

**Leona Egeland Rice**

**PART II: Charting a course through a male-dominated Capitol**

**Interview conducted by Dan Morain in Napa, California, on January 22, 2024.**

**DM:** And so you're a young mom, one of two women, only the 15th woman elected to the California State Legislature, 15th in its history. And so, you're focusing on these sorts of bills. Were men focusing on them, or were you kind of alone in this field?

**LE:** I was on the Health Committee, and then I was on both of the subcommittees. One was the Mental Health Committee, well, it was Mental Health and DD, and the other was the committee, I'm not sure I remember what it was called, but it was the one that gave licensing act, it was a licensing act.

**DM:** Business and Professions is what it's called now.

**LE:** Oh, I don't know, it wasn't called that, but it was the other subcommittee from the Health Committee, Gordon Duffy chaired it, and it said what a podiatrist could do, and what an optometrist could do, and what could prescribe, et cetera, et cetera. And they were always wanting to be able to do more, each profession, and the profession that did that was trying to stop them from doing that. So that was that kind of a committee, it was crazy.

[chuckle]

**DM:** Still is.

**LE:** Oh yeah. Every year the orthopedic surgeons and the podiatrists would fight over who was gonna do ankles, and every year, the ophthalmologists and the optometrists would fight over who could prescribe drops or do something. So that was that committee.

**DM:** Those fights don't change.

**LE:** No, that was that committee. But because I was in the health area, I just became more and more involved in putting in legislation and having an input in other people's legislation. So to answer your question, there were people who had other bills that came before the Health Committee, certainly, and then that's where all the mental health bills came.

**DM:** Well, you mentioned Gary Hart as being a friend and an ally. Were there others who you found common cause with? Was Beilenson still around?

**LE:** Well, Beilenson was in the Senate, so, yeah. And well, Alan Sieroty.

**DM:** Alan Sieroty.

**LE:** Alan, and I'm still in touch with Alan, and Alan was my first seatmate, until Tony Beilenson went to Congress, and then Alan went to the Senate. But he was in the Assembly when I was elected. So he was my other friend.

**DM:** But did you have people you looked to, sort of mentors, people, I don't know, Willie Brown? I have no idea. Was there anybody who you could sort of model your efforts after?

**LE:** No, I think I had to do a lot of reading, research, phone calls. I worked very hard, and I loved it, but it took a lot of effort and time. And then I would develop kind of a bias for, or against, or perhaps your bill would be really good if you just tweaked it this way, or if you took this out because if you put that in, it's gonna clash with this other section in the other, in another part of the statutes, and it'll only be a lawsuit, so you need to change it. So I tried to work, when I couldn't vote for your bill, I would try to fix it so that it was at least tolerable. But I didn't have a mentor, except perhaps I would ask Alan. But both Alan and Tony Beilenson were from very safe districts, and they didn't have to develop a strategy to go home and explain why they did certain things, is one of the differences. So I had a very controversial district, or an even district, and I was gonna have an opponent all the time, and I had to go and explain, well, how did you decide such and such? So it was, I mean, later, it wasn't the beginning part, but it was one of the biggest controversies that I had to look at was generic drug substitution, and that was Art Torres' bill, and Art was then my seatmate.

**LE:** And it was generic drug substitution, I think it was Art's bill. Well, of course, they didn't, none of the drug companies wanted drugs, generic drug substitution, and argued how they spent all this money to develop this drug, and they needed at least 30 years of charging everybody the maximum in order to get paid back for the research so they were very plausible sounding, except that they were making huge amounts of money, and the Canadian companies were charging so much less and still making money. I just felt that this was something that could be done, and it had been done in, I think, four other states by that time. So, I called the director of health from each of those states to talk about whether the generic drugs were efficacious, whether they were, that there had been any problems in terms of them hurting anybody. And I didn't find any reason to not have those. But there was a lot of pressure. A lot of pressure. And that was one of the few times I was actually offered an amount of money to...

**DM:** A bribe. Really?

**LE:** A bribe. I was offered two bribes on that particular bill.

**DM:** Really?

**LE:** Yes. One was off limits somewhere in the Caribbean, a bank account. And the other was a man who was going to make me very happy.

[laughter]

**DM:** Really?

**LE:** And I...

**DM:** As in a gigolo man?

**LE:** Yeah. They showed me his picture. I told them I didn't like blondes and...

[laughter]

**DM:** Seriously.

**LE:** Yes. So, that was very bad. But I did have one worry about that bill. And that was Carl Djerassi, who invented the birth control pill and was very involved in the production of that pill and other pharmaceuticals. He was the head of the chemistry department at Stanford, but this was his business, and he was one of my highest individual contributors to my campaign. So, of course, I knew that when I voted for generic drug substitution, I was going to lose, [chuckle] I was probably gonna lose that. So I said, well, I don't want him to read it in the paper. I'll call him and tell him what I'm going to do. And to his credit, he never stopped giving me contributions.

**DM:** How interesting.

**LE:** Yeah.

**DM:** Well, so I want to ask more about the bribes.

[laughter]

**DM:** But I also wanna ask about Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.

**LE:** Yes.

**DM:** You had said that the liquor industry was very much opposed to any kind of a warning notice. And so how was it to butt heads with the liquor industry?

**LE:** Tough.

**DM:** In the middle 1970s? Was there anybody in particular, any lobbyist or lobby group that was...

**LE:** Every lobby group. The beer and wine, all the vineyard people, their associations, the beer companies. The hard liquor in particular paid a lot to their lobbyists. I can't even remember all of the lobbyists. And but, having pictures, this gentleman from San Diego...

**DM:** Was this UC San Diego, Do you remember?

**LE:** I think so. I think it was. Yes. And I'm sure you could probably look him up. I don't remember.

**DM:** I'll try. Yeah.

**LE:** I've lost track of him. But they had such facial distortions as well as emotional and mental problems. And it was such a devastating thing and so easy to stop, it's not saying you can't have any alcohol. It's saying, understand that you need to control this and drink only in moderation. Understand that what you are doing has this effect. So if you do less of it, you probably have less risk. And the men who had to vote on that had children too and grandchildren. So it wasn't that I was saying, you can't have any alcohol. It wasn't that kind. It was just saying, understand that there's a cause and effect. And if for nine months you could stop, then you have no risk at all.

**DM:** And so the Legislature ended up passing this and you got bipartisan support for it?

**LE:** I believe so.

**DM:** And but it wasn't an easy fight getting it through the Legislature.

**LE:** No.

**DM:** Can you recall any sort of instances or episodes that where you got a vote or didn't get a vote?

**LE:** I don't, it was just a tough fight because it was always the third house, the lobbyists are often there beyond the legislators' terms. They played tennis with them. They played cards at Fats (Frank Fat's restaurant) at night with them, poker. They took them on trips. They were buddies. And so, they, 'Hey, do it for me. Don't vote for this'. And so it was a hard sell.

**DM:** So did you play poker with the boys?

**LE:** I was never invited. [chuckle]

**DM:** You were never invited?

**LE:** No. I was never invited. In fact, there was a funny incident, I'm going to forget the man's name now. The representative from Cool, California, at that time. And he was a nice guy, a little old fashioned. His passion was feeding the squirrels on the campus. He had fed them all. But he every year would invite his friends from the Legislature to go up to the area of ... they would visit the bawdy houses or they would gamble, or they had a whole regime of what they did up there. And so, the letters from his office went out and I think the letter said something about... What was the name? It was, I'm going to... They were the vigilante group that took care of the widows and orphans, especially the widows, and they had a special name, but they were...

**DM:** It will come to you.

**LE:** Yeah. They were the group and so we got the letter and the legislators were invited to their shindig up in the mountains.

**DM:** Up near Cool.

**LE:** Near Cool, yeah, near Placerville, near whatever it was where they functioned. And so this gentleman from representing Cool [Eugene A. Chappie] who sent out the letters came into my office and he said, 'I know we sent these out, they went from my office to everybody,' but he said, 'You don't wanna come,' and I said, 'Sounds interesting.' 'No, no, no, no, you really don't wanna join us'. I said, 'You don't think I'd like the activities?' He said, 'Please', and he got down on his hands, he took his hat off, he says, 'Please don't come'.

[laughter]

**LE:** And so I said, 'Stand up'. I said, 'Let's make a deal'. I said, 'You give me three votes and I won't come'. He said, 'Okay, but not on an abortion'. I said, 'Okay, we'll be modest about it', but there were three funny votes in his voting record that if you looked at it, people would wonder, why did he vote that way?

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**LE:** And I think one of them was about spanking. It was my spanking bill.

**DM:** Okay. All right. Well...

**LE:** He paid me back for not going.

**DM:** Yeah, well, so.

**LE:** E Clampus Vitus.

**DM:** E Clampus Vitus.

**LE:** E Clampus Vitus, that was the name of the group who took care of the widows and orphans.

**DM:** I see. Okay.

**LE:** And you can look it up.

[chuckle]

**DM:** All right, okay, well, we will, I guarantee you. So, okay, well, so you brought up paddling. Tell me about the paddling bill.

**LE:** Well, I remembered that horrible incident in Mr. Kolloff's eighth grade math class, and I also did quite a bit of research on paddling in California, and it appeared that there was a movement across the United States, in many states, where they were trying to stop any kind of corporal punishment in the schools. And it was a rough go, because people would say, and they said to me, 'Well look at, I got paddled, and I'm... ' and I'd say, 'Yeah, but look at you now'. [laughter] They liked paddling, but they wanted to do the paddling. They didn't want the coach or the principal to paddle their kid. So when I found that niche, I tried to play on that and utilize that, because it was, we were not gonna stop paddling in the schools, but if parents knew that their children were being paddled, they could say no. So the legislation that was introduced was not to stop paddling in the schools, and I don't know what's in the statutes today. There's no paddling in the schools today, but it was that the school had to get permission from the parent. Well, those people who, my colleagues, who didn't mind having been paddled and thought it was a great idea, and really helped kids and all that, but they also were more inclined to want parents to have rights and knowledge over what their, what happened to their children. So that was what I, the legislation that I put in, was to... So that...

**DM:** Parental notification.

**LE:** Parental notification.

**DM:** And that passed.

**LE:** And that passed. And [George] Deukmejian was my final vote.

**DM:** Deukmejian?

**LE:** Yes.

**DM:** So he's in the state Senate?

**LE:** Yes.

**DM:** Getting ready to run for California Attorney General and then Governor.

**LE:** Yeah, right.

**DM:** Anyway, but he voted to authorize parental consent...

**LE:** Yes, yes.

**DM:** In paddling. You remember why? You remember why?

**LE:** He didn't tell me why, he just, he knew I... Probably because of the parental notification that he wanted parents to be notified as to what was happening sort of, I mean a lot of them said, 'Yeah, I'll vote for that. I think that they need to be paddled, but if anybody's gonna paddle my kids, it's gonna be me'. [laughter]

**DM:** And was he a surprise, did you expect?

**LE:** Yes, no, he was a surprise.

**DM:** He was a surprise.

**DM:** He was, I needed one more vote in the Senate, and I was shocked, almost.

**DM:** And he was a...

**LE:** He was my last hope.

**DM:** Did you ever have a conversation with him after the fact?

**LE:** No, no.

**DM:** Okay. What kind of a guy was Deukmejian, in terms of how you dealt, his dealings with you, if any? I don't really know.

**LE:** I didn't really have any dealings with him, once or twice on bills when he became governor, but I didn't... There was a real bridge between the Senate and the Assembly.

**DM:** You mean a wall?

**LE:** A wall. We were the lower house, they were the upper house, and so most of my, except for Tony Beilenson, who I had worked with, and he went off to Congress, and left me, [chuckle] but yeah, most of my associations were with people in the lower house.

**DM:** Right. So you did work on abortion bills, contraception bills...

**LE:** I did.

**DM:** And such. Tell us a little bit about those.

**LE:** Well, some of those were before I was elected. They were when I was lobbying, and in fact, I think most of those were when I was lobbying and then the office... Creation of the Office of Family Planning was after that.

**DM:** Was when you were in the Legislature.

**LE:** Right.

**DM:** And the Office of Family Planning, I mean, it's hard to get new offices created, especially Jerry Brown was governor, kind of notoriously tight with a buck.

**LE:** It was a way for people to get all of these groups, these women's groups, off their back. Well, we don't have to vote for this specific law or that specific, but we can vote for the creation of an office in the Department of Health that'll look into things, that'll do the research, that'll be funded to carry out whatever happens. So it was... Actually, there's often moves to create some kind of bureau, some kind of study group, some kind... Not usually an office, a full office, but some kind of thing, so then it passes the buck on a controversial issue.

**DM:** Okay. So, how was it working with Governor Brown's office? Did you have much relationship with, I don't know, Gray Davis, Diana Dooley, I guess, was his [legislative] affairs secretary?

**LE:** Both of them, yeah. Both of them were... Diana and Gray were the ones that came into the office to discuss the bills, and I didn't...

**DM:** How was Diana to work with Diana Dooley? Do you have recollections?

**LE:** I liked her. I think we had a mutual respect, and I had no problems at all working with her.

**DM:** I don't think there were a lot of women [legislative] affairs secretaries before Diana.

**LE:** No. No.

**DM:** All right.

**LE:** No. And Gray was more controversial. He was not the favored person of many of my colleagues, but I had no problem in working with Gray. And when I was looking for photographs for this interview, I saw an interesting paper thanking me for supporting him for Governor. [chuckle]

**DM:** Oh, for Governor?

**LE:** Yeah. Yeah, I didn't work much with Jerry Brown. I don't know if he worked with my colleagues individually or always sent Diana or Gray. But I did meet up with him when he signed some of my bills.

**DM:** Any in particular come to mind?

**LE:** Well, there was one bill that was an extremely very controversial bill, I know. I had a young woman who was a constituent of mine from San Jose, and she was at McGeorge Law School.

And this young boy, she didn't think he was in the law school, but he was following her around on the campus.

**DM:** Stalking.

**LE:** He was stalking her. He never came close. He never threatened. He would leave her presents. He would write poetry. He was always there no matter where she went, whether it was a social event or her classes or whatever it was. And so she came to me and she said, 'Is there anything that you could do? I don't wanna wait till he decides to murder me to have somebody say, oh, isn't that horrible? Let's do something about it for everybody else. I don't want him anymore. He's frightening me'. And there was nothing in what he was doing that met the standard of stalking. So we did a search about what had been done in other states and what our statute had. And I said that what if we create a pattern of behavior that represents stalking, represents a risk? In other words, you don't have to hit somebody, but you have to get close enough enough times that you look like you might do that. So in other words, if you establish a pattern of stalking behavior, harassing behavior, that was it, that's the word we used. The harassment bill was a harassing behavior. And that's what we put together.

**LE:** And that was another bill that, 'Oh, look at this girl, she's so pretty. Of course he's following her around'. And my colleagues didn't seem to see that this was a grave situation for this young woman or anybody who would be in that situation. One of my secretaries, Bethel Barker, said I know the undersheriff of, I think it was Placer County, that had a big stalking problem with some lady. And she knew him and she called him.

**DM:** Oh, this is a woman stalking a man?

**LE:** Yes. And he came and his situation had been horrible. And he agreed to come and testify for my bill. And this woman entered their home and wrote things in lipstick, love notes on the mirror, in the bathroom. And left a present. And the wife was sure her husband was having an affair and had requested a divorce. And it was a terrible situation, but he was willing to come. And when my colleagues heard his story, they didn't think it was, 'Oh, that lady thinks he's such a handsome man, she's just admiring him.' They thought it was... Became a serious issue. So harassment and a pattern of harassing behavior was something they would vote for. So the bill passed.

**DM:** So you got that bill through.

**LE:** I got that bill through. And actually that bill I've had over the many years, not perhaps over the last 10 years, but in the beginning, I had more calls on that particular piece of legislation for legislative intent than any other bill I carried.

**DM:** And when you say legislative intent, what do you mean?

**LE:** In the bill, in the beginning of each bill introduced, there's a legislative content, the legislative digest that tells you what the law says now and what this bill proposes to do. And then, when you would test... When you would go to testify before the committee, you would embellish on that, 'And here's why I'm putting this in and here's my constituent, and this is what happened to her', and all that.



**DM:** And so, you would get calls asking what your goal was with this bill? And calls for law enforcement, calls for...

**LE:** What my legislative... No, it would mainly... No, it was mainly attorneys who were, had cases.

**DM:** Ah okay. So this set a civil... This was a civil action.

**LE:** Right.

**DM:** Yeah. And, and so Governor Brown signed that into law?

**LE:** Yes, he did.

**DM:** And you said you had some interaction with him on that?

**LE:** Well, that was... And so, I have a picture of him, and he wrote the name, 'Good job'. And I have the lady, the picture of her and Governor Brown and myself with him signing the bill.