

Interview with Robert Bergland

**Interviewed by Associate Dean Ann M. Pflaum
University of Minnesota**

Interviewed on April 9, 1999

Robert Bergland - RB
Ann Pflaum - AP

AP: This is Ann Pflaum. Today is April 9, 1999. I am interviewing the Honorable Robert Bergland, who is, at the moment, a member of the Board of Regents; but, I'm going to ask him for an update of his biography, including his early education, his high school, college, and his career in Washington, if you will. Thank you very much.

RB: I was born on July 22, 1928, at Roseau way up in the northern end of the state. My mother was a school teacher. She had graduated from the one-room country school and gone to Bemidji State Normal for two years of training and was licensed to teach school in those rural places. I think she started teaching when she was seventeen years of age. My dad was a Ford Motor Company mechanic and mom and dad had a farm just south of Roseau, which I now own. I graduated from the Roseau public school system in the fall of 1946 during the war time. World War II time had a major impact on my life. My dad had been a soldier in World War I, so he had more than a casual interest in this whole thing as well.

I was very interested in farming. We lived on a farm and I could sense that there were important changes developing in farming; that is, new technology was on the horizon, not yet quite available, but it was on its way. So, I decided that I really wanted to be trained in the business of farming. On the advice of some people who I turned to for some help, including the county extension agent . . . I can't remember his name at the moment . . . Melvin Hawley, I think. He suggested that I try to enroll in the College of Agriculture in St. Paul. I tried and by the fall of 1946 or the summer of 1946, the war had ended, the G.I. Bill had become law and hundreds of thousands of returning veterans were enrolled under the G.I. Bill back to some college of higher education of many sorts. As a result, the enrollment in the College of Agriculture was filled. I was not a veteran so I didn't have that preference, but I did enroll in the School of Agriculture, which had been a high school program with an agricultural base that was converted to a post high school two-year vocational agricultural program before I came down there to school.

Getting to the university that fall was quite an experience for me. I had never been to Minneapolis in my life. Mom and dad had an old Ford Model A car that wasn't really good enough to drive to the cities, so they borrowed one from my mother's brother. It was a newer Ford. We bundled up our lunch and off we went. I remember seeing my first streetcar coming into Minneapolis from the north side.

AP: Do you remember about how long it would have taken to have driven in those days?

RB: It took all day. I don't recall exactly what time we left, but I know we got into the cities towards evening.

AP: What time of year was it, fall?

RB: In the fall, yes. It would have been in September. Mom had had experience in Minneapolis. She had worked down here for awhile in her younger years and she wanted to go over and see Foshay Tower, so we threaded our way from the north. We came in on . . . I'm trying to think of the name of that street. It's kind of a main thoroughfare—it used to be, at least. It runs way north and way south right through the west side of downtown Minneapolis.

AP: Washington Avenue?

RB: No, not Washington. There were streetcars on the street and I was really impressed by that device. We got downtown and got out to look at the Foshay Tower and I just couldn't believe that place. I thought it was the biggest building I'd ever seen; it was the biggest building I'd ever seen in my life!

We wound up over at St. Paul and I got signed in as a student in the School of Agriculture. I was assigned to a residence dormitory that has since been torn down—much to my dismay—old Pendergast Hall. It stood on the hill, right on the corner of Buford [Avenue] and Cleveland [Avenue]. It was a wonderful old dormitory building, built for that purpose in the 1890s, 1880s maybe . . . an old timer. The campus was, literally, filled with temporary quarters. The university had to accommodate this huge influx of students, largely returning war veterans on the G.I. Bill. They brought in living accommodations. They brought in these Quonset huts for married veterans to call their residence. They brought in those army huts and they sited them all over the campus. They used them as temporary teaching quarters. They were pretty cold and drafty, were not heated well, but we got by.

AP: Do you recall what courses you took?

RB: Oh, yes, I remember most of them.

I made my home in old Pendergast Hall, which was kind of a leaky old building. In the winter time, the snow would come in through the windows. We'd stuff our socks in those cracks to

keep the snow out of the room. I became acquainted with people older than me, soldiers, and others, of course.

In the course of the enrolling, I was assigned to a counselor, a teacher, Dr. Ralph Miller.

AP: Oh, sure.

RB: He was my official counselor and he and I became the best of friends. Ralph Miller talked with me a long time and he wanted to know what I was doing there and I told him that I wanted to farm. We talked about some public service stuff. He encouraged me to take courses and training that would help me in a public way and I agreed to that. I had an ability to be able to give a coherent talk. I wasn't afraid of getting up in front of people and he sensed that. I enrolled in an agricultural course. I took the usual things that were required at the time: animal industry, livestock nutrition, government, soils, organic chemistry. I think I had sixteen credit hours.

AP: That's a healthy load.

RB: It was a healthy load, but they had us load up because this was not a very long program. We crammed in a lot of credits.

AP: It would have been October through . . .

RB: Through January, two quarters in the winter, so we didn't have a lot of time to waste. It got piled together pretty tight. I spent a lot of time studying. In the winter quarter of that year, Dr. Miller encouraged me to take some other activities and I got into a course he taught: parliamentary law. I got into commercial law, which is basically contracting. I became involved in public speaking courses and programs that were sort of defacto; that is, they were not credited. There was a lot of activity of that sort that went on there in clubs and groups. This was stressed. I extended my training in history and some of the sciences. I became very active in the local campus affairs and things went well. I had good grades and I enjoyed the experience immensely. The next year, I came back, in the fall of 1947 and just sort of picked up where I'd left off: more science and more public programs, history, government.

I was developing a real interest in politics. I was a Democrat. My dad had been a Farm Laborite. That's what I was, too; I didn't know what I was. My dad had been a Republican and had voted for [Herbert] Hoover in 1928 and everything went haywire for them and dad changed his politics and became a Farm Laborite. Today, we'd call him a Socialist. So, I grew up in a household in which politics was highly regarded; so, when I got down to the university, I just sort of picked up on that basic training I had from my father and took an interest in farm labor politics. That was kind of a no-no over there, at that time. My professor of history—I don't recall his name—heard that I was active in trying to form a political action club, a DFL club, on the campus and he said, "No, we don't do things like that here. That's not permitted. We're not here to engage in such frivolous things as politics. We're here to get a serious education and you

ought not do this." He, basically, got it derailed. We never got it organized. But I did get involved in a political campaign over in Cleveland Park. I went downtown Minneapolis one day when Hubert Humphrey was running for the Senate and listened to him. I was impressed by him and I volunteered to put up literature over in Cleveland Park. He was getting ready for a run in 1948, which he made. Again, I got lectured by this professor. He'd heard that I was putting up these signs and he said that I was just going to drag the university into politics. This was no good. I couldn't do this kind of thing. He forbade it, except he didn't have any control. He tried.

I graduated in the June 1947.

AP: Would you have come back for graduation? Wouldn't the term have ended in March or by this time, had they made it a regular academic . . . ?

RB: No, not yet. It was probably March 1947 that I graduated. I had been accorded some honors. I had the Gold Letter A for academic achievement and a Sears Roebuck scholarship of fifty dollars, with which I bought a watch.

I remember one of the experiments I had in soil science class. They were encouraging the application of fertilizers. That was a new thing. I brought home some fertilizers to set up a demonstration plot on one of my dad's fields. I remember dad's brother came over to see what we were doing and he said, "That's salt. You're going to poison this land." He told my dad that he shouldn't allow me to do this. But dad had sense enough to let me go ahead and try it anyhow; so, we had a small plot of various fertilizers on a grain field near the highway. You could see those things all summer. They stood a foot taller than anything else. They had a good green color, a very healthy appearance, and, indeed, the yields were far better than anything else we had around and my dad's brother had to admit that that *salt* had some value.

AP: [laughter]

RB: It aroused a lot of interest in the community. It was a very primitive extension program, but it was one that had an impact on my life. I could see there was resistance to new technology even then.

AP: Before you go too far, the Sears Roebuck scholarship . . . they gave you a watch or you bought a watch?

RB: I bought a watch. It was the first watch I ever owned.

In thinking back, at the time when I went down there, I had never in my life seen a person of color. I had never met anybody of the Jewish faith. I lived in this rural community like did most people at the time. I never went anywhere and nobody ever came to our community, excepting those that were the folks who had risen up from the immigrant parents. And I came

to St. Paul to the university and we had people of African-American descent. There were a few Asians. I became acquainted with people of the Jewish faith. I came face to face with diversity in a very primitive form. We would engage in some real interesting discussions outside of the classroom and get acquainted with each other and found out there were some significant cultural differences. National origins were different. We had just led different lives. The university provided an opportunity for people of this sort to get to know each other and there some serious bonding that went on.

AP: When you say bonding, would this have occurred on the St. Paul campus as well?

RB: Yes.

AP: You'd be hanging around the Student Union?

RB: Social clubs. We didn't have a student union over there.

AP: When you say social clubs, what would they have been?

RB: These would be literary societies and sometimes just hanging out. A lot of it took place in the dormitory. The dormitory was a four-story building and we had a lot of social contact in that building.

I didn't know what the Jewish faith was all about until I met a fellow who was Jewish and he told me about their community and about their family. I didn't know anybody but Lutherans up where I lived, white ones at that. So, it was my first experience at getting acquainted with the rest of the world and that has stuck with me all my life. It impressed on me the importance of diversity. To this day, I'm still very strong on the need for diversity at the university. The tragedy of the war over in Bosnia is a lack of tolerance on all sides. The university needs to teach tolerance, as they did during my time in a less well-structured way.

AP: One of the issues that began to come up, though I think it was after you would have left, was the Cold War, the Red scare . . .

RB: That came a little later. That came in 1949, 1950.

AP: You would not have seen that.

RB: I didn't see that at the time. I saw a lot of prejudice there. I saw a lot of political prejudice. When they found out that I was a DFLer, they thought I was a Communist. They didn't know the difference.

I finished up my work in 1947. Then, I wanted to see if I could get in the College of Agriculture, but there still wasn't room. So, then, my dad said, "You should finish someplace else, perhaps." I said, "Dad, I think I'd like to become a lawyer." He thought that was not a

very good idea. But, I had some skill in public speaking that I'd acquired from the university, from Dr. Ralph Miller who was a very, very good teacher, in addition to being a good friend and a mentor.

That fall, I was offered a job and I worked as a farm organizer. I attended a lot of meetings, going around organizing farmers into a farming organization and I rather liked that, as a matter of fact. By 1950, I was engaged to be married and did so in June of that year. I married a young lady from up home and, by then, I knew that my college career had come to an end. I wasn't going to get back. We started having children and we farmed. In 1950 when we were married, we bought a farm from three brothers who were cousins of my father. They owned 280 acres of land right next to his place and they sold it to us on a contract for deed. We didn't have any money; so, we bought it for the promise to pay and we did, eventually, but it was a struggle.

I look back on my university experience as a very important part of my life. It was exciting. I know that if I hadn't been there, my life would have been different because there was so much that I learned there, academically, but socially, that helped me sort of prepare myself for what became a career in public service.

We were farming in the 1950s and it was tough going. I'd had an agronomy professor, Dr. Ralph Thomas, while I was at the university and he was talking with me while I was there as a student about the possibility of this Northland developing a grass seed industry, lawn seed. It was a new emerging thing. I said to Tommie, "Oh, I don't think so. I'm going to go home. We're going to farm in the traditional ways up there. If it doesn't work, I'll let you know." So, by 1954, I called Tommie and said, "It's time. This isn't working at all." Through the county extension agent, we set up a meeting and three of us went down to St. Paul and met with Dr. Thomas and agreed that we wanted to establish an industry like this up north and asked for his help. He said, "I'll do it." He introduced us to the notion of raising a purebred variety of bluegrass for lawn seed, which had been developed at the university on which they owned the patent, and we would be franchise growers—we did—with the stipulation that we'd have to certify all of this and maintain the brand and maintain the integrity of the quality of the crop. We got that industry started up there in 1954 and 1955 and two years later, my dad and I joined as growers and it was a good crop for us. It gave us diversity again in our cropping patterns and it was economically attractive enough so we were able to hold everything together.

I got involved in the political campaign in 1960 on behalf of Hubert Humphrey. I don't know if you want to get into this stuff?

AP: Sure, absolutely.

RB: Humphrey was well-established in the Senate by that time and I had become one of his admiring supporters and campaigned for him every chance I got. A man called one day and he said, "Humphrey is going to make a run against [John F.] Kennedy in the Wisconsin primaries. Will you help?" I said, "I don't have any money, but I'll do what I can." He said, "Could you go out and help raise some money." I said, "I'll try." We got a group together, probably eight

or ten persons in the state and we agreed that we would do our best. We organized to raise money out in the rural communities as best we could. We got one, and two, and three, and five dollar bills—no big deal. I don't know how much was gathered together in that effort, but it was many thousands of dollars. We sent it to him. Then, a carload of us went down to Wisconsin for a weekend. We were invited down to take part in a series of farm meetings and distribute literature and become a part of the Humphrey entourage. I found that to be fascinating. But, Humphrey lost that Wisconsin primary and he went on to lose the West Virginia primary to President Kennedy, at that time Senator Kennedy. We were all mad, of course, that Kennedy used his money and his muscle and his prestige to cast our *Happy Warrior* aside.

Before the election, which is set for November . . . it would have been, probably, in September, we were asked to come to St. Paul and meet with Senator Humphrey. There were probably ten, fifteen of us in that St. Paul hotel room. Humphrey came in and said, "Well, the nomination is over. The choice we have is Jack Kennedy or Richard Nixon and that's no choice at all. I know you were all loyal diehard supporters of mine, but I'm asking you to put on a Kennedy hat." For a lot of us, that was a big bitter pill to swallow. We said, "We don't want to do this." We argued with him. We never said, "No." He just kept on. He said, "It's got to be." So, we switched allegiances and we all had assignments in the campaign and really worked hard out in the rural areas of the state to carry the Kennedy campaign and that was kind of an ugly thing in a lot of places because of the Catholicism. The old Scandinavians had a hard time to buy a Catholic president. The campaign went on and Kennedy effectively dealt with the religious issue in that speech he gave, I think in Texas. We got better and better organized, better at it and identified voters and got a pretty significant voter turnout that November. Kennedy carried the state, but not by much. A lot of people have said, "If it hadn't been for Humphrey's efforts, Kennedy wouldn't have carried Minnesota." I think that's a safe bet. If he had lost Minnesota, he wouldn't have won the presidency. It was that close.

AP: That's right; it was very close.

RB: Very, very close. To make a long story short, we felt good about the victory; although, we were Humphrey loyalists, first, last, and always. Kennedy was elected and Orville Freeman was made Secretary of Agriculture. Freeman had been involved with us in this campaign. In fact, I'd run for the state legislature in 1958 when Freeman was governor of Minnesota. I ran as a Democrat. In those years, it was non-partisan, but everybody knew I was a Democrat. I ran against a very fine, conservative gentleman named Senator Don Sinclair. Freeman was out trying to get some opposition for every Republican member of the legislature.

AP: Interesting.

RB: He recruited people. He recruited me. I didn't expect to have much chance to win, but I said, "I'm going to give it my best shot," and I did. I campaigned hard and worked hard—couldn't afford any part of it, but I did it anyhow. I didn't win the election, but I was close. In the process, I maintained my integrity and developed a keener and deeper interest in political matters.

After Kennedy was elected and Freeman was appointed Secretary of Agriculture, Freeman called me one day and he wanted to know if I would come down to St. Paul and take a job. I needed that job bad; I was just desperate for money. Our farming wasn't going well. By that time, we had five children. I had to have work; there wasn't any question about that. So, I took it. It was a part-time job in St. Paul with the Department of Agriculture. I was chairman of the state ASCS Committee; that's an acronym, Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service. It went well. Things went fine with the job. I liked it. I was gone from home a lot and didn't like that much. But, the pay was good. I was classified as a GS-13 part-time. I think I made thirty-five dollars a day. That was good pay for me. I'd never seen that much money in my life.

AP: Was your family up on the farm?

RB: Yes, on the farm. On the days I put in, I'd get paid thirty-five dollars, which bought groceries and clothes. My wife would work off and on in between, struggling to keep the family fed. We were a strong family, but it took some money even then.

In 1963, Freeman's aide called me and said, "Will you come to Washington for a job down here? They're opening up a full-time job." I said, "Well, that means I have to move, doesn't it?" He said, "Yes, it does." So, I talked to my wife and said, "What do you think?" She said, "Why don't you take a look at it?" So, I went out there. They paid for my trip. I was interviewed and was offered a job. I said, "I've got to talk this over with the family. I'll let you know." It was a full-time job as area director for that same agency, traveling in the middle western states, supervising the farm program. I think the GS-15 paid \$12,000 a year, maybe \$13,000 a year, which was, I thought, more money than there was in the whole world, plus insurance, which we didn't have . . . health insurance. We didn't have life insurance. We didn't have anything like that. So, I took the job with my wife's full approval with the stipulation, however, that she and the kids wanted to move out there. They didn't want me working there and they living here and I didn't want that either; so, we loaded up our meager possessions in our old Ford truck and we took off. We didn't hire a transfer agency because we didn't have the money to pay for it. We got out to Virginia and rented a house for awhile and, later on, we were able to round up enough money for a down payment and bought one.

The war in Vietnam was building up. I thought the whole thing was a tragedy. In the spring of 1968, a delegation from Minnesota's Seventh District Democratic Party came to Washington and looked me up and asked if I would run for Congress that fall of 1968. I said, "I'm flattered, but I can't afford it." They said, "We know it's tough, but we'll raise the money to pay for the campaign." I said, "The second condition is that if I run and lose but run well, I want the option of running a second time." The district was represented by a Republican, a fine guy—Oden Langen was his name—a conservative. They had run a bunch of candidates against him, but everybody would take one shot and get beat and quit and go away. I said, "I'm not going to do that. I'm either going to run twice or not at all." They said, "That's a deal." My wife agreed to it and we packed up and went home. I surrendered my \$13,000 year job. We had no money. We had no business doing this. By then, we had seven children. There was no earthly reason why we should have done that excepting the urge to get into this public service. By that time

the war in Vietnam had gotten very ugly and I was dead set against continuing it. Humphrey was the Democratic standard bearer for president and [Eugene] Gene McCarthy was the peace candidate—both from Minnesota. While McCarthy and I got along fine on most matters, his supporters and I did not. They wanted me to renounce Hubert Humphrey. They wanted me to abandon my traditional principles and join with them in this anti-war campaign. That's the only thing they had on their platter. I said, "I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to reject Hubert Humphrey for anybody." They said, "Then, we're not going to help you in the campaign." I said, "That's your call. You're going to have me or they're have that Republican [unclear]. I'll tell you that my views on this war stuff are far closer to yours than his and you're going to have to decide that." I kind of tempered the reluctance on the part of the McCarthy followers to help me. I didn't get their full-hearted support, but neither did I have their opposition. Gene McCarthy saw to that, that they didn't come out against me. I worked like a dog. I went door-to-door, house-to-house, day after day for months on end.

AP: What was the district?

RB: The Seventh Congressional District, U.S. Congress. I got the Democratic endorsement. I got the nomination. I just kept campaigning. I think we raised the magnificent sum of \$7,000, which basically bought my gas. I couldn't afford advertising of any sort, so I had little cards printed up, kind of biographical cards. I'd give one out to everybody I met. I passed out 190,000 of those cards.

AP: Wow!

RB: I mean I really worked! That was shoe leather campaigning. I learned a lot about this and come later in the fall, while my race wasn't considered to even have a chance of winning because there wasn't [unclear], the *Minneapolis Tribune* came with a poll and showed that I was even with Langen. We hadn't taken a survey. We didn't have any money for it. That changed everything. Suddenly, people perked up and took notice and I think we raised \$35,000 in the next four weeks, which we spent on some advertising. We didn't use television, but we bought some local radio and bought some local newspapers and we did a tabloid newspaper. By that time, Langen came back. He had thought that he didn't really have to campaign. He thought that my efforts were sort of fruitless. He came back in October with a very well-organized, well-financed, well-directed campaign and I lost, not by much. I ran ahead of Humphrey in the district and ran ahead of the Democratic ticket in most cases, but not strong enough to win.

So, I'd lost the election. I'd surrendered my job. I couldn't find work up there. It was a terrible year on the farm. Helen's brother, my wife's brother, was farming and had a poor crop, poor prices. It rained all the time. I bought a grain dryer and that winter, I spent every day going farm to farm drying grain, shoveling the grain into the dryer and shoveling it out. It was all just hard work. I made a living and my wife went to work in a grocery store clerking. The kids were old enough by then that the older ones could take care of the younger ones.

In the meantime, I'd go out campaigning and in the summer of 1970, I was back in full swing as a campaigner every day, day-after-day doing my thing, house-to-house, town-to-town. But that time money was a little easier to raise because we'd come so close the year before. We raised over \$50,000 and we put together a better advertising effort, put together a better brochure, more professional. We had an advertising agency in St. Paul, Coleman & Goff, do the advertising for us at a very low cost and we won. We won the race in 1970. I went back to Washington and Helen and the kids stayed home because we weren't sure how this was going to go and we didn't have a place out there. We'd sold our Washington home. We'd owned it five years and made \$6,000. We thought, that's a lot of money. We cashed that in because we had to have it to live on and move back to D.C.

I was involved in the Congress and worked hard in that business and paid attention to what I was doing in agricultural matters. Governor [Jimmy] Carter was nominated to be president. I didn't know him very well, barely at all. But, I helped to organize a little committee of people nationally to support Carter's campaign. Walter Mondale was his vice-president. Carter won. Mondale called me one day and wanted to know if I'd have any interest in joining the cabinet. I said, "Not really. I like what I'm doing," and beside that, I thought to myself, there's no chance in the world I'll get picked. There were a lot of people who were interested in those appointments. But, one day in November, after the election was over, Carter called me and he wanted to know if I'd consider an appointment. I said, "To what?" He told me, "Secretary of Agriculture." I said, "Hmmm!"

AP: That's a big, big deal.

RB: A great big deal. I said, "Let's talk about it." He said, "Fine." So, I went down to Georgia and got acquainted with him and we hit it off right away. It was like chemistry. I was there an hour or two and we had a long chat about lots of things. We were, for the most part, in agreement on major public policy stuff. He asked me if I would agree to signing a waver relinquishing my right to see the field report on an FBI investigation so that when the FBI went around to check on me with friends, they could tell them that anything you tell us will be confidential, won't be released. I signed that waver. The FBI people came up out of Minneapolis. An agent and another fellow came to my mother and dad's house. Mom and dad were elderly at the time. He flashed his badge and he said, "I'm so and so with the FBI and I'm here to talk about your son." Mom thought I'd robbed a bank.

[laughter]

RB: I said, "No, mother, I'm being considered for an assignment, for a job, in the Carter Administration." "What is it?" I told her, "Secretary of Agriculture." She didn't believe it. She thought, that's all a bunch of hooey, that there was no way in the world this is going to happen to me. She just said, "I know you're in some kind of trouble. What is it?"

[laughter]

RB: I said, "Mom everything is fine." Dad believed me but mom was really skeptical. Finally, Carter made the announcement and then mom was okay.

AP: What year was it that you took office?

RB: In 1977. He was elected in the fall of 1976.

AP: This would have been early January?

RB: I was sworn in January the 4th or 5th. I resigned my seat in Congress on the 20th. Congress convened and I submitted my resignation; but, I wasn't going to do it until I'd been confirmed by the Senate. So, the Senate confirmation hearing turned out to be nothing of consequence, just a routine inquiry. Once they voted approval, I tendered my resignation as a member of the House of Representatives. There became a vacancy and another election was held.

I liked that job a lot; although, it was not as satisfying as the congressional experience because there's more authority in the Congress. I found working in the Carter Administration to be an interesting thing. Carter was willing to allow me to make some significant changes in the structure of the Department of Agriculture: to become more environmentally attuned, to become more consumer friendly. That was controversial. There were lots of people in the Congress and around the country that didn't like either one of these changes because they thought I was abandoning the traditional principles, which wasn't true. I was simply being politically realistic. I stayed there until the Carter Administration ended and we never had any scandals. I was never investigated for anything. Everything was always accounted for and never made the news, therefore, of any consequence.

AP: He left office in what year?

RB: In 1981. [Ronald] Reagan was elected in 1980 and he took his place in 1981 and I resigned my seat.

I was a year or two without work of any real steady nature. Then, a job opened up in Washington that I wanted and I went after and I got it. I was the head of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. I was there for ten years. That was another very interesting experience.

But, in all my public life, I have always hearkened back to my time at the School of Agriculture in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1946 and 1947 and part of 1948 . . . not only the things I learned academically. By the time I was in the Congress, everything I'd learned academically was obsolete. A whole new generation of new sciences had displaced everything. It hadn't changed the results of what I had learned, but had just refined it very substantially.

But, there were some things that hadn't changed. I had learned how to become more tolerant of persons whom I didn't know, make allowances for their religion, for their dress, for their language, for the way they looked, for what they ate. That was very much a part of that campus life that has stayed with me all my political career. I developed a tolerance for strangers that has served me in good stead in my political world.

AP: How did you get to become a regent? You joined the board in . . . ?

RB: I retired from Washington in 1994 and we moved back to Roseau. We had friends that said, "Oh, come on down to Florida," or "Come to Arizona." We have wonderful retirement communities. We took a look at them and went down there. We said, "But, we really don't want to live here. We want to back with our kids and grandchildren." To us, that was the most important thing in our life, so we did just that; we moved back to this little town of Roseau, built a new home and intended to settle into kind of a quiet lifestyle volunteering. I'm very interested in historical matters and I was on the county historical society board and a member of the state board and church work and that kind of thing.

One day, I had a call from Roger Moe, Senate majority leader. This would have been in November or December of 1996. Roger said, "There's going to be a vacancy on the Board of Regents. Stan Sahlstrom from Crookston has announced his intentions to retire from the board." He was having physical difficulties that needed medical treatment. He'd been on the board for twelve years and he was not going to go for another six-year term. Roger Moe said, "We're looking for a candidate to replace him. Would you do that?" I said, "Well, yes, I think I would. I'd like that, I think," without knowing what I was getting into. He said, "I'm going to put your name in the hat. There's a candidate search committee that's been formed by law. They'll be getting organized here pretty soon and they'll call you." So, they called me and I went down to St. Paul to a meeting of this group. They had been recruiting candidates from all over the state for the vacancies which were developing on the Board of Regents, not only vacancies as in my case with Stan Sahlstrom retiring, but there were incumbents whose terms were up and they were obligated by law to find candidates so that these jobs had some competition. I went through the interview, as did others. They narrowed the list down to me and Dr. Herbert Chilstrom from Pelican Rapids. He was the retired bishop of the Lutheran Church in America, a fine gentleman, whom I'd known a long time and for whom I had nothing but the highest regard. Then, the thing went to the legislature and we had to campaign. I was an old hand at that business. I knew how. I just went to every member of the Seventh District delegation, every member of the House and Senate, and other leaders of the committees that dealt with the confirmation of the regents.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Tape 1, Side 2]

RB: By March, I was a full-fledged member of the Board of Regents from that first meeting. I was well-treated by my colleagues and by the administration. The university had gone through some very trying times. They had the tenure code dispute. Remember that?

AP: Indeed, yes.

RB: President [Nils] Hasselmo had resigned under some duress, I think. They had agreed to hire Mark Yudof, who hadn't yet arrived when I came on board, but the decision had been made. They had to sell the University Hospital because of a serious financial rupturing and it merged with Fairview. So, there had been a lot of trouble on the board and a lot of trouble at the university. I was asked by my supporters in the legislature to do what I could to put the fires out. This was the main thing, as far as they were concerned, to try to restore peace and tranquility. There had been several changes in the board when I was elected. I think everybody was determined that we were going to put an end to the warfare, some way or other, whatever it took. It just couldn't go on this way.

President Yudof came, was installed. I was very impressed by him the first time I met him. He was an experienced war horse. He had a lot of university experience and a lot of political experience. He was a lawyer. He knew the ropes. He knew how to make the place go. He and I just got along famously right off the bat. We understood each other pretty well. He knew my background. My bag was a political role, mainly, with an agricultural interest. So, we've gotten along well. Things have gotten well for us here at the university. I'm just finishing my second year of a six-year term.

It takes a lot of time, more time than I had really thought. We're not salaried, which is okay. I don't need the money. But, it takes more time than I had counted on. I suppose I spend easily 100 hours a month on something related to the university, either at meetings here in St. Paul or Minneapolis or out in the field. I get invited to a lot of farm meetings. I go and I talk about the university's agenda and drum up support for the legislators who want to support us but are never quite sure how their constituents would feel; so, I help build support with and among them. It's just like an old-fashioned campaign, except I'm not a partisan. I enjoy that kind of thing; but, it does take a lot of time. Then, reading material and answering phone calls . . . it's kind of a busy place for retired folks.

AP: Would you like to comment on what, in your time, has been the most difficult decision as a regent that you've faced?

RB: I don't think there have been any. We haven't had any contentious issues. By the time I got here, the business of striking a bargain on the tenure code had been settled. Yudof knew about all of this and he was determined that he, too, was going to work to put an end to that strife. We agreed that during his honeymoon, it was time to strike on the new building program. Some of us had complained bitterly about the university's appearance. We said, "It's shabby. The windows are dirty. The junk is not picked up." There was agreement all around that we had to spruce the place up and that's happened. We haven't had any serious fights. We haven't

had anything that would be considered anywhere near like I used to go through in my public life. I won't let myself get involved in an argument about things that are not important. I'll get involved in an argument but only if it's important.

AP: When you describe the university to, say, a colleague or a former legislator which you may have known in Congress or someone that you would have known nationally and they say to you . . . They would have called you, "Mr. Secretary?"

RB: Sometimes. People that knew me in my federal life, yes, that's what they do. I carry that handle.

AP: If they said, "Describe the University of Minnesota to me," how would you describe it?

RB: It's a major world-class research, teaching, and education facility. All three of these are taken seriously here. We have a wonderful outreach program—the best I've seen. Of course, it's changing with the electronic era now. We're going to be transferring this knowledge to a different constituency; it will be done electronically. The outreach is there. The research agenda at this university is legendary. The work that the university has done in the medical complex, now called the Academic Health Center, is just enormous. We are the world's leader in heart and internal body organ studies. It's this work at the university that's encouraged or even allowed, I guess is the word, this medical alley to flourish. We're a huge medical heart device manufacturing center and all the things that go with it. It is a big business here. People come here from all over the world to be treated because we're so well-known. Agricultural history here has been always strong.

This is one of the few places where the land-grant college and the general college is combined into one. In most states around here . . . North Dakota has two universities: NDSU and the University of North Dakota. South Dakota is the same way. Iowa is the same way and it goes on and on . . . Ohio, Michigan. But, here, they're combined. They're both in the same setting.

It's an urban campus. That's different. I think there's an advantage in having an urban campus. It's close to a center of 2 million people with all the things that happen in a community like this: the arts, humanities. The university itself is a major institution for learning. Learning never stops; this is a lifetime thing. We have major league sports. It's just a very attractive place in which to live and to visit. I like it here for that reason. Students come here because it's an attractive place.

It's very highly regarded by the professional ranks. We're in the process of establishing a world-class research center in genetics. It's a molecular biological center. We're the first of its kind in the world where we combine the molecular biological research arm of the Medical School with the College of Agriculture and the College of Biological Sciences. It will be a world-class laboratory. It's a done deal. It isn't built yet, but it's been authorized and construction is underway. This is going to mean that the University of Minnesota is going to be in the center of the world of genetic sciences and that's becoming the new generation of agricultural

technology. Maybe you've noticed that big, giant chemical companies like Dupont have bought seed companies like Pioneer Hybrid?

AP: Yes.

RB: Monsanto has bought seed companies. Navartis is a combination of chemical companies and seed companies. Cargill has entered into an agreement with some of these. The next generation of agricultural science will come in genetics. [unclear] probably be in a new chemical order for controlling pests and diseases chemically. The genetic sciences are very exciting and this is going to be a world-class place and we're going to attract attention—for whatever that's worth—but more importantly, we're going to train people here in these twenty-first century sciences. We'll be able to complement the requirements of a world in which the land base is depleting at a rapid clip. All over the world, the farmland base is going down, being taken over by housing and shopping centers everywhere. You lay against that declining land base the inevitable rising cost of energy, oil and gas energy . . . There's no doubt about that; it's going to go up because it's a finite resource. You start seeing what's happening with the consolidation of oil companies on a global scale . . . British Petroleum bought Amoco and, now, they bought another American company, the Atlantic Richfield Company. They see the handwriting on the wall; they know that the oil industry is in the beginning of its last chapter of its history. I may not live long enough to see the end of oil, but I'll sure live long enough to see it rise in cost. Everybody knows that. Farming industries on a global scale have to find new ways of doing business and the genetic sciences offer that new way. Not only is it important from a business standpoint, which is not so important, I suppose, all things considered, but what is much more important is that the world's population will double in thirty years. The food requirements will triple in that time. With a declining land base, this is a prescription for war. The haves will take it from the have-nots. The scientists which this facility can train will, no doubt, find technical answers to this, what appears to be, horrible dilemma. And the University of Minnesota is going to be one of the leaders in the world, of which we're all proud.

AP: That's very helpful.

Is there anything I haven't asked you that you'd like to put into the record?

RB: I go back to this business of diversity. The war in Kosovo is a collision of intolerant forces and persons. The unfortunate truth is that that dispute is not going to be settled by gunfire. The gunfire will probably stop the killing—we all hope—but it's not going to provide a permanent solution. The world desperately begs for more tolerance and most of us coming to a university like this probably aren't going back into the community from which we came, probably not. I grew up in a mono-culture. It hasn't changed much in my lifetime, culturally . . . no racial differences of any consequence. So, one can say, well, we don't really need to have tolerance or an understanding of nationalities and religions and cultures because we don't have anybody like that around here. But, when they get into the world of work, everything changes. Suddenly, they're up against something they clearly don't understand and the question is whether they're going to let their prejudices and their bigotry prevail or whether they're going to be trained in

how to deal with this sort of difference. The university's role, one of its major responsibilities, is to prepare people for the diverse world into which they will be thrust. The diversity here is not just a matter of hiring teachers and professors of color and more women—that's, of course, necessary. When I say diversity though, I'm talking about the far more significant importance of training people to be tolerant of one another. If we were to become an all white, male university, there would be no tolerance. That's why diversity is important, not only in the faculty and the staff but on the Board of Regents, in the student population. We want to be sure that people are trained to the best of their potential and that's important, but the social contacts with students who don't know each other in my lifetime has been as important to me as all the technical training I acquired. It served me well in politics.

AP: Could you go back a little bit and see if you can remember, say, meeting with Professor Miller how it was . . . because you would have come from a mono-culture which would have been suspicious or at least unfamiliar with people? Did anything particular happen that you can remember that put you on this course?

RB: He found out I was interested in politics and so was he; although, he was not a practicing political person. He didn't run for office. I don't even know what his politics were, but I do know that he thought this was a good calling, that people should go into public service. I said, "Dr. Miller, I want to farm." We were all very respectful of our elders. It was *Dr. Miller*; it wasn't Ralph. We treated people with courtesy and that military bearing which was found at the university when I was there from these soldiers coming back had a very powerful influence on me and others. I'd never seen this before. There was that dignity that prevailed, at that time. So, I called him Dr. Miller. I said, "I want to learn to be a farmer." "Yes," he said, "You can do that, but you need to do something besides that. I want you to get into courses which are going to prepare you for some kind of public service." I found that all very interesting; but, I didn't think it was ever going to happen. But, he kept on and he kept on and it worked.

AP: Thank you.

RB: You're welcome.

AP: This has been a wonderful interview. I appreciate your time.

RB: You're more than welcome.

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

[End of the Interview]

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