

**Transcript of KMYR series on The Public Affair:
“Analysis: 1975 New Mexico State Legislature”**

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Albuquerque Museum, gift of Zane Blaney

This radio program is a four-part series by Zane Blaney, with Ernie Mills, Carrol Cagle, and Jane Evans, State Issue Coordinator of Common Cause.

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[stopwatch ticking]

ZANE BLANEY: In ten seconds or less, evaluate the current session of the State Legislature.

ERNIE MILLS: Easy enough that just like the past seventeen years the chaplains from both houses get up and they ask God to give these men patience and guidance. And after sixty days you get the distinct feeling that God is saying “No”.

JANE EVANS: It really makes you feel all warm inside.

CARROL CAGLE: It’d be hard to, uh, say, you know, if – what the results will be, yet.

[farting sound effect]

BLANEY: On “The Public Affair”, the legislature.

MALE VOICE: This program has been brought to you by the Republican Party, a leisure service of ITNT [?] .

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BLANEY: The sixty-day session of the state legislature has been termed the worst session in thirty years. The reason? Little, if any, reform legislation was passed, pushed aside for special interest concerns and party pressures. On “The Public Affair”, a discussion with long-time legislative watchers. Today, Ernie Mills, who has reported on Capitol activities for the past seventeen years. He is now a syndicated radio and cable television columnist.

BLANEY: Ernie, what’s your overall reaction to this session?

ERNIE MILLS: I believe -- I’m disappointed because of the number of controversial bills that were held up throughout the session. That the lawmakers didn’t meet head-on. In other words,

items like the collective bargaining bill, uh, the racetrack measures, uh, serious measures that everyone knew the lawmakers were going to be faced with and they put off until the last minute taking up. And it was purposeful and, uh, if they took them up earlier, I don't think they would have had the log-jam in appropriations bill that eventually showed up.

BLANEY: Why do they put things off to the last minute like that? What is the politics involved?

MILLS: Uh, the House of Representatives, last time, was very liberal. They expected it to be more liberal this time. Just the opposite happened. The House got more conservative and the Senate, because of some additional appointments. Remember, there were four new appointees to the Senate and some changes, and so the Senate was more liberal. Now, it didn't mean that the House was voting conservative, but the votes in the house were closer. And the votes in the Senate were closer. And I – My feeling is that that means the leadership has a little more trouble keeping their forces together. I think – I think the lawmakers would have done themselves a favor this time if they'd got to some of the big measures, told everyone you had a year to do your homework and, uh, let's get with it. Take a vote, if it doesn't pass, then forget it.

BLANEY: Was the absolute sixty-day deadline effective?

MILLS: I don't go along with the philosophy that one hour extra would have helped this time, but I think they could have finished up with, say, an additional four or five hours. But they knew that they had to meet the noon deadline and I think they just sort of gave up on it.

BLANEY: Why the lack of, uh, reform legislation this time? It seemed that a lot of issues, campaign reform, lobbyist regulations, impact statements, this kind of thing, just seemed to fall flat.

MILLS: I think a lot of it was on the inability of the news media to, uh, consistently keep after reform legislation. This is one of the big disappointments. The, uh, consumer-type legislation was almost nil during this session. We lost lobbying bills, you know, bills to tighten lobbying procedures. There was no campaign reform. Uh, I – I think the lawmakers -- maybe they spent too much time talking about restoring public confidence and not enough time in doing something about it.

BLANEY: What did the citizen get out of this session?

MILLS: I'm afraid to say. At this point, uh, and I was being facetious then. Anybody who says that he can analyze exactly what's happened this session is either a mystic or a liar. I don't think it can be done. We accept the mouthings instead of looking for the performance. I think what we will have to do if we're going to get legislation through to this [??], there must be more participation by the guy in the street. There must be a greater participation by the news media, also. And that means looking behind the printed press release, for example.

BLANEY: One last question, Ernie, and that would be in your crystal ball. Can you predict what will come out of the special session? Any meaningful legislation at all?

MILLS: I think – I think we'll know in a couple weeks what it looks like. I don't think anything great will come out of this – out of the special session because we know pretty well which bills they have to work with. And the decision on whether they act on those bills or not was simply a matter of whether or not they were up for third reading. A bill could be – could have been tabled for a technicality, temporarily, that had the support of both houses. And that is not being – that is not being considered in this session. There have been a number of bills that came in this time that I got the distinct feeling that legislators themselves were not looking behind the people, behind the bills. And, you know, we do not know at this time whether or not a measure will pass which will provide for a tightening of the saving and loan industry. If you remember, Zane Blaney, it was you and I a year ago who had broken the story from Santa Fe on the – on the Great West Saving and Loan situation. And there were an awful lot of people at that time that raised old Harry about it. And it took six months before they were able to realize exactly how seriously laws were needed to tighten controls, not over just the saving and loan industry, but the uninsured saving and loan people. To give the banking commissioner the right to go in and put, uh, an agency into receivership without it going to court. In one way, that's one of the reasons why we keep hammering away up here for looking behind the laws and, uh, looking for laws that are going to – the key to it are laws that are going to protect the people and not necessarily protect the special interests.

BLANEY: Santa Fe columnist, Ernie Mills. Tomorrow, a talk with Carrol Cagle, who covered the session for the Associated Press and other media outlets. I'm Zane Blaney on KMYR.

[07:20]

BLANEY: Continuing our review of the state legislature, a discussion with Carrol Cagle, who covered the session for the Associated Press and other media outlets.

CARROL CAGLE: I would say that the – that the session results ended with an endorsement of, uh, safe and continuing programs and a rejection of new governmental initiatives and reforms.

BLANEY: Several people have pointed to the fact that the legislators were staying away from controversy this time. In your opinion, why was that?

CAGLE: It's a traditional political response, as far as I know, and that is to try to bring home those projects and programs which are – which win approval from the voters and to stay away from those which do have some controversy attached to them. There were members of the legislature that were proposing these new initiatives but they were in a distinct minority. Probably, they are all representing their constituents. The state, overall, is basically, uh, politically conservative and it turns out that those members – those legislators that are from those districts tend to be the ones that stay around the longest. And therefore, through the workings of seniority, and, uh, political capabilities, work their way up into positions of power.

BLANEY: What effect, uh, did the loss of David Salman have, for example, in the – in the House?

CAGLE: Yeah, I've heard that question brought up by several members of the House, themselves. And, with the assumption being that if Salman had been there that he would have – that there would have been some different votes and some, uh, some laws that were enacted --that would have been enacted that, as it turned out, did not pass and the reason for that is that Salman, who is the House Majority Leader, um, has an ability and a capability of articulating, uh, progressive issues and making them more plausible, giving a better rationale and better research, better philosophical underpinning to them than, um, many of the rank-and-file Democrats on the House side. And since he was absent through, due to hospitalization, that kind of articulation and, uh, pin-pointing of what issues are – should be addressed was missing this time.

BLANEY: Can you explain more specifically why we lost such things as campaign reform and the environmental impact statement legislation and the lobbyist regulations, for example?

CAGLE: Those kind of so-called reform measures lacked a cohesive and articulate, uh, faction on their behalf. Individual members would launch the proposal but there was no strong cohesive coalition of support.

BLANEY: What did the consumer get out of this session?

CAGLE: [laughs] Well, if this weren't for use on the air I could give you a more direct answer, but I'll just say it this way: they got very little. Uh, there was a – there will be a minor tax break to the low-income user – low-income tax payers. So, if you can say that a tax break is a consumer measure that would be one. And, even that will be fairly modest for most tax payers. One of the most significant developments during the session was the – was a fairly concerted effort to, um, -- to develop statewide policies dealing with the coming energy boom here in New Mexico. Um, there are proposals to build two 100 million dollar coal gasification plants on the Navajo Reservation. Uh, New Mexico has large deposits of oil and gas, uranium, geo-thermal deposits and energy companies from all over the country and the world are descending on New Mexico to try to develop, or exploit, these resources. And so heretofore, the state has not had any centralized way of – first of all, determining out – determining what is happening. And secondly, how to develop a concerted coordinated policy to deal with those energy exploitations.

BLANEY: Santa Fe journalist, Carrol Cagle. And I'm Zane Blaney on KMYR.

[12:25]

BLANEY: Today, a look at the state legislature from the lobbyist point of view with the State Issues Coordinator for Common Cause, Jane Evans.

JANE EVANS: Seems to me, that all of the pre-election campaign talk of reform kind of bit the dust during this session. Many of the legislature –legislators are, uh, willing to agree to the

concepts but when it gets down to passing specific bills, then that's another matter. The Senate is particularly, uh, reluctant to pass through reform legislation.

BLANEY: A lot of people expected the legislature to be a little more liberal this time. Did you anticipate that?

EVANS: Yeah, because of what, you know, other people here in New Mexico had said that there seemed to be high hopes for, uh, a big change this year. And yet, by the end of the session I was hearing seasoned observers say this is the worst we've seen in years. So, I think, uh, it may have seemed worse because of the high hopes, I'm not sure.

BLANEY: What was the legislation that Common Cause was particularly interested in?

EVANS: The, uh, -- we sponsored and supported four bills, um, campaign reform, amendment to the 1974 open meetings law, lobby—full lobby disclosure, and conflict of interest. And, in addition, we supported the environmental impact statements contained in the EQA [Environmental Quality Act of 1974]. Uh, and we also are involved in the ERA [Equal Rights Amendment] issue, which we hadn't expected to be raised.

BLANEY: Carrol Cagle mentioned yesterday that he didn't feel that there was a united front, uh, of reform-minded people to push through reform legislation this time. I don't think he was specifically being critical of any one lobbying group, but he felt that there probably wasn't a coalition. Uh, what are your feelings about that?

EVANS: Yeah, I think that's true. A good case in point is the campaign reform bill. Governor Apodaca had called a markup conference early in the session to discuss Senator R.E. Thompson's campaign reform bill and that included the, uh, Common Cause, the leadership of the Democrat and Republican parties, COPE [?] of the AFL-CIO, the League of Women's Voters Women's Political Caucus, and um, of course, the Governor's legislative aide, Nick Franklin. Uh, we went through the bill point by point, uh, agreed when we were finished with the changes that were made and, uh, in that conference we were definitely united in supporting the bill but, uh, by the time it got to committee and out of committee onto the floor apparently, um, particularly in the Democratic leadership, uh, they didn't have the votes behind them to push it through. But the Governor was behind the concept and the leadership was, so, uh, there was a case where, you know, the different groups got together but some of the, uh, I guess grassroots support in back of that just didn't come through.

BLANEY: What would you say the consumer got out of this session, if anything?

EVANS: Very little. [laughs] Um, we -- I think the best thing that happened was that we sustained the 1974 open meetings law. Uh, the only really drawback to that law is that the legislature has exempted itself and there were several bills that were introduced to them at this time that which would have, um, hurt the 1974 bill and they didn't get through. So, um, I think that's probably the best thing that happened and with open meetings, that means that many

other things can be done. Oh, and the ERA, we backed the attempt to repeal the ERA, but other than those two issues, I don't believe the consumer got much this time.

BLANEY: How do you go about resolving this problem of, uh, campaign speeches and practical experience in the legislature and overcoming the lack of responsiveness, many times, to these key issues?

EVANS: Uh, I think the only thing that can be done there is for the facts to be given to the voters in a particular legislator's district and they'll have to make the decision. If there's no problem for them if there's a discrepancy between, um, a campaign promise and legislator's actions during the session, then that's their choice. But, if they have the information and they know how their congressmen vote, uh, then they can make the choice when the next election time comes around.

BLANEY: State Issues Coordinator for Common Cause, Jane Evans. And I'm Zane Blaney on KMYR.

[17:43]

[end]