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Gauvreau, N. Paul oral history interview

Andrea L'Hommedieu

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Interview with N. Paul Gauvreau by Andrea L'Hommedieu

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Gauvreau, N. Paul

Interviewer

L'Hommedieu, Andrea

Date

October 5, 2001

Place

Lewiston, Maine

ID Number

MOH 319

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Biographical Note

Norman Paul Gauvreau was born in Burlington, Vermont on August 4, 1948. He grew up in Lewiston in a Franco-American community. He attended the University of Maine in Orono and was active in the political protests and activist struggles of the times, including the Vietnam War. He worked for the Community Action Agency in Augusta, and then attended the University of Maine School of Law, graduating in 1975. He had been practicing law for the last twenty-six years at the time of this interview. Gauvreau ran for the state legislature in 1982, and has served in both the Maine House and Senate.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: Lewiston political history; environmental protection work; Anti-Vietnam War movement; Democratic Convention of 1968; Civil Rights movement in Maine; Maine politicians; "English Only" Bill; Maine Commission on Legal Needs; and Muskie's environmental work.

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Transcript

Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview with N. Paul Gauvreau on October the 5th, the year 2001, at the Muskie Project office in Lewiston, Maine. This is Andrea L'Hommedieu. Could you just start by giving me your full name and spelling it?

N. Paul Gauvreau: My name is Norman Paul Gauvreau, and Gauvreau is spelled G-A-U-V-R-

E-A-U.

AL: And where and when were you born?

NPG: I was born in Burlington, Vermont in August of 1948, August 4th, 1948.

AL: And when did you move to Lewiston?

NPG: My father came back to Lewiston, where he grew up, to begin his medical practice, and that was in 1952.

AL: So you grew up in Lewiston? What was it like growing up in Lewiston in the fifties?

NPG: I think it was a pretty normal existence. I grew up in an upper middle class family, very strong intact values, the city was undergoing some change. The textile base was waning and the city in the sixties was trying to diversify its base, although much of that wasn't lost on me in my junior high school and high school years. I was focusing up on adolescent issues and not those issues. The sixties were a very interesting time. The Kennedy presidency fascinated a lot of us, and then of course the horror of his assassination. And then that went into the war years, so a very interesting tableau growing up. But I had a very, very normal adolescence; went to high school here in Lewiston. Was very involved in activities, and went off to college. And then I think I began to form my world views and things changed.

AL: And what schools did you attend in Lewiston?

NPG: Let's see, I went to Pettengill elementary school, and then I went to McMahon, or Montello, at that time went from grade seven through nine. And then I went to high school, Lewiston High School which at that time was grades ten through twelve.

AL: And what was the sense of the Franco-American community at that time?

NPG: Well, I had an interesting perspective. My father is traditional French Catholic background on my father's side. My father married my mother, who was from Beverly Hills, California whom he met, she was a secretary in the military when he went out and was stationed in San Diego. He was in the Marines, and he went out to fight in the Pacific theater. He met her there, and they married right before he was shipped out, not knowing whether he would return to see her. Fortunately he did return to see her, came back at the end of the war, and brought her back to Lewiston. It was hard for her because Lewiston was a very insulated community at that time. Much has been written about, correctly, the prejudice visited upon the Franco American community. But it's also true there was a reverse discrimination going on that the Franco's were somewhat suspicious of people who were not of Franco heritage. And my mother who is Episcopalian, you know, experienced that in a way that's not widely discussed. But, so she found it difficult coming into the community. I didn't, I was just, people were people to me, it didn't make any difference at all. This was my world, I didn't know anything else.

AL: Do you have any examples of how that was expressed, her made to feel uncomfortable?

NPG: She was uncom-, I think she was uncomfortable in different social settings. People just, she was just viewed as an outsider and she never really felt totally comfortable for a while.

AL: Was there a lot of speaking the French language in the community still at that time?

NPG: Yes, it was much more so then than now; absolutely so. My mother is not fluent in the French language. My father is, and the children basically learned French in school because we didn't speak French at home, in our home. The French, French was definitely much more significant part of the culture, you know, *Le Messenger* was a popular newspaper back when I was growing up. And in many homes, French was the primary language. So it's changed a good deal now as the grandchildren have basically gotten away from the French heritage a bit.

AL: *Le Messenger*, do you remember that being influential to the Franco-American community?

NPG: Yes it definitely was. Absolutely, absolutely, absolutely. And it was a very strong voice to maintain the culture, French culture. Because there was certainly a sense even back then that the French culture was under attack. You know, being assimilated into the greater American community.

AL: When did you become aware of your interest in politics?

NPG: Well, that's an interesting question. I know that in high school I was absolutely captivated by the Civil Rights movement. Absolutely, I just, I was enthralled. I was, I admired the leaders in the movement, the images on TV especially marchers, demonstrators being thrust back by police. O'Connor seeking the police dogs against the demonstrators in Selma, Alabama. Those images were very, very strong. And, I never could understand why anyone would treat anybody different based upon the color of their skin. And, but it was painfully apparent. It had been going on for a long time in our country. And it became a very, very important issue.

The other issue that was also very important to me was that of sexism. I can, Lewiston was a very traditional community. I can recall our salutarian in high school was not allowed to go on to college by her family and I just, I can recall being dumbfounded, dumbfounded at why would that, how could that possibly exist. And I, in many ways, women were consigned to traditional roles back in the sixties. So those two issues I felt very strongly about.

And I did get involved. I got involved, as soon as I went to college I got involved, of course the other was the anti-war movement that was, that really had taken over college campuses. And I can recall 1968 going to the Democratic convention down in Portland, meeting Senator Muskie who spoke. He met for about an hour with many of us college students who had been protesting the war and listened to our views, and we had a very interesting discussion at that time. And of course he by then was a very prominent national leader, and had been nominated himself to the vice presidential nomination on the ticket, as it turned out. So that was a fascinating convention, and I came away just enthralled by politics. And for the next four or five years I was very involved helping everybody's campaign I could possibly imagine. I would do whatever had to

get done. Make phone calls, leafletting, do plant gates, mailings, whatever had to be done, you know, there's a great deal of work in politics obviously.

AL: And where were you attending college?

NPG: I went to college at the University of Maine in Orono. And I met a generation of political leaders. Jim Tierney was one class ahead of me. And Jim and I became friends. Steve Hughes, who came from Auburn, who was very involved and he also ran. He actually was a very young legislator, he was in law school and also, he was tapped by Gov. Curtis to sit on the, as a trustee of University of Maine. And so at the time Steve had the distinction of being the youngest legislator and the youngest trustee. And so, Fred Broder from Auburn ran, and he kind of ran against the establishment and I managed his campaigns. We were doing all sorts of things at every single level. It was very interesting.

AL: Were there any professors at the University of Maine at Orono that influenced you?

NPG: Oh, there were several. Robert Thompson just was a brilliant theoretician and really, he was just very influential in terms of providing intellectual order. Gene Mawhinney was a wonderful man, the head of the political science department and just a very gracious individual. A true genuine love of American democracy. Ken Curtis, a special friend, Ken Curtis just, Ken Curtis still brings a tear to my eye. He's just, he passionately believed in what this country's all about and expressed that through his teaching. And of course he became very active politically, and so I worked with him on some of his political efforts as well. And there were other people, too, at the university to be sure.

AL: Was Ken Hayes a professor yet?

NPG: Ken Hayes was a professor, yes, he was, he was, yeah. I can recall coming to class, it was the morning after the 1968 presidential election, and Ken had been up all night and just, he just, I can't teach today, I'm just too tired. Nixon had won the election and he was obviously depressed. And he was just, it was an interesting, you know, Ken, he had, he could be detached but you could also see how he was very much involved in the process. Jimmy Henderson was another person up at Orono who, oh, there were so many people that I met on the faculty and students. Charlie Jacobs, Jim Tierney, Stan Cowan, a lot of people who I met then, that were very active politically. And have kept that up through the years.

AL: I had the advantage of being taught by both Gene Mawhinney and Ken Hayes during my college years.

NPG: So you know they're really wonderful people.

AL: Yes, yeah.

NPG: I enjoyed them very much.

AL: What were your impressions of Senator Muskie when you went and saw him speak about

the war issues?

NPG: Well, Senator Muskie was obviously a very able individual. Young people were very suspicious back in those days. I don't think I was as suspicious as they were. I, but there were some who questioned the integrity. Everybody in the establishment and Senator Muskie, for right or wrong, was part of the establishment. And so when he came and offered a leavening tone, people saw that as him selling out. I didn't have that sense, but there were some, a little more strident voices I think in the anti-war movement, who tended to be very naive and arrogant almost that they had a monopoly on wisdom. And who were these old people? What do they know? Well, of course Senator Muskie obviously, I think his record stands for itself. But I was impressed with his willingness to engage us in dialogue. There was much said about the Muskie temper, and he had a few moments when he would shoot back and it was, oh, okay. But I was impressed at how this very powerful, important national Senator would sit an hour with us. And I thought that was, ultimately, I thought that was really quite a thing. I was very impressed with him.

And I think, I met him several times after that in the course of my state career, I'd meet him at political events, I'd go down to his home for the Muskie clambake and so on. And I have, I still have, in my office I have a photograph of Senator Muskie and me when I was in the Senate president's office. They took a picture of that, one of my favorite pictures. So I certainly came to admire Ed Muskie as a person of extraordinary will. There were many bright people serving in Washington, but Senator Muskie was able to identify core issues, core regional issues, budgetary issues and environmental issues. And I've always thought it ironic that in a state where the power companies and the forest parks industry dominated the state legislature to the point that we could not have meaningful environmental reform. It took a Maine senator to go to Washington to force Washington, to have Washington force Maine to finally recognize its ecological heritage.

AL: Now, you touched on this a little bit, but could you give me a sense of what the overall student response was in Maine and the student body of Senator Muskie's stand on the Vietnam War?

NPG: Well, there was, the campuses were increasingly getting very active. And they wanted people to be pure on Vietnam. They had people like Gene McCarthy and George McGovern and Robert Kennedy who had come out strongly opposed to any involvement and to immediately cease the involvement. Senator Muskie was not of that view. He was, I think he wanted to have a responsible detachment from, in Vietnam. And so he was not perceived as being the leading national voice in the anti war movement. There were other national leaders, I think, who college students tended to focus around and some of them offered their candidacies for the presidency. Of course we now know that Senator Muskie obviously was trying to balance a variety of interests, including loyalty to the administration. But that wasn't seen to college students, they just basically saw the issue in black and white terms.

AL: After college, what did you do?

NPG: I took a year off and I went to work for a community action agency up in Augusta, and I

was asked to focus on transportation problems for low-income populations. It was a very meaningful part of my life. I had studied political theory four years, and I found myself trekking out a mile or two in the woods to these little shacks, unheated shacks, and people were shivering, living there in February and my whole world changed in terms of the impact of poverty and the disparate allocation of resources in this country. And it really was quite a, it left quite an impression, working, trying to develop strategies to assist low income people, to empower them and provide basic health care, housing, transportation, economic skills. I taught some people, kids who would drop out of school, I led a class to get them, help get their GED. It was very enjoyable and I felt it was just, it was a whole new experience for me. And then I went to law school, went to law school at the University of Maine in Portland and graduated in 1975, and have practiced law for the last twenty-six years.

AL: Now, where were you living all this time? Bangor and then Portland area?

NPG: Yeah, I went, I lived up in Orono and in Bangor when I went to the university. And then of all things I lived on Westport Island and commuted to Augusta when I worked for the CAP agency. That was a strange thing, but it was what I was doing. And then I lived of course in Portland for the three years of law school. Then I got, my first job out of law school was in Waterville. So I worked for a lawyer there for three years in Waterville. And then my wife was a librarian, was trying to find work in her field in Maine and that was very, very difficult, it was a very difficult market for librarians to penetrate. And as it turned out, an opening developed at St. Mary's Hospital in Lewiston for a medical librarian and we jumped at it because we knew there were very few opportunities for Evelyn. So I came back to Lewiston with her. And I set up, well I just, well I came back and I was filling up my car with gasoline I saw a lawyer I had met a couple years ago, we had a discussion and the next thing you know we went to the bank and took a loan out and opened up a law practice.

AL: Oh wow.

NPG: So, and that worked out pretty well.

AL: Was that lawyer politically active, too?

NPG: Yes, that was Paul Thibeault. He was quite active, he had gone to Bowdoin and he was working for Pine Tree Legal Assistance. And he was the one who came to me later on and asked me to run for the state legislature.

AL: And what year was that that you ran?

NPG: I ran in 1982. The Democratic Party was looking for a candidate. Romeo Boisvert had died in office and so there was an open seat. And I ran and lost to his widow in a special election. But it was fascinating, and I really enjoyed the process and so when the widow didn't run for reelection the following spring, I again announced my candidacy and got elected.

AL: And that was what year?

NPG: That was, well I was, that would be, let's see here. I guess actually Romeo had died in January '82 so I got elected in November of '82.

AL: Eighty-two.

NPG: That's right. And very interesting election, we worked very hard. I had a three way primary to get the Democratic nomination. But I had no one running against me in the fall so I worked for other Democratic candidates. And that was also the year that George Mitchell ran for the U.S. Senate on his own. He had been appointed after Senator Muskie had become secretary of state. And I can still recall just the joy when Senator Muskie, when Senator Mitchell, George Mitchell, came back to Lewiston to celebrate his election to the U.S. Senate. There was just an extraordinary sense of pride at that. Because this is, we had actually succeeded in electing this person who we had great respect for to the U.S. Senate. And so that was the beginning of my career. I stayed for ten years in the legislature. I served one term in the house and then there was an opening in the senate. I was asked to run for that, I did run for that. I succeeded, and I served eight years in the Maine senate mostly working on issues of health care and civil justice issues.

AL: Whose seat did you replace in the senate?

NPG: Richard Charette. It was a very odd circumstance, politics being what it was. Richard was working for Northeast Bank at the time, not the current iteration but a prior iteration of Northeast Bank. He was the senate chair of the banking committee and the bank told him he had to leave his job. He thought it was an odd thing, but he did. So there was an opening and so I was asked to run and I thought about it for a while and then I ran.

That was interesting because I walked the city of Lewiston and met a lot of people and really became aware of how close knit a community it really is. Many folks had known my father who was an obstetrician, had known my grandfather who was a surgeon. There were very few practitioners in the early part of the century, and so a lot of the older population knew immediately who my grandfather was, would start speaking to me in French and so we had discussions. My French wasn't that good, but we had discussions. And I came to really appreciate the role of my family in the community. And I later on came to recognize that when I got elected it was really as much a validation for what my grandfather and my father had done as what I had done. I was very, very aware of that.

AL: And your grandfather, he practiced in Lewiston?

NPG: My grandfather practiced in Lewiston. He was, my grandfather was an extraordinary man, Horace Gauvreau. He was very active, he was involved in the city council, involved in local politics. My grandfather, there was a time in my life, I came to Lewiston (*unintelligible phrase*), but then my father went to outside Boston to do his residency so we lived for four years outside of Boston in a small town, it was a small town then, Waltham. And we'd come up on weekends occasionally to visit my grandparents. They had a magnificent home on Horton Street, which is now a nursing home, but it was just, to a young boy this home was just, it was just unbelievable. It was a paradise. And I can recall my grandfather would always call us, you

know, he always watched Meet the Press, Lawrence Spivak, you know, he'd talk about the issues of the day. And it was very important to him, and it was a, and my grandmother, Louise, really was just as strong a person as my grandfather was. And then we'd have these extraordinary discussions on politics. And that was really, at age eight and nine I began to really, I now look back and understand that's where my real interest in community affairs developed. And it's hard to express just how strong a person my grandfather was, but that was, so. I'm not sure how I got on that tangent. But that's, I know we did that.

AL: Did your grandparents grow up in Lewiston, or did they come here?

NPG: My grandparents came in from, my grandfather immigrated to Lewiston from, well from Vermont. He came from Vermont, Winooski, (*unintelligible word*), that's right. And my mother, part of the Lebel family, she, my grandmother, she was from Lewiston. The Lebel family is an amazing family. There's, go way back with them. And they were many of them, they had a big family. The Lebel's and the Cliffords became very, very close, were close friends. And they're still very active in the political community today.

That's how I got involved in politics, I guess. It was the question. I think, I look back at it, I had an orientation to go into political affairs and when I was asked to run I was somewhat anxious about that because I really was naive as far as the economics of trying to run a business, run a law practice and be a lawyer, and be a legislator. I now look back and understand there's no easy way to do that. I understand why lawyers from small firms serve in the legislature and not large firms because, tend to have conflicts of interest which would deprive large firms of significant clientele basis. So, so small firms usually send lawyers to the legislature, and it's very stressful. You're working eighty hours a week and there's no vacation time. You love what you do but it's very, very demanding work. I mean, you work on Christmas, you work all the time if you care about the quality of your work. So it's, so I did that for ten years and then I realized that it was a great ride but I had other objectives in my life, not least of which was being a father to my children. And so I left in '92 and set out to build my practice up and spend more time with the family. And I've achieved those goals partially, but I tend to be a workaholic so I'm not home as much as I should be.

AL: Now tell me, I'm interested to know, you had these political discussions and listening to your grandfather talk about issues. And I'm wondering what sense you had of the local community politics happening in the Lewiston area when you were growing up. If you remember some of the political figures of that time, and if you can tell me about them and what role they played, and also how Lewiston politics have evolved or changed over time.

NPG: Sure, well Lewiston pol-, Lewiston had undergone a major restructuring of its government in the mid-thirties as a result of substantial corruption in city government. And a lot of authority was reposed within the finance committee and personnel committee, and the issues that my grandfather spoke a lot about, some of them are national issues to be sure, about American involvement overseas, or the Civil Rights movement. But certainly the local issues were probably more about economic development. I can recall when Raytheon came to Lewiston, there was a great debate about that. They're now, they were in the buildings now occupied by Liberty Mutual out on Lisbon Street. And you know, Raytheon was going to

challenge the economic infrastructure of Lewiston because they were going to pay a higher wage rate. And a lot of the chamber of commerce people didn't like that because they'd have raise wages and pay people you know higher wages, and so there was great debate about the economic development issues at the time. And, or developing certain properties, and that was a very local issue that my grandfather would get involved in. And my grandfather was very active, he owned several properties and was a landlord for a while, so he was quite active.

AL: Do you remember some of the political figures from this area that were active over the years?

NPG: Frank Coffin certainly, and Bill Hathaway. Bill Hathaway, a good friend of my family's, my parents played golf with him, he was the other lawyer in Auburn. I got to know him a bit, he invited me to Washington so I interned in his office for two summers, and that was a very interesting experience when I was in college. I interned in D.C. two years. And those were two turbulent years, they were 1968 and '69. And so I can recall I was in Washington in '68, very active time. I guess it was enough. The first day I got to Washington Senator Kennedy had been assassinated. I went to my aunt's house in New York, outside New York City, we learned the news that night. Everyone was in shock. I went to Washington, the city was in mourning. I can recall when the train came in bearing Senator Kennedy's coffin. People were just lining the streets, they were crying. It was just very, very searing emotional times. And that was of course the background of everything that was going on with the war in Vietnam and the rebellion of young people in our society. And so I worked with Senator Hathaway for two years. He was Representative Hathaway then, in the house.

AL: Did you get a sense of what his working relationship was with Senator Muskie?

NPG: He had, yeah, I mean he, he would, the Maine delegation was very close. It was a small state, everyone caucused together, worked together on regional issues. Senator Muskie of course, we all had great pride in Senator Muskie because he was a national leader. But I wouldn't, I don't think I saw, I didn't see Senator Muskie I don't think that whole summer, the first time I was there. I spent my time mostly just doing interning work in the house. And let's see, political figures growing up.

AL: I'm thinking of people like Paul Couture, or Louis Jalbert.

NPG: I knew Paul, well I got to know Paul quite well. And Louis, yeah, Louis very well. I served also a year as an intern in state government in Augusta for the Legislative Research Council, a predecessor to the Office of Policy and Legal Analysis. And I was asked to write a study on environmental regulation in Maine. And that was quite an eye opener for me. And Louis and I would see each other daily. So I had known Louis a bit before then, met him like in some conventions. And then I began to really, I knew him very well then. And I would see Louis regularly and of course then ultimately I ended up serving in the legislature with him eight years later on. And I actually have Louis Jalbert's desk in my office. Because when they, when the house remodeled they sold their desks and I bought Louis' desk.

Louis was an enigma, I mean it's really hard, it's hard to describe, it would take a long time to

describe Louis Jalbert. And Louis was very shrewd. Louis was focused on issues beyond insular Lewiston. A lot of the members tended to focus on very local issues, like giving a liquor license to someone. They didn't really have broader perspectives in terms of infrastructure or, and Louis did. And Louis was a player. Because he had longevity he was, he rapidly ascended to Democratic leadership, which was not a whole lot back in the fifties because the Republicans ran the legislature and Democrats showed up for their paycheck. But Louis was on the appropriations committee and became very adroit in exercising his power. And then also was a mentor to people like Jim Handy and Greg Nadeau and me when we went up to the legislature. I mean, I got along well with Louis. Sometimes people would clash, but Louis was always a very interesting figure. He wasn't a polarizing figure to me, I mean I, Louis, on the, the seminal issue of my time was probably getting funding for the University of Maine in Lewiston-Auburn because we had been an outpost for so long. Louis had been the dean of funding for technical colleges, and so I think he was concerned about draining resources from the technical schools to the university. We tried to explain that it was really trying to provide even funding for all different avenues of higher education. But, you know, Louis, I got along with Louis.

AL: As you've seen Lewiston represented over the years in the legislature and Lewiston as, looking at it from that area as opposed to the whole state, how has Lewiston been, I don't, not benefited, but how has Lewiston been served by their legislative representatives over the years?

NPG: Oh, I think it's been mixed. First of all you understand that by the very nature of the process, anybody, Maine's a very open state, you can run for office, get elected, don't have to wait twenty years to be a senior person to run such as in New York or in Pennsylvania or whatnot. We've had, and so you had people from different perspectives serve in the legislature. Of different abilities and perspectives. And Lewiston's had a varied experience. They've had some members, Robert Clifford for example, exemplary, but I don't, (*unintelligible phrase*) of his nature obviously. Greg Nadeau I thought was a superb legislator from our area. And others who just have not had a state wide perspective on Lewiston, sometimes has not acted.

Lewiston has had this inferiority complex and has tended to view the state as ignoring the needs of Lewiston, as opposed to appreciating that there are urban-rural issues in state legislatures. And that it makes sense to align on, I worked with Peter Manning who was the house chair of the human resources committee, and we wrote the law on general assistance which was a win-win situation and helped communities like Lewiston and Portland that spent a lot of local funds to assisting poor people. It allowed some flexibility of the funding formulas and it was not a case of Lewiston against Portland. Even today when I see people try to raise the shibboleth, discouragingly it's banal politics, it's setting one group against another. There's nothing profitable, there's nothing profitable in that.

Politics can be very exhilarating and effective when people forge coalitions and create positive structures. It can also be, it can also bring out the worst in us when people appeal to base motives, fear, prejudice, hatred. And I saw some of that in the last election cycle, issues on siting the postal center, and somehow, you know, trying to vilify leaders in the Portland community who were trying to represent labor people who worked in the postal service. I didn't, I don't understand what the reasoning for that is, because one thing that's hurt Lewiston over the years has been this obsession because we have a lot of people of Franco heritage, somehow the

other parts of the state were committed against us, that's just fatuous. You have to basically state your case, make a good strong case, and work with others. That, I think the model for that is probably Lewiston-Auburn College, which has been a resounding success. Yet, it addressed the broad needs of a certain cohort in the community, people who had left school early, needed to go back and finish their school, have a, just a vibrant thirst for higher education. You see people in their forties, fifties, come back. It's just been a wonderful success story. And we had to deal with such sophomoric issues as, well where are we going to locate it, oh we can't put it in the Peck's buildings, you know, we want the Sylvan community for a university. People really couldn't understand the interrelationship between culture and economic development and personal opportunity that higher education in all its forms represents. But we were able to work with people in our community and enlighten legislators elsewhere to actually build a coalition. And the university I think began to understand that if it added Lewiston-Auburn to its campuses, there was a ten percent voting share in the state elections that would actually be inclined to vote for state bond issues. So they finally understood that it was good to bring Lewiston into the community as opposed to keeping them outside.

AL: And so from your perspective that would be the strongest way to sort of boost the self esteem or self confidence of this area in terms of how they see themselves in relation to the rest of the state?

NPG: Lewiston-Auburn has many extraordinary attributes. The people are wonderful. I can say this because I've actually knocked on their doors; I've been in their homes. They are very, very hard working, honest, honorable people with strong values. They should be very proud of that. I'd put people in Lewiston-Auburn up with any community. And the fact that some of them didn't go on to college or graduate school, phooey. They've got great instincts, they're hard working, they believe in honor. A day's work is a day's work; they'll give you everything they possibly have. And they have great pride and they have sacrifices for their children and their families. I think, frankly I've tired of this whole discussion about Lewiston feeling inferior. They should, Lewiston should just be proud of the work that people in this community do. But also respect the work of other communities as well. And the work, and people of Irish or Italian, it really matters not. It seems obvious that what really counts is what's inside a person. And I only get, I get discouraged when I see some people, they don't play racial politics in Maine, they play ethnic politics. And it's really, nothing ever good comes from setting one group up against another, it's always destructive.

AL: It sounds, that brings to mind the "English only" bill that was brought up in the legislature last year.

NPG: By Tom Shields. Yeah, Tom Shields is, I think is a friend of mine. I've known Tom professionally because when I was in practice over here I'd use him as a witness occasionally. Good friend of the family, treated me when I broke my bones playing sports. Tom's a conservative Texas guy. I think he's an honorable gentleman. I just don't understand where he's coming from on that issue. You can't kind of force that orthodoxy upon people. If it fits well, it will fit well. English is a critical language and people understand that. But other languages, French and Spanish and other languages are equally important. And if there's one problem we have in our country, it's Americans are not bilingual. Americans tend to be sort of isolationist

and ethnocentric. And the study of languages and cultures begins to foster our appreciation for the skills and ability and knowledge other cultures have accumulated.

AL: Tell me about how you came to be on the Maine Commission on Legal Needs, unless I'm skipping something in between.

NPG: Well I was on the, I was the senate chair of the judiciary committee for two terms. And the Maine Bar Foundation, and many groups in Maine, had become clearly aware, certainly during the Reagan era, of the yawning (*unintelligible word*) between legal services and their access to lower income populations. The governor and then President Reagan had a real visceral aversion to the efficacy of legal services to lower income populations born of experiences with legal rights groups representing farm work groups in California, and he took that animus with him to Washington. And one of the goals of President Reagan had been to eliminate federal funding for legal services. And in Maine, legal services was not viewed as a partisan issue. People of all different points of view came together and understood how important it was for people to have access to legal services as part of their normal life. To have a will drawn or a contract drawn up, or to have some services so one could be processed for a divorce or whatever it was.

And so there were certainly, Howard Dana, who is now a judge on our Maine, on our law court, was then a leader in the American Bar Association, a Maine representative, and he, a staunch Republican, strongly opposed President Reagan's initiatives. Our legislators in Washington did a wonderful job. And Senator Muskie amongst them, Senator Muskie clearly very strongly felt the need for equal access born of his early career as a lawyer in Waterville, and his passion in a sense for civil justice and he understood how important it was to have access to these services. And he lent his prestige to this effort. He could have lent his name, he could have simply come in and signed the document and that would have been wonderful. No, Senator Muskie went all over the state. And Senator Muskie sat through hours and hours of testimony with grace and respect for Maine people, and if there was, the process of watching Senator Muskie interact, and of course there was a love at that time, and I can recall, once I'd actually drive Senator Muskie places and people would come up to him with tears in their eyes. It was just, it was a love affair. It's hard to describe. They just knew how much this man cared about Maine people. And for him to have done that, he went so far beyond what he had to do, his influence was extraordinary.

And people like Speaker [John] Martin in the legislature steered the package through. A lot of people in the private sector cared passionately about legal services. Maine is always the highest state in the country in terms of hours of volunteer services of lawyers in Maine. A fact not widely understood or appreciated. Danny Wathen, Chief Justice Wathen, a very strong articulate voice for equal justice. It's not a partisan issue in Maine, it's a matter of just respect for our neighbor. And that makes living in our state very special I think. And Senator Muskie I think embodied all those values, and believe me, he, his contributions are on that. He not only lent his prestige, he clearly passionately cared about making this process come to pass.

AL: What have we seen as a result of that commission in the years following?

NPG: Well, we live in a nation of significant disparity of opportunity, or wealth. And the last

decade, with the rapid growth of the stock market increased the disparity in some classes in our country. And legal services have become very, very expensive. When I was a young lawyer we could do a divorce for three hundred dollars, today the same divorce would cost twenty-five hundred dollars. It's very discouraging. We are providing a lot of services. Legal services is being funded at a much reduced level by the Congress, President Clinton was able to negotiate with the Congress and keep legal services intact. We have fewer legal services offices in Maine. We have a lot of volunteer effort on the part of Maine lawyers and we have the Maine Bar Foundation funding initiatives, the Cumberland County Legal Aid Clinic. We now see providing services for crime victims. We see volunteer lawyers coming in helping domestic violence crimes for example. And to help advocate and get restraining orders, protective orders, enforce bail conditions. We're beginning now to understand that there's more than simply providing nuts and bolts divorce services, but a whole array of other legal services as well. The attorney general's office where I work, I mean all of our lawyers go to Portland routinely to help out in the volunteer lawyers project, and we call lawyers throughout the state. Many of them are wonderful in terms of giving hundreds, well hundreds of hours really a year to provide free legal services. And so I think we're making a significant impact. We're certainly are not at a point that we will be when we have equal justice for all, but we try. And I think that the commitment to providing these core services is very strong in Maine. And it's keenly held by our governor and by our legislature.

AL: I'm going to stop and flip the tape.

End of Side A
Side B

AL: . . . On side B of the interview with Mr. N. Paul Gauvreau. Go ahead, you were just wrapping up talking about the Maine Commission on Legal Needs. Over the time period that you've known Senator Muskie, you knew him, had contact with him, you know, observed him, what do you think some of his strengths were?

NPG: Well Senator Muskie understood the relationship of man, or man or woman, to the community and also to the environment. He developed a very keen respect for the fragility of the ecosystem and the need to constantly stand vigilant to protect the environment. And he understood the power of our government forces, which were not antithetical to the environment but really didn't have environmental protection as a significant issue. For decades in our country it had been standard fair to despoil the water, to despoil the air, it was a by-product of progress and it was taken for granted that this just was a compromise that had to occur. And Senator Muskie said, no, it's not true at all, that there's a moral obligation on the part of every generation to leave the world in the condition, or in a better condition than that in which we found it. And began to change the whole paradigm of how we looked at the world and looked at our ecology. And yes, there was a (*unintelligible word*) cost to that, it would retard economic development, it would cost money, public sector or private sector, to actually initiate systems to purge these pollutants from the ecosystem. But he, through the strength of his personality, and a really strong personality, and his work ethic was able to develop strong coalitions across party lines to make that come to pass. There were others, Gaylord Nelson, in Wisconsin, clearly, Senator Williams in New Jersey, but there were clearly people who were very aware of the fragility of

the ecology and how important it was for government to play a lead role in policing the pollution that was going on in the system. That was a great contribution of Senator Muskie.

And I think his strength of character and his work ethic came to the fore. It wasn't a passing issue for him. He worked in obscurity for many years in the Senate committee on public works. And then eventually, as sometimes happens, there is this delightful coincidence between the person's work product and the mood of the country. And around the late sixties people began to realize that, hey, the environment was important. And people like Senator Muskie who had worked for a long time on those issues all of a sudden were in the vanguard, ironically, because now, oh yeah, these people actually care about this. And, but Senator Muskie was able to sustain that initiative. And really, I think, in form, the Maine policy, his successor, George Mitchell took up the Muskie mantle and, you know, after Senator Muskie retired Senator Mitchell was able to shepherd the Clean Air Act through the Congress. And even today we see industry trying to, certainly with the Bush administration, seen trying to have them, relax the standards of the Clean Air Act, which is discouraging.

It tells us again that this is not a battle easily won. It's a constant, constant issue. We will always have voices in our community, in our society, telling us to relax, that we need to make compromises. That's what we need, oil, you know, in the north slope of Alaska. And, but not telling us to engage in conservation measures. And, I think Senator Muskie would have, Senator Muskie could certainly make his point very clearly that that was not the way responsible people behave. As mature adults you have to honor the environment and you have to use its resources very carefully. So I think his strength of character and his work ethic, prodigious work ethic, really served him very, very well.

And people respected that. He became, as did Margaret Chase Smith, really above politics in Maine. Those two actors, when I was growing up, those two people, were honored by Maine people. I mean, it was very difficult for Maine voters when they turned Margaret Chase Smith away in favor of Bill Hathaway. It was a very painful choice for them to make because they respected Margaret Chase Smith so much. Senator Muskie I think just had the great sense of timing, when it was time for him to move on to other office. And he finished his career as Secretary of State.

AL: You said you were, you had quite an interest in the Civil Rights movement.

NPG: Yes.

AL: Did you ever notice some of the local people here in Maine that played a big part in the state of Maine, like Elizabeth Jonitis?

NPG: Yes, yes I did.

AL: Jerry Talbot?

NPG: Jerry Talbot, certainly, yes.

AL: What effect do you think they had in Maine, and what were the issues in Maine and how did that all play out?

NPG: Well of course Maine has been a homogenous state, by and large. With the exception of Portland, and only because as it turned out the railway ended in Portland and given the history of, in our country, of economic recrimination against people of color, a lot of people, African Americans, worked in service jobs on the railway because they weren't allowed entry to other positions. So we had a lot of African Americans settling in the Portland area. Retiring, living or retiring from the railway. And so you have, but you didn't have many black people in Maine. And so because there were so few people of color in Maine, it wasn't a big issue, as it was in states where you had larger concentrations of minorities. Then, the power structure tends to fear those groups. It didn't happen in Maine so much.

So it was kind of a matter of, the issues of people of color were kind of off the chart in Maine politics. And so when you had people like Elizabeth Jonitis or Louis Scolnik, people like that, there were many, many others. I'm not sure why I can't think straight this morning, but there was never really a cutting issue in Maine. And it never really has been. I mean, I hate to say it but civil rights is still an issue that's not to the front and center of Maine politics. Our office, the attorney general's office, actually I sponsored legislation when I was in the senate to create the current civil rights act which allows the attorney general to seek injunctive relief against persons who discriminate against others because of gender, race, nationality, sexual orientation. And we do have a persistent history of hate crime in Maine. It's not widely reported. It's not as pervasive as domestic violence or alcohol related crime, which are the two most serious forces, but we have a significant number of instances of prejudice and hate crimes. And that erodes at the integrity of the social fabric.

So I think in recent years, certainly people at the epicenter of the legal system, the chief justice, the attorney general, have been very articulate in advocating for a system, which enforces and vindicates civil rights. But it's still not at the cutting edge. I mean, this state has grappled, I don't know, twenty five years, thirty years, with the issue on whether or not the state should enact legislation to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation. Many other communities have addressed that issue and gone on, and decided that that discrimination is inappropriate. In Maine, we've taken one step forward to six backward. People, I've never understood what the issue is, but it seems to me that no one should be shunted aside or discriminated against based upon their sexual orientation. It really is, it shouldn't be a such an issue, but it has tremendous emotional value even today.

So I don't think the civil rights movement has been a dominant issue in Maine because other issues, economic opportunity, educational opportunity, have always held sway. It's hard to live in Maine, it's hard for people to make a living in Maine. It's a harsh environment and those issues tend to have salience, civil rights is, oh yeah, it's good to do that, we want to live together in peace. But no one really makes the commitment. So when you have the people who come forward to make the case for civil justice, I mean I appreciate that because it's really, there's usually not a lot of political fare in advocating civil rights in Maine. Jerry Conley, both senior and junior, I served with both of them, and they both were very strong spokes persons for civil rights in Maine and they make the point that it's very easy for them to, majorities tend not to

want to support civil liberties.

AL: Is there anything else that I haven't asked you that you feel is important to add today?

NPG: Let's see, I think only that people like Senator Muskie have probably materially assisted in the Democratic process in the state in the sense that they attracted generations to enter public service. Senator Muskie was always proud of expressing the honor and dignity in public service, and how important it was for people not simply to simply observe public affairs or comment upon them, but to actively participate. Democracy is not a spectator sport, and the strength of one's community and (*unintelligible word*) is directly related to the commitment of its citizenry to actively engage themselves in the political world. And that politics is an honorable art. It's the art of what can occur, what can, what people can put together. And we've seen historically people in our society and other societies who have used politics. I think of a Gandhi or I think of Mandela, or Martin Luther King, who have used politics to move whole generations to higher values. And I think Senator Muskie really informed a whole generation of what their responsibility was as citizens, to take part in a democracy, and we're a better people because of that.

AL: Great, thank you very much.

NPG: OK, sure, thank you.

End of Interview