've had experience in working in the legislative process, both in Washington and in Minnesota—in addition to working with Gaylord Nelson, I went out with the Carter/Mondale administration and worked in the US Department of the Interior—and so I've had a lot of close ups with some very good environmental legislation and worked things through and could see that side of the street, the government side of the street. And then I've worked in the media, so I guess I'm a trained skeptic, from the standpoint of—or a cynic—you just kind of doubt what's coming at you and you ask, "Who, what, why, where, when?" and you soon come up with, well, a different take on things than the spin would have you believe. So, I've got that side of it, but then, I've got the practical side of working in business, and I have to tell you, that even though a lot of people have a serious doubt about the trustworthiness of government, my own feeling is that government is more honest and trustworthy *by a long measure*, over what, unfortunately, we see in the business world. And, my abiding faith is in good governance, and I think that we have to have more of it, because if businesses, frankly, were allowed to run roughshod, we would not have the kind of society that we want.

**SH:** Well, I want to thank you for your service and thank you for your time today.

**RW:** Thank you. I enjoyed it.

**1:00:32.5**

[End of interview]