

California State Archives

State Government Oral History Program Oral History Interview with

Gloria Molina Los Angeles County Supervisor, 1991-

Los Angeles City Councilwoman, 1987-1991

California State Assemblywoman, 1983-1987 May 25, June 1, June 21, July 12, July 19, and August 16, 1990

Los Angeles, California

Department of Special Collections

University of California, Los Angeles

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Restrictions on this Interview

None.

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Preface

On September 25, 1985, Governor George Deukmejian signed into law A.B. 2104 (Chapter 965 of the Statutes of 1985). This legislation established, under the administration of the California State Archives, a State Government Oral History

Program "to provide through the use of oral history a continuing documentation of state policy development as reflected in California's legislative and executive history."

The following interview is one of a series of oral histories undertaken for inclusion in the state program. These interviews offer insights into the actual workings of both the legislative and executive processes and policy mechanisms. They also offer an increased understanding of the men and women who create legislation and implement state policy. Further, they provide an overview of issue development in California state government and of how both the legislative and executive branches of government deal with issues and problems facing the state.

Interviewees are chosen primarily on the basis of their contributions to and influence on the policy process of the state of California. They include members of the legislative and executive branches of the state government as well as legislative staff, advocates, members of the media, and other people who played significant roles in specific issue areas of major and continuing importance to California.

By authorizing the California State Archives to work cooperatively with oral history units at California colleges and universities to conduct interviews, this program is structured to take advantage of the resources and expertise in oral history available through California's several institutionally based programs.

Participating as cooperating institutions in the State Government Oral History Program are:

Oral History Program

History Department

California State University, Fullerton

Oral History Program

Center for California Studies

California State University, Sacramento

Oral History Program

Claremont Graduate School

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Oral History Program

University of California, Los Angeles

The establishment of the California State Archives State Government Oral History Program marks one of the most significant commitments made by any state toward the preservation and documentation of its governmental history. It supplements the often fragmentary historical written record by adding an organized primary source, enriching the historical information available on given topics and allowing for more thorough historical analysis. As such, the program, through the preservation and publication of interviews such as the one which follows, will be of lasting value to current and future generations of scholars, citizens and leaders.

John F. Burns
State Archivist

July 27, 1988

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1. Transcript

1.1. TAPE NUMBER: I, Side One (May 25, 1990)

Vasquez

Councilwoman Molina, to begin this interview, let me ask you to tell me about your family, where they come from, where you were born, where you were raised, that sort of thing. First, tell me about your folks and your family.

Molina

Okay. My parents come from Casas Grandes, Chihuahua [Mexico]. My mother [Concepción Molina] was born and raised there. My father [Leonardo Molina] was raised there. He was born in Los Angeles. It's a beautiful agricultural valley. And my father came approximately about 1943, 1945. And he came through some kind of a worker program. Like a "bracero" program of some type. Although it might not have been a formal "bracero" program, but something like that where they brought in workers. He worked his way from El Paso [Texas] all the way over to Los Angeles. And throughout those years, he was able to go to-as he tells us-to La Placita [of Los Angeles]. And at that time, I guess, a lot of their records had burned down. But somehow he was able to track his baptismal record.

Vasquez

That's interesting. Tell me why he was born here and ended up being raised in Mexico?

Molina

Well, it's interesting. It's a story that we hear about. But all we know is what my uncle has told us. And what my dad has told us is that his father was here. As a young man he had come from Casas Grandes. As many of them used to do, I guess, it was a free-flowing [open] border at the time. And he was married here. Well, maybe they don't speak about it in my family. I'm not

sure. Whatever happened is that he was taken back at the age of three to Casas Grandes. And he was raised by the older sister, my abuelita [grandmother] Celsa [Molina]. And even though she wasn't the [real] abuelita, that's what we knew her as. But his tía [aunt] basically. And my tío [uncle] Chón [Esperación Molina], who still lives with my parents today. But we're not sure. I think my family has a tendency to never have anything like. . . . I don't know why, but I've always read into it that it possibly could have been a divorce. It could have been a separation.

Vasquez

Oh. Something "scandalous" like that? [Laughter]

Molina

Something like that. But, instead, we hear that he got taken at three and left there. And that his father came back here and eventually died here. The only thing that I've ever heard from my father that he knows of L.A. as a youngster is that he was brought up somewhere in a barrio near where Sears [Roebuck, and Company] is now in Boyle Heights.

Vasquez

On Olympic Boulevard?

Molina

Right. Right in that area. You know, right by the [Los Angeles] River there.

Vasquez

Yes.

Molina

But I'll tell you. Whenever I ask questions in that regard about what happened to his father and what happened. . . . Where is my real grandmother? And these kinds of things. Everybody gets real quiet about it. So that's just my assumption. And it may be very wrong. We found some press clippings once about a woman who had died giving birth at Lincoln Hospital in East L.A. And the names were all very familiar. My sister was able to track that down. But no one will. . . . No one tells us. So because of that silence, we assumed something of that type. There are pictures that we have of them. And one of

the things that's interesting about how my, I guess, abuelito. . . . We just don't know them. How my father's father is dressed in, I guess-what is it-the 1920s. I mean, he's not [in] a sombrero. I mean, he looks slick.

Vasquez

Too slick maybe?

Molina

Well, maybe so. You know. I mean, the suit and, you know, the whole thing. I mean, very nicely dressed for a Mexicano in L.A., I don't know, in the 1920s, late twenties. And, again, his wife. . . . It's so hard for us to relate to them as being our grandparents, because we never knew them. And the wife being, again, very. . . . The dress, the outfit. And maybe it's the way people took pictures at the time. I don't know. So we make up these things as a family, because there are [so many questions]. And I doubt that even my father knows exactly what happened. What we know is the oldest aunt, my abuelita Celsa, they had fourteen children, I think. Their parents died very early. She became the one that was in charge of the family. She never married.

Vasquez

What was her name?

Molina

Celsa. What is . . . ? I guess Celsa is her real name. And then the youngest one, my tío Chón Do I know what his real name is? Anyway, those became [our] grandparents even though they weren't. They were just his uncle and his aunt. But as youngsters, when we used to go visit in Casas Grandes, those were. . . . You know, we always knew her as my abuelita Celsa and my tío Chón. And those are the ones that raised my father. Anyway, that's how he was born here, but raised in Casas Grandes.

Vasquez

Did he go to school here?

Molina

No, no. Both my mom and dad went to school up to the sixth grade in Casas Grandes. Well, my mother actually went only to the third grade. My dad had

the luxury of going on to the sixth grade. And could have gone on, because they were landowners. They had little ranchitos [ranches]. So they had money. My mother was very poor. They couldn't afford to continue going to school. But, no, he didn't. He just went up to the sixth grade. That was it. Never went up to secundaria [high school], as they call it there.

Vasquez

Were you raised in a very Mexican home? And what does that mean?

Molina

I don't know if it's very traditional Mexicano, but I guess it's a very Mexican home. I was brought up in a little barrio called-what was it called?-Simons. I guess it's part of Montebello now. At that time, it was sort of an incorporated East L.A. near the Simons Brick Yard. [Laughter]

Vasquez

Yes. Alejandro Morales has written a book on that. [Note: Morales, Alejandro. *The Brick People*. Houston: Arte Público Press, 1987.]

Molina

Uh-huh. There are people collecting a lot of information, and [I am] kind of excited about it. But, anyway, we were brought up in that little barrio. We were like other families in that area except that my family. . . . Well, almost everybody there spoke English except for us. My parents lived in the back of a little grocery store that my godmother, who is still living there, still owns. And I think it was very, very traditional. I remember being brought up always with the fact that we were going to always go back to Mexico. My mother came here under protest, I guess. And it was always the idea, "When we have enough money, we're going back to Mexico." I remember she didn't like what went on. She didn't like living the way she lived.

Vasquez

What kinds of things didn't she like?

Molina

She didn't like the things that went on. We lived not far away from a little pool hall and things of that sort. She always just felt that, I think, in Casas Grandes,

everything was right. There wasn't, you know, all of these things that went on. I remember that. She used to have lots of problems with people drinking and partying. And the looseness of everything. Everything was right in Mexico; everything was wrong here. The values were very different. I was very, very sheltered. We weren't allowed to participate in a lot of things. You went to school and you came home, and you had a whole list of things to do. You couldn't stay after school and play. That's what Anglos did. Mexicans came home, and they helped their mothers wash clothes. That kind of stuff. [Laughter] And that bothered her that others didn't do that, because then that would set a bad example for us, you know. "But they were different." And all of it, all the upbringing was always very different from kids that I went to school with. And even sometimes kids in our own barrio. For example, little things like joining Girl Scouts or something that my parents didn't allow.

Vasquez

She didn't allow that?

Molina

Uh-uh.

Vasquez

Why not?

Molina

That was something that took away from the responsibility to the family. You know, if you went off and did things after school, then you didn't come home and take care of the rest of the kids or help with whatever was going on. And everything was always back to the family. The responsibility of the family. And that was foremost. And it was like that all of the time. Everything that we did, everything I did, everything I asked for had to fit in to what the goals were of the family. But it was good.

Vasquez

How many of you were there?

Molina

I'm the oldest of ten.

Vasquez

Oldest of ten. Do you want to give me their names?

Molina

[Laughter]

Vasquez

Let's see how your memory is.

Molina

Well, see, it's first myself, and then my sister Irma, then . . .

Vasquez

Middle initial?

Molina

Oh, no. My sister didn't have one. It's just Irma.

Vasquez

Okay.

Molina

And then Graciela, and then my brother Domingo, who we call Mingo. He does have a middle name. Domingo Leonardo. Then my sister Bertha, who also didn't have a middle name. And then my brother Sergio, another brother Danny, or Daniel, the twins and the youngest, Lisa and Olga. I think we got everybody on there.

Vasquez

We're one short.

Molina

You've got Sergio, Danny, Lisa, Olga, Irma, Gracy, Mario . . .

Vasquez

Mario. I didn't get him.

Molina

Oh, you didn't get Mario?

Vasquez

Where is he?

Molina

Oh, pobre [poor] Mario. He is in between Bertha and Sergio. He always accuses me of being left out, too. [Laughter]

Vasquez

You bore it out, didn't you?

Molina

I know. That's pretty terrible. He's the sixth, I think. Anyway, there were a lot of us. And my real name is Jesús Gloria Molina. I'm named after my grandmother. My real grandmother.

Vasquez

On your mother's side?

Molina

No, on my father's side. My real grandmother on my father's side. In fact, yes. And my mother never wanted me to be known as Chuy.

Vasquez

[Laughter]

Molina

So they called me Gloria. [Laughter]

Vasquez

Tell me about school, where you went to school.

Molina

I went to Greenwood Elementary School, a public school.

Vasquez

In Montebello, right?

Molina

In Montebello. Right near that barrio. Then the name was a problem. You know the first day of school, everybody calls you "Jesus." "Looking for Jesus." Because Anglo teachers, you know. So that was a problem. I had a tremendous problem right from the beginning. But I went to a public school. I was totally Spanish-speaking. I probably picked up English around the third grade.

Vasquez

Oh really?

Molina

But I remember going through, particularly, kindergarten and first grade and just really not knowing what was going on. Having a lot of problems. I remember almost everything in kindergarten. And I think a lot of it is because of the problems that I had. My kindergarten teacher is still teaching in Montebello.

Vasquez

Who is that?

Molina

Mrs. Edwards. I'll never forget her. She's a good person.

Vasquez

What was the attitude of your family towards education and towards discipline in school?

Molina

Well, towards education, it was foremost. It was very, very important that we got a good education. And that served all the way up to high school. If you could graduate from high school, that [was] a good, solid, basic education. So we [were] always on track; we were supposed to get a good education and

graduate from high school. My parents were very, very supportive of us doing well. They didn't know what well was. That is, they didn't know if you were supposed to be reading at a certain level. They didn't have that capability of knowing what level we were at. But they knew that we should be doing well. I remember, the other thing is that my father was very insistent on us learning to speak English. And that we speak without an accent. And that we speak clearly and that we not use slang. Even though he didn't really know what it was.

Vasquez

What slang was? Spanish slang? Or English slang? Or either.

Molina

No. He didn't want us to use. . . . Well, Spanish slang. I guess, he didn't use it. Or they did, but didn't know the difference. But I mean, it was English slang. Like you couldn't say, "You guys." For my father it was just a terrible thing to be saying. You couldn't use a lot of words that he used to hear probably around his job that he didn't think were appropriate. But I remember the thing about the accent. And I remember him talking to us about, "You go to school and you learn English." Even when I was in, I think, the eighth grade. No, it was probably in the ninth grade. You got an option of taking [foreign] languages. And I was going to take Spanish. I mean, it would be an easy class. And he said, "No." He said, "You have to learn. . . . If you can take a foreign language, then take a foreign language." He made me take French.

Vasquez

Were you good at French?

Molina

No. I took a whole three years in high school. It was interesting, but I must say I was never [fluent].

Vasquez

Do you think that this insistence on the part of your father has something to do with your command of the English language now?

Molina

Well, I look back at it and I wonder if that's the case. I know with me he was very insistent. I don't know if that was [the reason]. . . . I don't know. People tell me, "Oh, you're so articulate. You have no accent."

Vasquez

You have an almost imperceptible accent.

Molina

Right. But I do remember my father telling me how important it was to learn English and how important it was to speak it properly. And things like that that he just kept [repeating]. But I think my parents had certain expectations of education. And they always knew what was right. In other words, you couldn't disagree and say. . . . For example, I remember that I had problems with spelling. Oh, I guess it must have been in about the fourth or fifth grade. I'm not sure when. And, of course, my mother went to one of those parent-teacher conferences. And they told her, "She can't spell." So she went and got a workbook-one of those you buy at the drugstores. And it was one of those that you do every single night. You know, you learn ten words and you keep [score] on the whole thing. And I remember my mother doing that with me almost every evening until we finished the workbook. She couldn't pronounce the words at all. Sometimes she would sit there and tell me how to spell something. And I'd sit there and say, "I wonder what she's saying," you know. Because she couldn't pronounce the words. She couldn't read them. But anyway, she was very insistent on helping me overcome my spelling problems and was very helpful. So she knew that there were certain things that she should be helping us with. And it was very important for me to overcome whatever problem was pointed out. So, anyway, education was very important. But, again, only pretty much up to high school. They never prepared us for college. And, in fact, my mother was . . .

Vasquez

Was it ever a goal?

Molina

My father thought it was nice that I should go to college. My mother felt it was very inappropriate considering the circumstances.

Vasquez

Which were?

Molina

Which were that we were poor. So consequently, "You're eighteen years old. You can go out and work now." [Laughter]

Vasquez

Hit the bricks, huh?

Molina

You got it. But she didn't mean it to be that way. I mean, that's when my dad had his accident. And it was real tough. And so when I wanted to go to school . . .

Vasquez

What year was that?

Molina

That was in 1966.

Vasquez

Let me just clear up something, because there's a discrepancy in some of the record. Was it an industrial accident or an automobile accident your father had?

Molina

An industrial accident. My father was in a cavein. My dad was a laborer who worked out in the streets with a jackhammer. And they were in some street, and it caved in on them. I'm not exactly sure where. Somewhere in the Eastside of town. I remember that. So he was in an industrial accident. The other man that was with him was totally paralyzed. My father did a little bit better. I mean, he had a lot of problems after that. He wasn't able to do the same kind of work, but it was an industrial accident.

Vasquez

And this forced you to, what, quit school?

Molina

Well, no. My dad had his accident right around '66, I think. It was the beginning or the end. Or maybe even a year before that. I should remember that. But I remember that it was very, sort of, lean times during that period. And then I wanted to go on to school. I had never been encouraged to go on to college, even though in high school I was in what they call the college [preparation] track. Whatever they call it.

Vasquez

What high school was this?

Molina

El Rancho High School.

Vasquez

El Rancho.

Molina

And it was not a teacher, but a person that I worked with after school. Because I used to work in a program after school. She was the one who encouraged me to go on to, at least, junior college. Which is what I did.

Vasquez

Rio Hondo College?

Molina

To Rio Hondo.

Vasquez

What were your better subjects or your favorite subjects in school?

Molina

Well, so much depended on who the teacher was. But I must say, the things that were the most important to me were things [like] history, or civics, or current events kind of things. History related to very real things that

happened. So I might have a real dull history teacher and have a real exciting civics teacher. But it all kind of related to civics. I don't know. Current events kind of issues.

Vasquez

All right.

Molina

My favorite class, by far, in my last two years in school was something called. . . It was a civics class: "Problems in Social Democracy." And I had a very, very good teacher [who] made it very interesting and very exciting. A lot of it depended on the teachers.

Vasquez

Who do you identify as being most responsible or [having] more [of an] impact on you in your early years? In your formation of political or social ideas?

Molina

Well, people ask me that all the time. And they really. . . . When you say my early years . . .

Vasquez

Say, before college.

Molina

Well, again, it was this teacher that I had in high school [who] used to focus us on [current] events. While most people, like all of us, will read the paper, very few of us ever take the time to understand the implications of [what] events mean and what [they] mean over all. And he used to put that kind of perspective [on] everything that you read in the newspaper: what it meant for the future, what it meant for the past, what was going on, what kind of trend it meant. I thought it opened up a whole different kind of a world for me. And [I] really [had] a feeling that you [could] have an impact on those events. You could change things. You could affect them. Whereas, before you always took everything for granted, that that's the way things are. So I think that he started opening up some of those opportunities, or at least considered looking

at them and viewing things very differently than, I guess, I had been introduced up to that point in time.

Vasquez

What was his name?

Molina

Mr. [Robert] Walker. He came by the other day, but I didn't get to see him.

Vasquez

Well, how did you. . . . Or when did you decide to go to college? How did that happen?

Molina

Like I said, I was in a college-prep track, I guess, because I did well in certain subjects. But I never had expectations. My idea would be that I would go out and work.

Vasquez

All right.

Molina

But I had this bookkeeper that I worked with after school. I had an after-school job. And one of the things that she had asked from the beginning when I started working with her in my senior year was if I was going to go on to college. And, of course, I was usually very shy and didn't even think about it or say anything. She would continue to talk about it. And then finally I must have said something to her that I couldn't. . . . I couldn't go. I didn't have any money to go. And that's when she started looking around for a scholarship so that I might go. And the fact that junior colleges don't cost anything, you know. It was basically free. And you just had to buy your books. She did a lot of that introduction. No one else had.

Vasquez

Who was she?

Molina

Mrs. Levesque. Charlene Levesque. She was like a bookkeeper at the high school that I went to. And I worked in an after-school program. We used to get paid for it. If I remember, we got certain credit, and we got paid for it. And she's the one that kept encouraging [me]. Everything that I kept bringing up, I would always look to college as something that you. . . . Because it never had been really introduced. It was only the white kids that got together to [talk about college]. . . . I mean, I used to hang around with all the Chicanos. And none of them were talking of going to college at the time. And, also, that you went away for it. You know, that somebody paid for it, and you went somewhere. And you went to college. I guess things that you saw in movies and other [places], [going to college] had never been really introduced as something that I could do. And she's the one that kept bringing it up and saying, you know, "They're going to open up this new college over here. Rio Hondo College is going to be brand new. You could go to that college." And, sure enough, that was the first year [1963] that it opened up. "It's going to be nearby." She did all of these things. And including introducing me to scholarships, which were hardly available for anybody going to a JC [junior college]. But she was responsible. I think I applied for a couple of scholarships, and I got them based on grades and interviews and other things that she did. So, anyway, that's what encouraged me. But at the same time, competing with it was my mother saying, "You've got to get out and work." [Laughter]

Vasquez

You, as I understand, went on to study fashion design at Rio Hondo.

Molina

Yes. I had this. . . . Because as a kid growing up, I just felt that was something exciting and interesting and something I thought I could do. We had a neighbor, someone who threw away magazines that I used to pick up. So I used to read a lot of magazines. And I was really fascinated by it all. You know, fashions and everything. So that's when I started looking into that. And, again, sort of [with] that same introduction [from] this bookkeeper, like, "Well, what is it that you want to do?" Well, I hadn't been brought up with [that goal]. . . . I mean, you do that when you're twelve years old. "Oh, this is what I want to be." But when you're seventeen years old, you know, it's very real. What is it that you want to be? Things are happening to you. I guess that's just part of

the other thing about being brought up in a very traditionally Chicano family. The expectations were that you were going to get married and have children. You weren't going to go on to be anything other than maybe what your mom was.

Vasquez

Did that bother you?

Molina

Did it bother me?

Vasquez

At the time.

Molina

It bothered me by its limitations. Yes, I remember that a lot. I remember saying to my mother that one of the things that I was not. . . . I was not going to get married right away. That I felt that I wanted to work. I wanted to have my own place. I wanted to do these kinds of things first. That I wanted to travel. She thought I was sort of nuts. And so I was annoyed by the limitations that it presented. But at the same time, I was sort of caught up in the fact that there was no planning. No one said, "Oh, Gloria, you know, you can go off and become a teacher. Or you could do this." It was just none of that kind of stuff. This bookkeeper, or friend of mine at that time, kept introducing, "Well, what are you going to do? Well, if you go to college, what are you going to take? What courses are you going to take?" And that's kind of the first time I had been introduced to having to make my own decisions about these things. Because up to that point in time, you know, as you take these classes and in order to get to graduation, you really hadn't [planned]. . . . Like I said, my little French classes. And I took a couple of art classes. A couple of electives that you got where it's very minimal. Nothing. . . . Going in any direction. I did know what I didn't want to do. And one of the things that I didn't want to do was I certainly didn't want to become like a secretary to somebody. Somehow there was some problem that I had. Remember those? That I didn't want to do that. And so to me the thing was, "So let's go in and say I want to be a fashion

designer." So I went in and started taking these fashion designer. . . . These art classes. Little did I know I had no talent whatsoever. [Laughter]

Vasquez

A lot of "ganas," [enthusiasm] but no talent.

Molina

No talent. [Laughter]

Vasquez

All right. So how long were you in designing?

Molina

Oh, probably a whole semester. [Laughter] Actually, it was probably a year. I remember that even during that first year, one of the things I had to do, I used to go out and get ready. Look for a job for the summer.

Vasquez

Uh-huh.

Molina

Well, I was working at Sears as a clerk. But, basically, getting ready to go out for a full-time summer job. And I started looking around. The big thing was, "Can you type?" Of course not. I had never taken a typing course other than a basic class that you [had to] take. But I had never really taken clerical courses. I spent that summer taking clerical classes so I could get myself a job. And that's how I became a legal secretary.

Vasquez

That's how you became a legal secretary?

Molina

Which I actually enjoyed doing. I loved it.

Vasquez

Did you?

Molina

Uh-huh.

Vasquez

So that's what took you on to the four-year college courses?

Molina

I never went on [to a four-year college]. . . . After that, after I started working full time, after I landed my first secretarial job, I started going to school only part-time. And I continued going to Rio Hondo at night. Then I transferred to East L.A. [Los Angeles] College at night. I was working as a secretary during the day. I started working at about nineteen, full-time almost. It was just one year. It was the only year that I went full-time. The first year. And after that, I always went in the evenings. And I went to East L.A. College, gee, till '70. . . . When did I stop going? Maybe '72, '73? And then I just went over to Cal State L.A. [California State University, Los Angeles]. Started courses there, but I've never finished.

Vasquez

Were you sorry you never did?

Molina

Huh?

Vasquez

Are you sorry you never did? Do you feel you missed anything?

Molina

Well, I feel that if I would have been able to go full-time and all that, I would have been able to join all the other exciting things that my friends were doing, like boycotting classes and being part of the student movement. I still was a part of it in my own way, even though I only went at night. No. Actually, I don't know that I would have missed out that much more. It's interesting because I always felt totally deficient about not having that education. And I have been a fortunate person in opportunities that have been presented to me. I have been able to take advantage of them. While I didn't have a formal

education from the standpoint of a college degree, I've been able to do a lot of things without it and been able to overcome that problem. It has still created until very recently. . . . Until about the last four or five years, have I finally just released it and said, "I'm not going to get one [college degree]." Or at least not at this point. I may go back later and get one. I was always worried that somewhere along the line, somebody was going to say, "Hey, you're not going to get any further. You go back and do it right." I was a legal secretary for five years. And I was introduced to the opportunity of becoming an adult education teacher. And I said, "Well, you've got to have a degree. I don't have a degree." They said, "Oh, no. You can petition in." I mean, they had a process where you could make. . . . [Laughter] Anyway, what you could do was, you could petition in at that time and send in an application. And I was able to petition in for adult education in clerical training. And it was interesting, because I was pursuing another thing. I was pursuing how we could get Chicanas trained. I was involved as a Chicana activist in trying to figure out why Latinas weren't being trained for jobs. I mean, they were just sort of like me, you know. Nobody ever said, "You really have to go out there and work. And you have to be prepared to go out and compete for a job." So I was trying to create a program in East L.A., so that we could get Latinas trained for jobs. And one of the things was a secretarial job. I was a secretary. I was being paid.

Vasquez

Who were you working with?

Molina

I was working for the law firm of Sheppard, Mullin, Richter, and Hampton, which is a corporate law firm in downtown. And I was being paid very, very well. Enough to make me very independent as a young Latina. As a young woman. To have my own car. So when I used to work as a volunteer with a lot of the young women in the Eastside in Maravilla [Housing Project], I found that one of the things they didn't have was real access to that independence, the opportunity for it. So I was trying to create this program when I was introduced to becoming an adult education instructor. And they said, you know, "You could do this. And you could train the kids, and you could teach. And you could do all of those things." So I was very lucky. I petitioned. I got

accepted. I got this job at the East L.A. Skills Center. And I became an adult education teacher and continued a lot of my activist kind of stuff.

Vasquez

Tell me about that activism.

Molina

It sprang up. Tell you about it?

Vasquez

Uh-huh.

Molina

Well, let's see.

Vasquez

What years, first of all, [would] you consider your activist years?

Molina

Well, a mitotera [busybody].

Vasquez

That's what you get.

Molina

Yeah, right. Well, right. I think all of us that went to school, to college, at the time we did-1966 when I did-we were all becoming, in a sense, more and more aware and more active about the problems that were going on out there. Being introduced to the whole so-called "student movement" at the Chicano Moratorium, the antiwar movement and everything else. But, certainly, when I was at East L.A. College and going to school and being part of the school walkouts and everything else that was going on, you couldn't help but attach yourself to what was going on at the time and being part [of it]. . . . At that time, I was part of a group called MASA, the Mexican-American Students Association.

Vasquez

Where? At Rio Hondo College?

Molina

No. At East L.A. College.

Vasquez

East L.A. College.

Molina

Yeah. Because that's really when I [started to get involved] . . .

Vasquez

Tell me about some of your contemporaries at college at that time that were in MASA.

Molina

[Laughter] Well, you know, it's interesting, because I was such a darned good follower. I can't remember a lot of their names. But I remember, Raúl Ruíz used to be a speaker there all the time. I mean, [Alberto] Al Juárez [Jr.] was one of the activists. All of them were there. Percy Durán was a big noisemaker. [Laughter] A lot of people that I now know. But at that time, I was a very quiet follower as I look at myself. I mean, because what they were saying and what they were talking about was almost too radical for me. Yet, at the same time, I agreed with everything that they were saying. And while I couldn't be in a role like they were, I could always be that backup assistance. So I always considered myself a good follower. So that's what I used to do.

Vasquez

What were the contradictory currents? Or was said or done that caused you . . . ?

Molina

Well, first of all, there was one overall kind of theme that I couldn't relate to, and that was this whole thing that somebody owed us something. It was always this feeling that, you know, more of a socialist [idea], and a lot of it. . . . Somebody owed us something. And I was brought up with a value system that kept colliding with it. It was, "No. I work hard. And I'll do well. And, you know,

everything will be okay. I'll be able to provide for myself." And, sometimes, the conspiracy of the racism, that it's all planned and staged, and we're just all little puppets in this process. Those were hard things that I kept [to myself]. . . . I recognized them, but I couldn't wear them. It wasn't anything that I could go up and speak about. I was just listening to all of that. Then, of course, it was the very racism that they talked about and how we were constantly being discriminated against and how we had to stand up and challenge all of that. That I could buy into, but yet at the same time, as the Chicano leaders there, they would oppress me as a Chicana. I just didn't feel. . . . I mean, the so-called discrimination and all the racism and everything. Then they would turn around. If I raised up my hand and said, "What about this issue?" they'd say, "Sit down." [Laughter] Honestly, I remember one time, I finally got the courage to say something in one of these meetings about something that we were doing. And I remember kind of being told to just sit down. Like I had no voice or was not entitled to participate.

Vasquez

On the basis of being a woman?

Molina

Yes. You could see that every so often. That it was the women who never got to participate. It was always the men. And after that, I developed this kind of quiet resentment. Like, you know, "Well, wait a minute. How come they're all men? And how come we don't get to participate?" And I remember that being a part of it as well. There was a bigger issue. A bigger cause. As I said, I continued to be a good follower. But I participated as an activist. And even though that was going on and, you know, I could go and mimeograph fliers and I would paint signs and I would do all those kind of things, I still wanted to work on the unique problem of the discrimination against Chicanas. And that's when I started working there. That's when I invested a lot of my time. And I started working in Maravilla.

Vasquez

As part of MASA?

Molina

Initially, it started out as part of MASA. They had like a student tutoring program that I signed up for. And I was to go and tutor the kids in Maravilla in the [housing] projects. What was real troubling for me wasn't tutoring. These poor kids couldn't read at all. I mean, that's how bad it was. And I was doing some of that when I got introduced to Casa Maravilla [Community Center], which was in the area. And it was doing a lot of work with gang kids and everything else. I decided to go over there and volunteer. They put me in charge of the women. And I started meeting with them and talking to them. I felt, you know, it was something I could do. I mean, I could start changing things for them and helping them. That's how I got active and got active in those issues. And before you know it, I was a so-called activist and a big mouth. I didn't intend to be. I intended to be helping them. I felt like they were just like me, brought up in the same kind of barrio, the same kind of situations. I made it. And I can help them. And here, you know, I did my little goody two-shoes routine around them. I felt like some kind of a Y [Young Women's Christian Association] director or something. I didn't realize how huge their problems were, how big they were, how different they were from my family.

Vasquez

Is that right?

Molina

Yeah.

Vasquez

You were known as something of a feminist. When do you think you became a feminist?

Molina

Well, I think I became a feminist probably, say, the first time I challenged my father at eleven. [Laughter] I got instantly smeared against the wall.

Vasquez

Take a position and right then you are put down immediately. Is that it?
[Laughter]

Molina

And I remember quietly espousing those kinds of things with my mother, you know. And, "Well, you shouldn't let Dad do that to you." And, "Why do you take it? If I were you, I wouldn't do these kinds of things." But it was just quietly I argued with my mother. And then probably other kinds of feelings: talking limitations. How being raised to just be married and to have children, I thought that was very limiting. And then later on feeling that in group settings and group dynamics, like within the Chicano movement, finding ourselves relegated to very secondary kind of roles almost instantly and automatically, because [it was] dictated from one of the guys. Right? So I think that made me feel that there had to be something said about it and done. And it was probably formalized as soon as the women's movement started expressing a lot of their goals and the so-called "consciousness awareness" kind of seminars that they used to have.

Vasquez

Consciousness-raising?

Molina

Right. And talking about being more assertive. Actually all those things were going on, and I knew that there was something that needed to happen. I was looking for something though. I remember searching so hard for something, that I wanted to get together with other Latinas to talk about Chicanas. And it was a very hard thing to do. I had heard of the women's movement. I think I may have even gone to a meeting and gotten turned off, because they were all white women.

Vasquez

Oh.

Molina

And I wanted to get together with other Chicanas. And I remember even at that time, I was going to East L.A. College at night. Someone had told me that there was a teacher at Cal State L.A.-and I can't remember her name-and they told me to go look her up. So I went to look her up. She wasn't teaching that

semester. But somebody said there was some kind of group of women that were getting together.

Vasquez

Of Chicano women?

Molina

Uh-huh. And I remember . . .

Vasquez

Was it Professor Linda Apodaca?

Molina

I don't remember. I can't remember her name. But I do remember going to those meetings with these women. About eight or ten of them. And it turned out to be like a study group more than anything else. It wasn't terribly interesting. I didn't have any real relationship with the other women, because they were all full-time students. I worked and went to school, and I just didn't have the flexibility they did. But I remember looking for something like that. And I remember later on reading about . . .

Vasquez

Why was it hard? Or why did it seem hard to you? That was already in the late sixties, early seventies, right? To come together with Chicanos inside the Chicano organization?

Molina

The Chicanas didn't get together.

Vasquez

They didn't want to?

Molina

They didn't get together and do anything. In fact, one of the things I found annoying about the Chicano movement was the fact that most of these Chicanas that were there were not expressing any of the feelings that I would.

. . . Or, maybe they, too, were intimidated by being put down. I mean, you had to be somebody's girlfriend to be anything.

Vasquez

Is that right?

Molina

That's not what I wanted. So there really wasn't anywhere [to go]. I mean, you couldn't go to three other Chicanas and say, "Hey, did you see him put me down? Let's talk about this," and that kind of thing. I think I was probably insecure at that time. But I also didn't see it as a forum by which to be raising these kinds of concerns. I know I had that kind of feeling. And it all eventually evolved. I finally found this place with this group of wonderful women. [This] was when I heard about the Chicana Service Action Center. And the fact that it was opening up. And I got into this, too. Some of the great leaders in our community, like Francisca Flores and . . .

Vasquez

I was going to ask you about her.

Molina

Yes.

Vasquez

Was this when you first met Francisca?

Molina

Uh-huh.

Vasquez

What's your estimation of Francisca?

Molina

Well, Francisca and I are so much alike. That's why we've always fought every time we've gotten together lately. We've ended up disagreeing most of the time. She is an amazing woman, who was certainly-I don't know if you'd say-ahead of her times. I mean, she was an activist in the thirties. She probably

has the richest history of any of us from the standpoint of challenging and overcoming, you know, problems in the past. Anyway, to me she was an unbelievable inspiration. Being, you know, at that time, twenty-three years old and looking for something. To hear this woman speak and to be so assertive and to know what she was talking about and willing to challenge and to move on. She was just tremendously exciting. That whole group of women really.

Vasquez

Tell me some of the other names.

Molina

Well, Evelyn Benson is still around somewhere. I met Yolanda Nava. Both of us kind of joined up at that same time. Amalia Camacho was another member. Lilia Aceves. Very active. Still around.

Vasquez

Lilia Aceves?

Molina

Lilia Aceves. Uh-huh. I'm trying to remember the other woman who was just wonderful from. . . . She's a teacher. I can't remember her name. But those were some of them . . .

Vasquez

What was it that was satisfying about the Chicana [Service Action Center] . . ?

1.2. TAPE NUMBER: I, Side Two (May 25, 1990)

Molina

They were saying exactly what I was saying. That is that Chicanas needed to have a full range of opportunities and that barriers needed to be eliminated. One of the first things they needed to do was to be appropriately trained to go in and take jobs. To go in and challenge and do all these things. Develop leadership skills. And so they were saying all of those things. And more than anything else, they had to say, "Tradition was fine. But it shouldn't. . . . It's not going to put us down." To me, it was just what I was looking for, because they had captured just everything that I thought were problems of the past. That

now we needed to direct ourselves to start bringing about changes. And that we should do it ourselves. That we didn't necessarily fit into the feminist, the Anglo feminist movement.

Vasquez

Why not?

Molina

Well, it's interesting, because we had a lot of dialogue about it. And I remember that's one of the things that I fit in. Even though the Chicanos in the Chicano movement would put us down every so often . . .

Vasquez

[Laughter]

Molina

. . . and we were brought up by sexist dads and so on, yet at the same time we understood that kind of racism that was going on and the problems that were being confronted by Chicanos in general as a community. And so for us to say, you know, as sometimes the feminist movement did, "Men are wrong. And we have to castigate them for their inappropriate conditioning up to now." We felt that it was more of our duty to educate ourselves and the men, and to start those changes. We used to get upset with the Anglo feminist movement because they would use words like "macho." "Those macho pigs." Well, we found that as an insult to our men. So there were differences there. Sort of like, "Let me call him a macho, but you can't" [Laughter] kind of thing. So we found differences. And the other thing too is that the same kind of racism that existed out there with Anglos existed within the feminist movement. And you had to almost be there to always feel it and know that it was part of it. You know, you were still secondary, in other words. So we felt we needed to get our act together. And that's what I enjoyed as well, that we were doing it ourselves without criticism of any other group. In other words, we weren't going to criticize the Chicano movement, and we were not going to criticize the feminists. We were going to take from both and be part of both. But we were going to develop our own leadership skills. And that attracted me to this

group of women right away. Plus the fact that they said what was on their mind. Which was very unique at that time.

Vasquez

What kind of things did you engage in?

Molina

What kind of things?

Vasquez

Yes. What kind of programs? What kind of study? What kind of discussion?

Molina

Well, we had great discussions. That was the other thing. Because everything was so new and fascinating that we just. . . . We had meetings that were supposed to last an hour that would go on for four, and talk about all the things that needed to be done. And we did our own consciousness-raising. So we had great dialogue. Great discussions. Well, the other part that was interesting is that, within these women, they were always-and Francisca was the prime example of this, if not the only person that really did it-everything had a strategy. "Well, what are we going to do about it? Well, this is what we've got to do. And then we've got to do this one. We've got to do that. And then we're going to change. . . ." And I had never been a part of that. In the Chicano movement, the only strategy I was involved in is how I was going to mimeograph two thousand copies of the flier. Right?

Vasquez

[Laughter]

Molina

Never was I part of the dialogue of how we were going to do something and change something. And so I got introduced to formulating strategies and talking about what we were going to do. It was one of the very first things that we were. . . . At least that I was introduced to. Francisca had already done other things. Francisca had written a proposal to the Department of Labor that said, "Chicanas have been left out. You've got to fund us for employment training." They funded her. She set up the Chicana Service Action Center. So

she was already a woman who knew how to do all these things. We were just little hangers-on. Yolanda Nava was an activist, I guess, within the student movement at UCLA. She had a hell of a lot of self-confidence, something the rest of us were still sort of testing and feeling out. Anyway, I learned a lot of those things. And one of the very first things that we did is that we were introduced to. . . . They said, "The Commission on the Status of Women [in California] is coming to town. And what we should do is we should go there and tell them about Chicanas and introduce them to what our status is. And also, we've got to have that presentation." And so we started meeting about it: what we were going to do, how we were going to do it, how we were going to gather the data.

Vasquez

What year was this?

Molina

This must have been 1973. I think. [Interruption] Anyway, what we were saying about . . .

Vasquez

The Commission on the Status of Women.

Molina

We put everything together. We decided we were going to testify. And some of us were in charge of getting the demographic data, putting that together. We had four speakers, and everybody was going to take on a different role. And we did it. I remember the very first time I spoke in public.

Vasquez

This was the very first time you had spoken in public?

Molina

Yes. It was the most horrifying, frightening situation.

Vasquez

How did it go?

Molina

Well, it was interesting. I mean, I got through it. I survived, as they say. But I remember even the evening before I was trying to figure out how I could get out of there. How I could do something so that I didn't have to do it. I remember going up there and speaking. There was a group of women. And I remember being so very frightened. I had to speak before a microphone and all of that. But, anyway, we went up there. And I even remember some of the things that we were going to testify about that I totally didn't agree with.

Vasquez

Tell me about that.

Molina

Well, because one of the speakers, one of the Chicana speakers, talked about the stereotypes. It might have even been Yolanda. How those stereotypes were now behind us and we didn't want to be part of these stereotypes and all this. One of the stereotypes was, you know, "We're not all heavysset Mexican women with ten kids hanging" Talking about my mother. Right? I'm going, "What?" Anyway . . .

Vasquez

[Laughter]

Molina

. . . so there were certain things like that. We did all these things. And one of the things that I was supposed to do. . . . I can't remember what my role was. But I had a formal presentation. I remember they kept telling me to speak up. I thought I was speaking so loud, and I wasn't. And then I don't know what inspired me at one point to say to them. . . . I know what it was. I was supposed to say something about the fact that there was underrepresentation. That here we were coming before the Commission of the Status of Women in California, and that one of the things that should happen is that there should be a Latina appointed or a Chicana appointed [to the commission]. And I remember when I said it. I said it so strongly, because I felt like it just echoed. And it was more of a demand. It was no nice thing. Just to say more, anyhow, "I demand that, you know, this commission be

representative of a Chicana," or something like that. And I remember saying that very strongly. But, anyway, that was our first presentation. So I learned a lot from those women. They were wonderful teachers. And they were, in their own way, very interesting.

Vasquez

How long did you participate in this thing?

Molina

Oh, for a long time. You know, actually. . . . From that was formulated Comisión [Femenil Mexicana Nacional]. Comisión was sort of in existence because Francisca and others had gotten together and they had developed a statewide conference. And there really wasn't a network of Chicanas. But what I did was we formulated the Comisión. What we know now, the L.A. chapter of it.

Vasquez

Comisión Femenil Mexicana Nacional . . .

Molina

De Los Angeles?

Vasquez

De Los Angeles.

Molina

[Laughter]

Vasquez

De Los Angeles, of course.

Molina

A long title. And a whole bunch of us got together.

Vasquez

Now, Francisca had [organized] this before, hadn't she?

Molina

Yes.

Vasquez

It goes back many years?

Molina

Francisca on her own. Francisca is. . . . Well, there wasn't really a formal organization. She had Comisión Femenil for a long time.

Vasquez

Was it sort of a speakers organization?

Molina

Right. And that's how she wrote the proposal.

Vasquez

That's how she published *Regeneración*.

Molina

That's right.

Vasquez

Under its auspices. Right?

Molina

That's right. All right. That was all Francisca. Like I said, the Chicanas had this action center, and all of that comes from her writing those proposals [for the] organization of Chicanas. But we really didn't have the network with the organization. . . . [We had] this group of women that would get together every so often. But Comisión became a more formalized kind of thing. And it became a very large network of Chicanas that would get together.

Vasquez

Was that the idea? Building a network?

Molina

Building a Chicana network throughout the state. That there would be chapters everywhere. That all of them would be involved in leadership development through issues in our community. That we would all be involved in taking on whatever the obstacles were for Chicanas. And creating programs to eliminate them. And we became a very strong activist group. It was interesting, because the dynamics at that time. . . . Well, we were just perfect. I mean, the Chicano movement was a complement to us. The things that were going on and the organizations that were there. And also to the feminist movement. We were a complement, because they weren't-as I say now-women of color who were involved in those kind of activities.

Vasquez

What conflicts, if any, did you have with the movements? The Chicano movement and other women's movements?

Molina

Well, the Chicano movement, again, every so often would surface about-the whole thing about-you know, "one battle at a time." You know, "Don't . . ."

Vasquez

"Divide the forces."

Molina

Right. Exactly. We would go to meetings, and there would be discussions. I remember one meeting. I can't remember if it was one of the senators-U.S. senators-[Alan] Cranston or [John V.] Tunney. I can't remember. There was a lot of discussion about, "We're going to go in and meet with him. And here are the issues." And, of course, at that time we had been raising employment training for Chicanas as really important. Higher education for Chicanas. And the other thing that was very important was child care, which is so unimportant to Chicanos.

Vasquez

Really.

Molina

Oh, very unimportant. I mean, child care? The women stay home and take care of the kids. I remember the dynamics of that meeting, of bringing it up. And it was exactly treated like that. You know. Very close to saying, "Because they belong home." Almost. But they didn't say it.

Vasquez

Yeah. This was like the late seventies already.

Molina

Yeah. Well, it was in the mid. . . . Early seventies. I don't know. This was around. . . . Maybe '74 by that time. And I remember that we had to work very hard and be very insistent that child care was one of the issues that would be discussed. But it was a debate. I mean, you know. . . . And again, it was, "How dare you? We've got all these other issues." Or it was that whole thing about, "Let's not divide the movement." You know, "Those issues are not important. They're secondary." So we had those little pleititos [disputes]. And, again, with the feminists and with the women's organizations, [these issues] always seemed to be relegated to unimportant kind of things. I mean, they were involved in "other" kind of issues.

Vasquez

Give me an example.

Molina

Well, they were involved in women in higher education and things of that sort. They didn't buy into the discrimination that, you know. . . . It was all one. You were discriminated against because you're a woman, not because you're a Chicana woman. We didn't buy into that. And we wanted it to be understood that if we were going to step in and create a coalition, there had to be an understanding that there is discrimination against us because we are Chicanas. And they seemed to [say], "Oh, no, no, no. You're a woman. That's the discrimination. That's the sexism." And they, too, didn't want to recognize that sexism and racism were one and the same. And so we were constantly involved in little pleititos. But then even within ourselves, we were. . . . We knew what we were doing. And some of us were exerting leadership that offended others.

Vasquez

Why did it offend them?

Molina

Sometimes maybe because we were. . . . I don't know. Maybe it's like anything else. Because you disagree with leadership. You didn't want to follow whatever was going on at the time. But I remember we began. . . . Like any other organization, the same little pleititos that go on about what's the thing to do, what's the position to take, who we should align with. All of those kinds of debates. The envidias [jealousies] that began. Somebody's not working as hard as somebody else or as she should be. Somebody, you know, didn't do their job right. All those little pleititos that go on that create conflicts in an organization started surfacing. And I know that for me, one of the things is that I continued to be somebody that, if you had a set of rules, continued to be so process oriented. People should follow rules and regulations and things of that sort. And I remember that even within Comisión, I had very, very strong feelings that we set up a set of rules and we should follow them. And every so often, there was somebody who would be bending them. And that used to be very annoying to me. I mean, that was like, you know, somebody tearing up the Constitution or something like that. And I used to get very dramatic about it.

Vasquez

Were you ever seen as dictatorial or . . . ?

Molina

Oh, yes.

Vasquez

Or strict?

Molina

Oh, yes.

Vasquez

Are you?

Molina

Yes. I was very aggressive about being involved. A Chicana who [never] took her job lightly.

Vasquez

Now what were you doing for a living at the time?

Molina

Like when I had a final, I used to get very insulting. [Laughter] I have a final.

Vasquez

What were you doing for a living at that time? Were you already being paid for your activism?

Molina

No. Well, during the initial part of it, I was still teaching at the Skills Center. Which is, I think, one of the luxuries that I had, because I worked from eight in the morning till two in the afternoon. So I had all afternoon. I used to be able to devote much more time than somebody who got out of work at six, and I was single. I was just totally intolerant. I mean, the Chicana movement was everything. [Laughter] And if you didn't make your contribution, I used to be really terrible. I used to devote a lot of time to it. And I used to be offended every so often when others just didn't pull their own share or didn't do what they said they were going to do. When I look back, it certainly was one of the reasons that I also had to step back, by the way, was because I was so darned pushy to the point of squashing other leadership.

Vasquez

Uh-huh.

Molina

And so I found myself like that. And one of the things that used to bother me so much about Francisca Flores. . . . I mean, she was such a great inspirational leader. But once you got closer to that, she could shoot you down just as easily. And that was one of the things that. . . . Or criticize you, which was really a painful thing to go through. I felt that one of the things that. . . . Even

though she inspired leadership, sometimes she had a tendency to jump it. I found myself doing the same thing. And that was when I started realizing that I [had] better start letting other leadership emerge. I think a lot of people were comfortable with my leadership, too. "That's good." You know, "Give her more work to do." But every so often, I would step back. And that's when I started doing some of that stepping back and allowing other Comisión leaders to take on those roles.

Vasquez

What kind of things did you do as you stepped back?

Molina

I got more involved in politics.

Vasquez

Politics?

Molina

Uh-huh.

Vasquez

We're going to find out what that means in a minute.

Molina

[Laughter]

Vasquez

In Comisión or in the Chicana Action Service Center, was there ever a conflict between lesbians and nonlesbians? Was that ever a problem?

Molina

Uh-huh. [Negative]

Vasquez

Did it ever become a problem?

Molina

Not while I was there. Not anything that became a . . .

Vasquez

An issue, for example?

Molina

No.

Vasquez

Or a debate over theory or whatever?

Molina

No. The only pleito. . . . And I wasn't even there, but I remember about it. Some Chicana conference in San Jose where that came up. You know, "Are the lesbians going to be part of this group?" And they said, "They might be, and nobody knows." And other people took a position, "Oh, we have to know which one is the lesbian," and that kind of thing. So that was a pleito. But other than that, I don't remember it ever being an issue or a problem. The other thing is it also never became a focal issue. In other words, we also didn't advocate for discrimination against lesbians. That was not a primary focus of ours. But it was never raised during that time.

Vasquez

I ask you because it was an important issue at the NACS Conference [National Association for Chicano Studies] in Albuquerque [New Mexico] recently. And I wonder if that ever came up in a setting where you had a concentration of people with the intensity that you seemed to have.

Molina

No. I remember that in the late seventies they had a conference up in San Jose, and it divided the group. I mean, it just divided them, because everybody . . .

Vasquez

On the basis of what?

Molina

They were formulating some kind of a statewide caucus. And somebody raised the issue of, "Are lesbians going to be part of this coalition?" And some people feeling, "Why focus on it?" There are lesbians in all of our Chicana organizations. And there wasn't a lesbian organization that you could just say, "Come on in." At that time, they were just part of it? "And so why make it a focus?" Some of them said, "No. You have to make it a focus, because it is a real problem. And for that, it is important for other Chicana lesbians." So that became the pleito. And from my understanding, it divided a whole conference. Everything went down the tubes at the statewide conference because of that pleito.

Vasquez

Now, you began to get involved in politics. Tell me how you began to be involved in politics.

Molina

How did I begin to get involved in politics? I started out as a very reluctant participant, I guess. What happened with Comisión or with even my activism with the young women in Maravilla is that I found myself attending things like school board meetings, going and listening to so-called assemblymen or a senator. And, of course, none of them were Chicanos. And they knew nothing about us. And so then later on, being introduced to someone like a [Assemblyman] Richard [J.] Alatorre, who was, you know, finally a Chicano activist that was now. . . . You know, with all due respect, the congressman [Edward R. Roybal] was someone that you knew about, and you certainly knew he did good work, but he wasn't this young activist like a Richard Alatorre presented. And so that was really interesting for a lot of us.

Vasquez

Did you know Richard before he became an assemblyman?

Molina

Yes. By accident. I used to work at a law firm when I started working with his ex-wife [Stella Alatorre]. And he used to come in every so often. [Laughter] And it's interesting, because Richard was, at that time, working for, oh,

something like the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People].

Vasquez

NAACP.

Molina

Their education project? Or something? And that's the only reason that I knew of him. But not from the standpoint of his Chicano activism. I knew him as Stella's husband. [Laughter] Ex-husband. So I knew Richard. And then later on, when I was out there in the community, he was being introduced as this rising youngster. I think he worked for an assemblyman. He probably worked for [Assemblyman Walter J.] Wally [Karabian] or somebody like that. He used to be introduced as that. Then, later on, he was elected. Now I remember one of the things that I also used to do was I was a volunteer for the Western Center on Law and Poverty. I was. . . . Because I was a legal secretary. . . . I used to type for Chicano organizations. I would go and volunteer and do these things. And the Western Center was working with somebody else. They had asked me if I would go and volunteer to work on this campaign. It was Ralph Ochoa [Laughter] at the time, I think, and so I volunteered in that campaign.

Vasquez

That's how you got involved in that campaign?

Molina

Yes. But it was only as a typist, in a sense. I didn't know him that well. In fact, I might have met Ochoa at the time. But I don't think he even knows that now. That I was used as one of these little gofers in that campaign. Like I said, they used to send me over to type things. But I did a lot of volunteer typing for various things through the Western Center. Because they used to send me out to different groups. But later on, through Comisión, I had an opportunity to meet Richard in a formal setting. [Philip] Phil M^on^te^z had, when we were at the Commission on the Status of Women, heard us testify and all. And he came up to us afterwards and he said. . . . And I don't know if you know Phil M^on^te^z. But in his own way, he said, "You guys should really go in and get a Chicana appointed to that commission." And, of course, we didn't know beans

about how to do that. So he said, "Well, let me introduce you to Alatorre. And you could meet with him and see what he can do." So Yolanda and I set up a meeting with Richard. And I had never met him before as an assemblyman. And I don't think he remembered me as . . .

Vasquez

The typist? [Laughter]

Molina

Right. The little receptionist that used to work with his ex-wife's law firm.

Vasquez

What was your impression of what you saw?

Molina

Of Richard? He was amazing. You know, he was real informal. I remember being sort of intimidated when I was first going to meet him. Because I didn't know how to address him. And I was, at that time, still very gun-shy about talking to someone in a leadership role like that. But he made it very comfortable. I remember Phil M3nchez met us there. And Yolanda and I spoke to him. And we introduced the subject. He said, "Fine." As he usually does. "Fine, fine, fine. I'll set up an appointment. You know, you guys make arrangements to go up to Sacramento. I'll call you. We'll do this." And I couldn't believe it. I said, "Gee, he's going to set it up for us." So he made arrangements for us to meet with then Governor [Ronald W.] Reagan. Yolanda and I were able to scoop up. . . . I think it cost us a whole thirty-five bucks to get up to Sacramento. A lot of money at the time. So we flew up to Sacramento. Met with Reagan for about thirty-two seconds. And then we could appoint a person after that. And made the recommendation.

Vasquez

Who did you nominate?

Molina

Ourselves. Yolanda and I nominated ourselves. [Laughter] No. We had a list of . . .

Vasquez

Was this part of your assertive training? [Laughter]

Molina

We had a list of us that we introduced and said that we . . .

Vasquez

It was all Comisión people?

Molina

Right. We were amongst the people. And, of course, none of us got appointed. A Republican by the name of Carolyn Orona was appointed. But it was done. And not only that. Then we went and solicited Carolyn and got her involved in Comisión. [She] became a very active member in Comisión. But that's how I met Richard. And it's interesting, because that's how I got involved, [through] people like him, in his activist role. It was a reason. . . . It was a bridge for the political process. Because we had always been the outsiders who had been critical of what was going on. There was nobody there we could relate to. Why even bother participating?

Vasquez

He was a human bridge for you?

Molina

I think so. For me, it was. And then I participated with Richard. I went to fund-raising [events] for him. I would go out and gather volunteers for anything that they needed. He introduced me to [Assemblyman] Art Torres, told me that there was this young man who was going to be running, and that we would really like him. He started his campaign in '74, I think. I was working, like I said, as a teacher who got out at two o'clock. So I had all of this volunteer time. So all I did was work at getting more Chicanas involved in those campaigns. And most of us who were in Comisión. . . . A lot of them were college students. I mean, politics is just something you just didn't participate in. You just. . . . You know, we were the rock kind of group. And so that started creating the link and the bridge of participating. And it was exciting. Richard and Art were very exciting people for us. I mean, they were the ones that were going to bring

about [change]. . . . Because they came from the movement as we saw it, they were going to bring about all the changes that we thought would automatically happen once they were there.

Vasquez

Group assistance?

Molina

That's right.

Vasquez

Were you disappointed?

Molina

I can't say that I was disappointed. As I participated through the process, I became more knowledgeable about how the system works, and how difficult. That Richard and Art, they didn't mean anything to the big political picture. We needed more Arts and Richards, and that they needed to be smart and articulate, and that they needed to be backed up by all of us. And I really bought into all of that, and felt that our mission was to go out there and build their power base. So if they were powerful, then they could bring us all those kinds of changes.

1.3. TAPE NUMBER: II, Side Two (May 25, 1990)

Vasquez

When we were last talking, you were giving me your initial impressions upon meeting some of the new young Chicano politicians that were becoming eminent on the scene, like Richard Alatorre and Art Torres. Would you pick it up there?

Molina

Sure. Well, they were very exciting. Because I think what we had really known at least myself-people who had been involved in what we called the student movement. The other Latino politicians were not ones that we. . . . They were already in their place. And very frankly, they were part of the status quo. Having someone like a Richard Alatorre was very exciting for a lot of us,

because we felt he came out of that same kind of movement. It was going to carry forward all of those same kind of issues.

Vasquez

Why? Why did you think that?

Molina

Because he had been involved in it. He was going to be sympathetic. That's what we all believed. That he wasn't going to be making excuses for the community. And that was going to be aggressive leadership. There wasn't going to be a going around and being an apologist for us in many respects. And taking an aggressive role, as many of us were doing within the movement. Confronting the issues, calling them what they were, and asking that reforms take place, and creating the political action to make them happen. And those were the things that movement was about. And the excitement about someone like Richard Alatorre was that now he was going to be in a position or is in a position of power and was going to go and do that within the political arena or the political structure and political process.

Vasquez

How many . . ? Go ahead.

Molina

Well, the other thing that I was going to say is most of us didn't participate in the political process. We didn't trust it. Yet at the same time, we knew that it had potential answers. And so the thought that somebody like one of us was now in the political structure [and] was going to make it much more responsive to our needs and make the structure much more responsive to the needs of our community. So those are the reasons why it was exciting.

Vasquez

Did it ever seem to you that, perhaps, it was unfair [when they came] out of a tradition that really eschewed Democratic [party] politics? Republican politics? The electoral kind of [politics]? Usually people had already been through that and gotten into another mode of thinking about what buttons of power one can push and what kind of politics one generates. That [it could] be either outside of that realm [of politics] or relatively unfamiliar with it. And then to

expect one or two individuals to make a big difference within all those constraints?

Molina

I don't know about the vast majority of them. But I think that most of us just had extremely high hopes. And we pinned them on them. There's no doubt. And in all of our kind of aspirations, we're with them all the time. But there were many of us-and I think that's where I played more of a role-that felt a real duty and a responsibility to them. I mean, they were like the warriors that were out there. And it was our duty to be that support mechanism for them. And I played that supporting role for a long period of time, because I took tremendous pride in the fact that they were out there as those warriors. But there's no doubt about it. I didn't learn that pretty much until I got elected. About the kind of hopes that everybody pins on you. And the problems even when you can have a majority or have the support. How difficult it is to really get things done in the political process. But it was a beginning. Well, for us it was a beginning. And we felt very excited about someone like a Richard Alatorre, someone like an Art Torres, [who] were moving through the process. They were within our age group at that time, and they were really. . . . And I think that's true now. I mean, we were not in the age group of the very, very-young of the younger people coming out of college then. Chicano yuppies, in a sense. I think they would be very excited about one of their own, let's say, getting into these roles. We don't have that. So there was more of a relationship. And it was pretty exciting.

Vasquez

A generational thing, maybe?

Molina

Maybe so.

Vasquez

In part?

Molina

In part. But it was also part of the movement. The movement was very unique. A very unique kind of a time. And it created a unity of people [who] felt that

things needed to be challenged. And many went out and did it. I mean, including going out and doing the kind of protest that they did at UCLA, at USC [University of Southern California]. Everywhere where they did the school walkouts. They were all part of that. The fact that [among] this group of people, Richard and Art were looked at as movement type of folks. Now, moving into the political structure, they were going to be able to carry that forward. And I felt our duty out there was to continue to build a kind of army to support them as they went out and did that.

Vasquez

What was the Chicano movement to you?

Molina

What was it? Well, to me it was an awakening [to], I guess, a lot of the racism, a lot of the lack of opportunity. All of the things that we had known as children or as young people. All of the barriers that were there were sort of identified all of a sudden and placed into these categories of discrimination. Of racism. That's why, you know, you're poor. That's why you live in a poor neighborhood. That's why you didn't get an education. These were all. . . . So all of these reasons. And so it was identifying those kinds of things. But the Chicano movement was confronting and not saying, "Por eso estamos como estamos." [That's why we are in the conditions we are in.] I mean, just because of us. That kind of thing. They were charging and saying, "Wait a minute. It's because of racism. It's because of discrimination. Because of lack of opportunity. Because it challenges things." And then the other thing that it meant for me, it was people who had courage. They had courage because they were. . . . I remember the school walkouts. [Note: In the spring of 1968, over fifteen thousand students in East Los Angeles walked out of their classes to protest the quality of education.] The courage. I mean, that day for me was. . . . I had a final. And for me to walk out on my final meant that I flunked the class that I had invested all this time in.

Vasquez

What school were you attending?

Molina

I was at East L.A. College when we did the walkout. And to not walk out and to go in and to take the final was really letting down a whole lot of other people that were trying to make a very important point. So it took courage. It took a lot of courage. I was just a follower at that time. But the people who were leaders were being very courageous. At the [National] Chicano Moratorium, they got hit on the head, beat up, killed in the process of trying to express themselves. But the other part of it that was also important besides the fact that they confronted it is they were also strategists. They had ideas of how to change things. And it was part of a training process. And for me, it was a wonderful education.

Vasquez

You keep saying "they." Is it because you saw yourself as a follower, and by "they," you refer to leaders?

Molina

Yeah. Because I was a follower. I mean, I was impressed by the movement. It represented the kinds of goals that I wanted to see for my community. And it represented the kind of actions that I was not yet ready to take on myself: to speak before a group, to challenge an issue, to develop a strategy, to organize a demonstration. I wasn't yet capable of doing that. But it taught me all of those things. It was a wonderful education.

Vasquez

How was it different than, say, Ed Roybal's generation or Tony Ríos's generation. They talked about housing problems. They spoke to racism. They even spoke to discrimination. What was different this time?

Molina

Well, you know what? It wasn't probably very different. But I wasn't there. And I didn't know about them. They didn't tell me about them. I never knew about the kind of things that Congressman Roybal did before he was a congressman. The things that Tony Ríos did. The things that Francisca Flores did. No. There wasn't a book I could go pick up and say, "This is. . . ." You know? I mean, the only thing that I saw that gave me any hope about people from before that fought the battle was the movie *Salt of the Earth*.

Vasquez

Really?

Molina

Honestly. My parents. You know, they didn't come from that. And I wasn't around that necessarily. And, like I said, in school they didn't tell us [about] leaders like Ed Roybal and what he did, when he fought, and when he was on the city council, how he got here, how he built a coalition to get here, how he struggled and should have won that supervisorial seat.

Vasquez

Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

Molina

About Tony Ríos. About César Chávez. About all of them that were involved in the early struggles. Or of Francisca Flores. In fact, even people like Mrs. [Lucille Beserra] Roybal, Lucille [Roybal-Allard]'s mom, who I found out about later. And of Francisca Flores. And Lilia Acevez. All of them had been out there before. They were the stickers and lickers for Congressman Roybal's campaign. How they used to baby-sit each other's kids, so that the women could all go and do something. And, you know, organize this and do that. So, in a sense, they may have been the same. But the Chicano movement didn't look at them that way. They looked at them as part of the status quo. In fact, in some instances, as part of the problem. And we didn't know about. . . . Or at least I didn't know about their early struggles to build on. But what we also found is that they joined in a sense. They kind of applauded what we were doing. But it probably was very similar. And hopefully what we did in the movement is we are going to have stronger and better documentation that there had been ongoing struggles of those kinds of issues.

Vasquez

That's what I'm trying to get to. Do you think, thinking back on it now, it might have been different had you had access to that information? That knowledge of the history of struggle and organizational effort that had gone on before?

Molina

Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. Because the things that we were doing. . . . I mean, sometimes we were reinventing the wheel, in a sense, when there were really mechanisms that could have been used. You know, we looked at the American GI Forum. A nice group of older people. Not the GI Forum that went in and fought for rights for people to go in and buy a house. We didn't know those things. We could have used that kind of an organizational mechanism that was [in place] throughout the Southwest. But no. We had to create our own. We didn't trust them. . . . Or at the very least the example? The example.

Vasquez

The knowledge that [it] had been done [before].

Molina

We didn't do those kinds of things. So it would have been very helpful.

Vasquez

A criticism of the Chicano movement of that period is that it was ahistorical. That it tended to feed on itself as if it was the only and the first effort ever made by the Mexican people. In urban areas, especially, this was the case. You feel that's a fair criticism?

Molina

I would say so, because we sort of operated that way. There was an arrogance about us. There's no doubt. I mean, we were the only ones. The Chicanos. You know, the whole thing. And I look back. I remember when Mrs. Roybal later on told me about some of the things that they did in Congressman Roybal's campaign. Talked to Lilia Acevez about the organizing. What they did. And really, I felt, you know. . . . I felt like we were the only ones that were doing it. There weren't any Chicano feminists before. And it was really because we weren't informed. It wasn't documented. It wasn't there to tell us they had been part of doing it. And so we sort of felt we were the first ones that did that.

Vasquez

There was something you said the other day that left me thinking. There was an intimation that there were elements-or something about the rhetoric or the discourse of the Chicano movement-that at the same time drew you in

and excited and taught you so much but also scared you a little bit. Or some things you weren't in total agreement with. What were some of those things?

Molina

Some of those things that used to be troublesome for me were. . . . I was brought up with certain values. The work ethic. And all of a sudden I'm being told that was a Protestant work ethic. You know.

Vasquez

[Laughter]

Molina

And I was brought up with this very, very rich work ethic that was really important to me. And it was very Mexicano. Like my father and his father. And that whole thing. All of a sudden, [leaders] told us. . . . And so it created some confusion in me every so often. The whole socialism that sometimes was involved was troublesome for me.

Vasquez

Why?

Molina

Because while I did believe in. . . . Well, I could understand and had feelings that there should be a lot of things that should be kind of socialist, more collective, a lot of things like that. At the same time, I remember growing up at the time of the red scare. You know, the fifties, there were still. . . . Reading the paper, hearing about it in the news. I wasn't smart enough at the time. So there were certain things that frightened me about it. And, hey, they were radicals. And there were a lot of radicals involved. Many times I felt that people were. . . . I looked at things differently. I remember that every so often, we kept looking at the discrimination. And everybody was sort of Everything was so bad. Why aspire to anything? Why do anything? And I still had hoped that there were certain things that I could do. You know, I'm going to get my little education here. I'm going to get my little job. And I'm going to do certain things. So there were certain things within the movement that were intimidating and frightening. And so those were some of the things that. . . . It was too radical in certain ways. That the values . . .

Vasquez

Too negative? Or too critical, perhaps?

Molina

Well, I didn't mind so much being critical with the system. I didn't have a problem with that. It's when they wanted to overthrow certain systems that were troublesome. I remember having a . . . Oh, I can't even remember the discussion. But it was a value thing about the work ethic. Where there were some criticisms of some people that. . . The "have's," I guess. And it was done in such a way like, "They're not entitled to have those things." And I didn't see it that way. I still saw it as, "Gee, they worked for those things." I just would rather be in a position of, "Can I work for those things, and get them, too?" As compared to, "Let's take those things away from them." You know, "Let's deny those things." And it was a value thing that was different. But I don't know. So I had some problems with it. But I sort of kept it to myself. I found myself participating with certain people that I could relate to. And some of them were intimidating. I now remember that there were certain people within the meetings that would come that. . . They were carrying out their agendas. They weren't part of what I felt the big agenda was. The Communist party used to come every so often and do their thing. And I just felt like they wanted us to buy into things that were not our agenda. But other than that, it was a great education for me. But I kept my distance from it, too. I mean, there were certain things I bought into and other things I didn't. I was sort of selective about it.

Vasquez

Tell me what you understood by the nationalist appeal of the Chicano movement? How did you understand that it addressed nationalism? What nationalism meant?

Molina

Well . . .

Vasquez

You remember the never-ending debates about that sort of thing?

Molina

Well, I wasn't as involved, because I always found myself involved in the actions. Not so much the, "Let's discuss the theory here, right? And let's debate Aztlán." I didn't. . . . I wasn't much involved in all that as I was in [Laughter] if we were going to protest something at one of the schools. Or if we were going to do something. I was involved with a lot of the actions that went with it. I would go, and I would listen to speakers, which they did every so often. . . . But I didn't have the kind of time that other people had. Because I worked full-time, and I went to school at night. And then I used to volunteer at Casa Maravilla on the weekends. So it was just moments that I had to participate within that. But there were certain things that. . . . They just didn't fit, you know, to me.

Vasquez

Like what?

Molina

[Laughter]

Vasquez

Like what?

Molina

Like Aztlán, you know. [Laughter]

Vasquez

Why?

Molina

Because, I guess, it was too revolutionary for me.

Vasquez

Uh-huh.

Molina

It was just too revolutionary for me. I felt that we needed to challenge a heck of a lot of things. But, you know, that one probably was just a little farfetched for me. Certainly, at certain times, it made sense. But it just seemed so

revolutionary for me. That, "Oh, we're going to get back Aztlán." [Laughter] And things like that. I mean, those were just a little bit too farfetched. I wanted to see things, and what I participated in, like I said, I would pick and choose. If we were going to challenge something at the school board, we needed to get people there. That's what I wanted to do. I wanted to rally the troops and go in there and dance on the heads of the school board members. Or something like that. And really, hopefully, bring about a change that kids were going to have. But it had to be more tangible for me. And so those kinds of discussions, I think, were fine for somebody else. But I didn't participate in them all that much. [I only] participated in certain things. Now that I look back, I think I was really kind of very selective about what I wanted to participate in. And it was mostly the political action stuff.

Vasquez

Well, there was one. . . . Well, one of the many areas in the political discourse that emerged from that period, and that's the La Raza Unida party. Were you ever active at all in that?

Molina

Not whatsoever.

Vasquez

What was your vision of it then?

Molina

You know, it was interesting. Because in the presentation of La Raza Unida party, I had real problems with it right away.

Vasquez

Why?

Molina

Because I felt, this party is for who? For Mexicanos? I mean, how many of us are there? And what does it do? I mean, what are we . . . ? What are the goals here? Well, to me, the way I read Raza Unida, that the very goals it was trying to achieve were the ones that we were complaining about as a movement. That is, not to discriminate. Here was going to be a party of Chicanos and

Chicano goals. At least that's what I read into it. And they were going to turn around and. . . . I mean, as a party, this was going to exclude other people. I guess, maybe, I was very realistic in the beginning as well. The numbers weren't there. It was not a functional party. What you do is you exclude Chicanos from participating in the real political process. So we have no power with Raza Unida and no power in it. So we have nothing. That's what I kept interpreting it as. So I never registered. A lot of my friends worked. I took classes from Richard Santillán, one of the founders of La Raza Unida. But I could not relate to it, because it didn't make sense to me. It didn't add up to real political participation. And again I didn't see any real . . .

Vasquez

You're a registered Democrat now?

Molina

Uh-huh. [Affirmative]

Vasquez

Have you always been a Democrat?

Molina

Always.

Vasquez

Why?

Molina

Because my papa was.

Vasquez

Why?

Molina

[Laughter] It's interesting. My father, who was a citizen in. . . . What he did was. . . . Voting was important in our household. It really was. You know, every time there was an election, there were, I remember, discussions about it. While not deep, heavy-duty discussions, but the process of voting was

important. My father would go to vote. He would take his labor slate card with him. He was a labor member.

Vasquez

What union? Do you remember?

Molina

Yes. Local 300 of Construction Laborers and Hod Carriers. Anyway. So he would follow that. And he registered to vote as a Democrat. He always told me that was the party of people like us. Of average, low-income people like us. And, certainly, I saw that all the way through in growing up. It. . . . You know, the Kennedys and things of that sort. So that when it was time to register to vote, those were the people I related to and the issues that I related to, even though I really didn't know that much about the other party. But my dad was a Democrat. And I liked the Democrats that were there. So that's what we did.

Vasquez

What is your first remembrance of a political activity that excited you? Or a political event? Or a political process that you got interested in and followed all the way through? Do you remember?

Molina

Well, I think all of us liked. . . . Were excited by the Kennedys. That was very exciting, even though I was a kid and didn't participate all that actively.

Vasquez

But you were active as a twenty-year-old in [Robert F.] Bobby Kennedy's campaign. Right?

Molina

In the Bobby Kennedy campaign. Again, another Kennedy. And, again, right at a time when [I was] sort of involved in the movement and these kinds of things. He was very exciting. And so I volunteered as a gofer, I guess, over at the Bobby Kennedy campaign. I guess I was a legal secretary by then. Or a secretary. And volunteered to do typing and all the gofer work that they used to have done at the time. And participated, in a sense, very actively at the very

bottom of the rung. But I enjoyed doing it. It was tremendously exciting, because he was exciting. And being around that whole campaign was very exciting to people. The things that we were doing, the thought of winning, the whole challenge-everything was just terribly exciting. And then very sad at the end. But it was one that I got involved in early. And I felt like, I guess, everybody felt. This was a man [who] was going to make everything happen and fulfill the vision that his brother had started. I don't know. I felt so honored getting to be part of the campaign, even though what I was doing was mimeographing and typing and making coffee. You know, getting called the last minute to . . .

Vasquez

What did his assassination do to you? To your commitment? To interest and love for politics?

Molina

It was a frightening thing for me, because it was. . . . I was not one of those that got disillusioned like some people that just hung it up. Because that happened with a lot of people.

Vasquez

That's true.

Molina

That, you know, there's never going to. . . . A good one [political leader]'s never going to come out.

Vasquez

Disappointment?

Molina

You know, that's right. It's useless. I didn't feel that way. I was very frightened by it.

Vasquez

What frightened you?

Molina

Well, what frightened me is the fact that he was assassinated. The fact that Robert Kennedy was assassinated. [President] John [F.] Kennedy had been assassinated. And then, you know, those things were frightening. That is that somewhere these good people, who I had hopes for, were never going to be in power or really bring about the kind of change. So those things were frightening to me from the standpoint. . . . Because there's always that feeling that there's somebody who's really trying to really control the big picture, you know, out there.

Vasquez

Have you ever been much of a partisan of conspiracy theories of politics?

Molina

No. But in a sense, it gets introduced every so often. And so you sort of think, "Well, maybe." But to me it was frightening that there was somebody who was trying to stop this wonderful thing, that we all felt so passionate about, from happening. But at the same time, I'm also one who felt that there were other things that. . . . We had to keep it going and keep participating. I mean, it seems like just as quickly as that happened, we were all involved with [Vice President Hubert H.] Humphrey. I mean . . .

Vasquez

You went on to Humphrey right away?

Molina

Yeah. That we had to. It was part of our mission.

Vasquez

Being a Democrat? Being a reformer? Being a political junkie? What?

Molina

Well, no. I can't say it was a political junkie, because it wasn't. I can't believe it was that. I really felt that these were the people that were going to make those kinds of changes. They really were. The social programs. Everything that [was] talked about. But it is interesting, now that I look back and think about

it, how quickly I transitioned from Kennedy to Humphrey. But we did. And we continued going and participating. Again, I was very-still very-low-key. I felt like I really wanted to be a part of it. And there was something there that we should be doing. But it was very low-key. But I don't know why I kept coming back to politics, now that I think about it. Because I was often doing community things, and I got sentright back into kind of a political situation.

Vasquez

Let's go to, what, I guess, 1970, when you ran Art Torres's campaign. Did you work on Richard Alatorre's campaigns?

Molina

Uh-uh. I had been. . . . Like I said, at that time we had gotten introduced to Richard Alatorre. He had worked on trying to help us get a Chicana on the Commission on the Status of Women. I was helping Richard with fund-raising and campaigning here and there. He was already elected. He said that he wanted me to meet. . . . Introduce me to this other young Chicano who was going to be running for office. And I had heard about the office. I remember he had run before and had just lost to Alex García. But I really didn't know him.

Vasquez

What had you heard?

Molina

What I had heard was that he was a radical basically is what I remember. He's a radical that went in there. And, you know, I really didn't know much about him when he ran. Because it was sort of a low-key campaign. I don't know why. But I do know that he was, again, one of those that was good. He was articulate. He was very effective. Alex García had money and all that. And I didn't know that much about him. I wasn't that connected with the campaign. But I do remember that he barely, barely won. So that's how I knew about him. And then he. . . . I mean, Richard introduced me to him. And it was interesting. It fell at a time when I could devote an awful lot of time to a campaign. So I was working. I was at the skills center. I used to get off at two o'clock. And I was able to run over and do precinct-walking and campaigning

with him. And then I was very involved with Comisión at the same time. I was recruiting other Comisión members, other people to get involved in that campaign.

Vasquez

What do you remember most about that campaign?

Molina

Actually, it was all the work that we did. I was, again, an outsider to all of it. But this was really the first time I really had gotten introduced to the inner workings of politics. I was still, I guess, in a sense sort of naive how it all happened. That you just went out there, and you did campaign and you rah-rah'd. And behind the scenes, there were people raising money. You needed to have money. You needed to know what your position was on this issue and what your position on this. You didn't get this support. All of the compromising that went on with politics.

Vasquez

Was this the first time you saw it?

Molina

In a sense, yes. Before I was always so busy. And I never asked, "Why are we doing that? And why not this?" I was more involved and got to see some of that in . . .

Vasquez

Any particular exchanges or incidents that most stick in your mind?

Molina

I went to a meeting. A fund-raising meeting, as it was called. Art needed to get some money together, and he wasn't part of this meeting. There were a whole lot of other people.

Vasquez

What kind of people were they [that you] were trying to get money from?

Molina

They were all the Chicano businesspeople. And, you know, they are still around. A whole group of people that Richard had around him. And Art. Basically, they were hustling the money. And they needed to get the money. I remember how hard-hitting it was about what they had to do. And I had always looked at a political contribution as being a gesture. [Laughter] You know, "Here's a check," kind of a thing. Never, "You've got to do it." You know, that kind of tough. And what it meant, you know, Art gets elected, you know, and becomes more powerful, is able to do these things. The kind of wheeling and dealing that was being introduced was also. . . . I remember that meeting very, very well.

Vasquez

Was that hard . . ?

Molina

It was troublesome for me. Yet at the same time, I was learning the reality of what it was going to take to stay elected.

Vasquez

What did you have to offer these people for their money?

Molina

No. I was just part of the meeting.

Vasquez

Well, your side.

Molina

What do you mean?

Vasquez

What was it you had to offer? You had a candidate that was going to do *what* for this money?

Molina

Oh. Well, what they were talking about was becoming more powerful. I mean, now we would be able to get, you know, legislation. We would get this. We would get that.

Vasquez

Businessmen usually like to exchange for things.

Molina

I can't say it was tit-for-tat kind of thing. They weren't saying, "Okay. I'm going to make it a contract and make sure our interests get met." It wasn't that kind of thing. But it was the idea that if we get him elected, then he's going to be in a powerful position to eventually help you. So it was that kind of a situation. Which was again, in a sense, for me a little bit troubling, because it had the makings of, "I want this. I'm going to give him a check. But he's going to have to promise me that." It was never done as blatantly as that. But I would say that was the sell that was being done that day. And I had never been in the inside of one of those meetings. I mean, we certainly knew about them. But at the same time, I always felt that the money came about because everybody wanted to have a good Chicano/Latino in that role, you know. And here's my little check. It wasn't because they needed something back from it. I learned that much later. [Laughter]

Vasquez

And what kind of people were there? People like Joe Sánchez from Mexican-American Grocers Association?

Molina

Well, they weren't formed as yet at that time. Joe wasn't at that meeting that I remember. No, I don't think he was. Gil Vásquez was there. And, if you know, Gil was a lawyer. I'm trying to think of all the. . . . León García, who was at that time head of one of the social service programs [Economic Development Corporation of Los Angeles County]. Gosh, I'm trying to remember these names. One of the guys was a banker. They were all the kind of Latinos [who] were in fairly prominent roles at that time in different positions. And, I think, there was also a sense of pride, that they wanted to elect Art.

Vasquez

Do you remember how much he picked up that day?

Molina

No, I don't. I really don't. I was part of that meeting. In fact, I was also hit up for money. And I was sort of freaked out by the thought of, "Me? Raise that kind of money?" You know. I mean, I was accustomed to hitting up people for, like, fifteen-dollar dinners or. . . . I can't remember what they were. . . . How much was it? But I remember for me it was very difficult to go out there and ask people to write checks. But they did. And we all did. But that was one of the new things that was introduced at that time. But I also became very committed because of Art and the kind of things that he was also talking about and doing that came out of the farmworkers movement and all of that. All of that was really inspirational. And, again, Art himself was so articulate and so witty and all those kinds of things. As quickly as you could get him elected to the assembly, you started to think of all the other things he was going to do. Right? And that is exactly what happened to him.

Vasquez

All the way you were thinking this way?

Molina

Uh-huh.

Vasquez

You became his administrative assistant [AA] very soon after that.

Molina

Very soon.

Vasquez

Tell me how that happened.

Molina

Well, how it happened. It was surprising to me. I can't say that it had anything to do with my great talents, or anything like that. Lou Moret, who was the administrative assistant to Richard Alatorre, also had an awful lot to do with my getting involved with Art Torres. He had said something about, "You really

should hit up Art for a job," and all that. And I was still in a position where I wasn't all that assertive. But he's the one that basically set it up. Art talked to me and asked me to be his AA. And it was probably one of the most exciting things that could ever happen to me. It really was.

Vasquez

Why?

Molina

Because I had always sensed that I . . . As much as I felt politics was an answer to a lot of the issues in our community, that the role that I would always play would be the outside rock-thrower. That's how we learned. And the thought of all of a sudden getting to go into an assemblyman's office and working on his staff and being part of the political process was terribly exciting. And challenging. I knew that. Anyway, I wasn't sure that I was going to be able to do what Art wanted me to do. But I certainly was willing to give it a try, so I went in there. And it was a wonderful experience. I loved it.

Vasquez

What were you doing as his administrative assistant?

Molina

My duties were basically to be his person in the district. He would go to Sacramento and legislate. I would do all of the district work and coordinate him into everything that was important within the district. So I was involved with all the constituents' cases.

Vasquez

Tell me about the district at that time, the district you represented.

Molina

The district I represented was basically all of downtown. Eastside of L.A. So it included areas like Boyle Heights, a part of City Terrace, all of the unincorporated East L.A. areas. It included the cities of Commerce, Maywood, Bell Gardens. And that was basically it. It was and still is, not 75. . . . About that time, it was 75 percent Latino. And it had kind of exciting neighborhoods.

Vasquez

So you did the liaison number.

Molina

I did all of the work. I went out there. And, you know, constituents called us. I tied them into all the schools. I tied them into all the chambers [of commerce]. I tied them into all of those things. I was sort of his eyes and ears out there. And then, of course, I had this little sense of, "Now, we've got Art there. Everything's going to get done right now." [I was] kind of overly zealous and very ambitious about Art. And that, "Now, [whoever] has a problem, we'll just get Art to fix it." Right? That kind of feeling that he could do everything.

Vasquez

Did you ever have to go to Sacramento and be part of the operation up there?

Molina

No. My duty was out here. He only had a secretary or two secretaries up there. And then, just myself and two secretaries here. Or a secretary and another assistant is all we had. It was a small staff. I did that kind of field work and the political work for him as well here. I did fund-raising for him. I coordinated all of that. I kept all of his fund-raisers happy. I set up all those meetings. All the stroking.

Vasquez

What did you do to keep the fund-raisers happy?

Molina

Well, you know, all of a sudden they start calling. "I need Art to attend this, you know, dinner. I need Art to do this. I need Art at this ribbon-cutting." So, you're scheduling him in all those kinds of things. And these were people who have made contributions. They want this, and they want that. They want Art to meet with so-and-so, you know. And it's important. So I was always screening everything for him. You become very popular once you're an elected official. [Laughter]

Vasquez

In some quarters, anyway.

Molina

[Laughter] That's true.

Vasquez

How long was it before you went off to the [James E.] Carter-[Walter F.] Mondale campaign?

Molina

You know, it wasn't all that long. It really wasn't. And the funniest story goes with it. It was, what, I started working for Art in '74. In '75 was actually when I started serving. And in '76, his campaign starts up. And Art had asked No. I had asked Art, actually. Because one of the things I was finding myself as I was working with Art. . . . It was just so much to learn. So much I didn't know. The thing about fund-raising. The thing about running a campaign. The thing about legislating. How long it takes to do things. All of those things, I didn't know. Also, I didn't know about Chicanos in other parts of the state. I mean, I was an Eastside kid, kind of. There was a lot of learning going on, and about politics in other parts of the state, and so on. Anyway, one of the things I found myself more fascinated by was besides now wanting to make changes in Sacramento, the legislative part of it-I became more fascinated by the political part of it. That is, getting other people elected. Now, "What if we had twenty-two Art Torreses, then what could we do?" kind of thing. And why don't we have twenty-two Art Torreses? Anyway, I wanted to learn more about campaigning. There was an opportunity to work for a candidate up in Sacramento. A Chicana. I asked him to send me up there. I went there for two weeks, and I did door-to-door walking and everything. She lost it up there. She didn't make it. Then another opportunity I had was for another Chicana in Fresno. Teresa, who was a professor at. . . . Teresa.

Vasquez

Cordova?

Molina

No. Isn't it Pérez? Teresa Pérez? She's a professor at the university there. Anyway, she also ran for the state legislature. Or the county board of

supervisors there. As I got to work on that campaign as well, I found myself being just very excited about learning how to run campaigns and what it takes to go . . .

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Molina

Anyway, but that's what I was getting very interested in. So, anyway, then there was an opportunity with the Carter presidential campaign. We knew they were coming to California and everything else. I told Art. . . . I said, "If Carter is going to have an Eastside operation, I really want to get involved in that. You know, take a leave of absence. Or I'd be happy to do that," or something like that.

Vasquez

Why?

Molina

Because I really felt that I really wanted to learn that part of it. Going out, campaigning, doing the grass-roots kind of campaign, you know. Not only that. Being able to now say to Carter, the candidate, "Here's the Eastside. We're going to be able to deliver the vote for you." And understanding the dynamics of what that meant. Of being able to do that and leverage that with. . . . That it was important for us as Latinos to be able to do that.

Vasquez

Did you anticipate already that you might one day be doing it for yourself?

Molina

No. See, my big thing was that I wanted. . . . I was finding myself. Well, I really enjoyed what I was doing with Art and the fact that he was legislating. Why, all of a sudden I was developing this goal of becoming a campaign manager. A campaign consultant. I was going to be able to be this person that was going to be able to go out there and tell Teresa and whoever, "This is how you put together a campaign. And you raise money. And you do. . . ." And I wanted to learn how to do that. I even went as far as to get into a program with the National Women's Education Fund. They were doing this program about

campaigning. It was called, "Getting Her Elected." They did three-day workshops. I went to that, and it was just a fascinating program, because it was broken down to all the components of campaigning. So with the Carter campaign, I really wanted to do that. I asked Art that if he had any pull to see if he could get me in there somehow. And it turned out that it was just. . . . I went to an event, and I got hired that night. I got hired that night at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion [Music Center of Los Angeles County] as the Hispanic deputy for the California Carter campaign. For the whole state. And I was prepared to do East L.A. I didn't think about doing the whole state. So anyway, I was hired to do that. It was also a very exciting time.

Vasquez

So you'd come from follower to kingmaker.

Molina

Well, hardly a kingmaker. I was still a follower. And I was out there, going to go and work for Carter. And it was great. I went up and down the state. I met a lot of people. I had some real good experiences. I learned a lot. And it taught . . .

Vasquez

Tell me about some of those experiences.

Molina

Well, I remember one of the things that happened. My job was now to get Latinos throughout the state involved in the Carter campaign.

Vasquez

Involved in which way? Voting? Registering?

Molina

Oh, no. Actively involved in the campaign. That is, I had to go into different parts of California and set up the Chicano community to follow into the Carter office or Carter campaign. Volunteers . . .

Vasquez

So you were [working] with political professionals?

Molina

Uh-huh.

Vasquez

Right.

Molina

Hopefully, yes. [Laughter] That's what I was I was supposed to do that.

Vasquez

[Laughter]

Molina

And I was supposed to tie in this network. You know, Art and all of the elected officials were part of it. So I had to create and find out who the leaders were in different parts.

Vasquez

How did you do that?

Molina

Well, I made a lot of phone calls. I asked lots of people. I called people that I knew to put me in touch with people in San Francisco, and San Diego, and, you know, San Jose. Wherever. And I started making up a list, and then eventually going out there. I had one. . . . And, basically, what I did, I went up there. We organized meetings with a couple of them: asked them what they were going to do, telling them what they need from us, and do all the rah-rah. And, "Let's work on the Carter campaign." You know, whatever. "This is where he stands on the issues." All of that whole thing. I started developing that momentum in the Latino community in the different areas. I remember when I went to San Jose. It was the best experience of all, because I went into this meeting. And I think there was a Chicano councilman in San Jose who had arranged this meeting. And he was real hard to get to. He made my life miserable. But he arranged this meeting. It was about thirty-five to forty people that were going to attend this meeting, and I was supposed to make a presentation. He introduced me, and I went in there and did my little Carter

speech about the campaign. What we needed to do. Get him elected. What the differences were, and the whole thing. And I remember this woman stood up, and she said, "You know, I'm tired of people like you. You come into San Jose. You're not even from here. You come into town. You tell us this presidential candidate is going to help us. They don't do nothing. They go back to the White House. We do all this work. They don't even pay attention to us." And she enumerated this whole litany of problems . . .

Vasquez

[Laughter]

Molina

. . . in San Jose. And she says, "Why should we follow?" You know. She was just wonderful. I mean, she really, like, knocked me off my feet. And I had nothing to stand on after she did that to me.

Vasquez

But it didn't discourage you?

Molina

Oh, no. No. No. I mean, she was right. And, of course, that's what I told her. I mean, what else could I say? She was absolutely right. I said, "Look, I come from East L.A. And I don't like anybody coming in from out of town telling me what to do either. And I don't plan to be here to tell you what to do." And I told her the whole thing. I said, "You're right. So you need to organize your own thing. You need to tell me I mean, I've been hired to do this job. There's only one of me." And I said, "But you need to tell me what I need to do for you in order to get you to develop this campaign. And you're right about all of those issues. I mean, it's the same thing we're talking about in the Eastside. But your choices are what? Either you sit on your hands and do nothing or you can get involved and see if we can bring about some changes." And I was able to convince her. But I loved the fact that she challenged me. Because there was just not enough of that going on. But it was one of the very first times I ever got floored so royally as she did to me that day. But, anyway, I was glad. And I had a heck of a tough time. I had a real tough time. I worked in the same office with the black deputy.

Vasquez

Who was?

Molina

[Clarence L.] "Buddy" James [Jr.]. He did the same thing in the black community that I was doing in the Latino. . . . Going up and down the state. Organizing. Putting people together. He was having tremendous success. He could go into town. I mean, he had a [limousine] waiting for him at home. I mean, he had real royal treatment. Right? I had to go beat the bushes just to find people who might be interested in talking to me. He always had a couple of people that they just got in touch with a couple of folks in a certain city. Everything was set up. They came in. They set up the whole campaign. He had people in the campaign *all* of the time.

Vasquez

Why was there a difference in the network?

Molina

I asked him. He used to tell me, "First of all, we have all of our Baptist ministers."

Vasquez

The church?

Molina

"How about just rounding up all the Catholic priests?" I said, "No. No. No. No. [Laughter] That's not how it works in our community." And, see, we didn't have those networks. The other thing is he talked about a black fraternity that he was a part of.

Vasquez

Right.

Molina

And tying into this black fraternity. He called, "Brother. . . ." And he set this up, and all that kind of thing, you know. Or somebody who knew somebody. We didn't have those networks.

Vasquez

You had MAPA [Mexican-American Political Association]?

Molina

There wasn't the kind of network that I could buy into. The best thing I had going was having people like Richard and Art and others help me formulate lists in those areas. Going to other elected officials. Going to groups like the Chicano Federation in San Diego, the established Chicano organization in San Diego. The established, established Chicano organizations. And, let me tell you, they were very resistant. You know, as far as they were concerned, partisan politics didn't mean anything to them. They weren't going to get [anything] from it. That whole thing. There was a tremendous amount of resistance. So it was tougher, but we did it. And we organized. We tried to be as successful as possible. And we went through the MAPAs and all that. You know, putting all those little networks together. But very frankly, it was tough. We didn't have the networks-the political networks-in place, let's say, if we were comparing ourselves to the black community. It was just much easier [for blacks]. There were more elected officials. They really had a lot of political networks that they could move around in. There was like an NAACP chapter in every little small town. We didn't have anything like that. There might be a MAPA. Then you would go over and talk to people who were in leadership roles and say, "I'm going to tie in with MAPA." And the elected official says, "Oh, no. No. I don't have anything to do with those people. Don't talk to them." The factions. All those little pleiticitos that were going on. So it was very, very hard work. But it was very good. We did a lot. And we worked very hard. And I was able to organize a couple of key meetings. Carter met with Latinos here. That was very tough to do.

Vasquez

How exciting was the Carter-Mondale ticket to the California Latino?

Molina

He wasn't. He really wasn't. I mean, I hate to say that now. But we had a tough time selling Jimmy Carter in the Latino community.

Vasquez

Why? Tell me some of the . . .

Molina

There was no relationship. None. There was no record. The man was a governor in Georgia. I mean, what's there to relate to? He wasn't a great civil rights leader. There was nothing that we could. . . . Once he spoke Spanish to this group, but none of us understood him. [Laughter] But there was very little relationship. In the beginning, there was a tremendous relationship with Mondale.

Vasquez

Tell me about that.

Molina

Because Mondale had been involved in a lot of the key congressional battles at that time. And that was important. Bilingual education issues and a lot of the labor issues. And he had great labor support. [There] was more of a relationship with Walter Mondale than there was, necessarily, with Jimmy Carter. But he was the top of the ticket. And so, you know . . .

Vasquez

Who did you bring into California? Or who did you bring out from California . . .

Molina

What do you mean?

Vasquez

. . . to campaign for Carter that was most effective? Was there any surrogate campaigner who was effective?

Molina

It was very, very tough to find . . .

Vasquez

The Kennedys didn't want to touch him?

Molina

They wouldn't. It was impossible. It was very tough to get Latino surrogates at that time. I mean, I had Art, I had Richard, I had Congressman Roybal. I mean, really, that's what I was using. César wouldn't get near him for a while until he endorsed-I think it was-Prop. 14 [Note: Proposition 14 (November 1976).] at the time, which he finally did. And so it was not an easy, easy sell. And it was tough organizing all the time, because we just couldn't get the momentum going in the Latino community that we really needed to get. And very frankly, that was very important to get. I've been involved now in many a presidential campaign. And let me tell you, we get taken advantage of royally. I mean, while I was out there and I was doing a job at the same time, I felt that we were being shafted. And I used to fight . . .

Vasquez

How so?

Molina

You have a fight for the candidate. We weren't getting the resources. We weren't getting the attention from the candidate. He wasn't addressing a lot of the issues. He wasn't making the rounds. If, in fact, we were included in any of the rounds where he wasn't doing a fund-raiser in Bakersfield, I had to beg to put together a Latino group that he would also attend, you know, and be a part of. Trying to get him out to a rally in the Eastside was next to impossible. All of those things.

Vasquez

What were the barriers?

Molina

The barriers were that. . . . The barriers that they don't want to tell you. The barriers are that basically they need you, but they don't need you that much.
[Laughter]

Vasquez

They need you just a little bit, huh?

Molina

They just need you a little bit. They didn't need somebody like me that kept punching at them to get more time and to get more access and all of those kinds of things. And that's the problem with the Democratic party overall. They need you. But. . . . Now just getting more so. They need us a lot, but they still have yet to realize it. But at that time, as they needed us, they needed to have us in a sense. But they didn't need us that much, you know. And not only that, I think they also took us for granted. "Where else are you going to go?" You know. So I had to fight really hard. That's why that woman who stood, you know, stood up and told me that in San Jose, she was absolutely right. Because the day before, I had my battle. But, you know, I go to these places. Well, what do I offer them? They got signs. That's it. Basically, they got nothing. I mean, the issues were there. There was no doubt that there were absolute differences as far as the Republican and the Democratic candidate. But the point is that there wasn't really. . . . I mean, were these people going to get to touch Carter? Were they ever going to get to meet with him? Walter Mondale? No. He wasn't going to into the Latino community, because the main campaign manager for California said, "No, no, no. You know, if he comes in, we'll do a Sacramento head, a San Francisco head, and a San Diego head." But it all will be with the majority party. And, I mean, very frankly, they're going to sell tickets for \$75 or \$125, and not many Latinos are going to get in there. It's just not going to be their event. So I had to work very hard. But I set up a couple of meetings. We set up one in San Francisco. At the one in L.A. we set, Mondale was good. In fact, sometimes, it was better for me to set him up. It was an interesting experience.

Vasquez

What did you learn out of that experience?

Molina

Again, what I continued to learn is that we had so much more work to do.

Vasquez

In what sense?

Molina

Statewide. That's when I really started learning about how we needed to connect ourselves statewide to have political leverage.

Vasquez

Is it true that, in a way, there are two or three cities in California? And the rest are just sort of incidental or unconnected?

Molina

They really are.

Vasquez

In Chicano politics [as well]?

Molina

Yes.

Vasquez

Is that the case?

Molina

Absolutely. We don't have those ties. There's a good group of people in Fresno, in San Jose, in Sacramento. And the smaller [numbers] in Salinas and all of the smaller towns that. . . . I mean, they're very tiny by comparison to L.A. But if we were connected, we could be very. . . . We still have yet to be totally connected. But that's what I learned that we needed to do. I went back, and I went back to work for Art. And I felt, "Gosh, that's something we really need to do. We need to start connecting ourselves."

Vasquez

At that time, there was something that you could call the Chicano Caucus. Was that of any help?

Molina

The Chicano Caucus was pretty good. Like I said, they were helpful to me from the standpoint of gaining the leverage that I needed within that campaign.

Vasquez

All right.

Molina

I mean, if I needed to call Richard and Art and others, too, "Hey, you guys have to help me lobby to get Mondale into this meeting, or to this convention, or to this dinner . . ."

Vasquez

By dint of being incumbents of the Democratic party?

Molina

Huh?

Vasquez

Then by dint of being incumbents and of the Democratic party, you could reach Carter's people that way?

Molina

Yeah. Yeah.

Vasquez

Who was most effective at that?

Molina

Richard, by far, is really a dealer. He's very effective.

Vasquez

Now, you went from there to the White House.

Molina

Another surprise. [Laughter]

Vasquez

Well, how did that surprise happen? You're just a lady full of surprises.

Molina

You know, I am. And my whole life . . .

Vasquez

Is this serendipity? Can it be?

Molina

I wish I could tell you that I planned all these things. Including planning running for office and all that. It's just not the way things happen to me. I mean, I kept working on certain things, and then great opportunities came about. Although when I was approached, I went back and I started working for Art. I was not very happy with the Carter campaign. I was kind of disappointed. We won, but I felt that they didn't do right by us as Latinos.

Vasquez

In that particular campaign? Or in the Democratic party?

Molina

The Democratic party. I was really kind of disappointed. Anyway, I remember that everybody bombarded me, "My resumé. My resumé. Gloria, send it over to the [White House]. . . ." I mean, I hated to tell them. . . . I was a hired gun. I had a job. They won and they left town. [Laughter] I'm not connected. It was really disappointing, you know. That was the worst . . .

Vasquez

You had nothing to give anyone, huh?

Molina

No. And I was very honest with them, you know. I would tell them that, you know. I mean, I have no pull whatsoever. Through Art and Richard and others, you might be able to. So. . . . Anyway, other people did it. Herman Sillas put together a bank of resúmes. Other people were doing it, and they were getting into the Carter White House. I mean, I got my inauguration ticket as a little payback. I got to go and sit at this inauguration with three thousand people and not see anything. But it wasn't really. . . . There was nothing that connected us into it. I mean, they just sort of left town. [Laughter] That was it. I was very disappointed. I was very dissatisfied with it. And not just myself. I wasn't planning on going anywhere. I was going back to work for Art, and I

was going to continue doing what I was doing. Because I loved working with Art and the kinds of things that I did. It was almost a year later when I was contacted by [Richard] Rick Hernández. Rick was *the* Latino desk in the Carter campaign. He was the Chicano that was involved with the big guys in the campaign.

Vasquez

Who were the big guys in that campaign?

Molina

Let's see. We had [Patrick H.] Pat Cadell. We had Hamilton Jordan. You had Tim Kraft. Those are the ones that were the real key kind of strategists that I remember. Of course, in the state campaign, we had [Terrence] Terri O'Connell, who was the head of the campaign here. The state campaign. And those were all the key players. In other words, I was the Latino deputy or the Chicano deputy there in D.C., or wherever the campaign. . . . I think the campaign was run out of Atlanta. That's right. Out of Atlanta. Rick was the Latino desk. I mean, sometimes I'd call Rick and say, "I really need to have Mondale at that convention. You've got to [call Atlanta]. . . ." And he would help me lobby that. Or position papers. Whatever we needed. Getting a reporter to interview Carter. Whatever it was, he would help with that. He came to me and he talked to me. And he was working in the White House. He asked me if I was interested in. . . . No. That they were going to offer me a job at the White House. And I said, "I can't think of going back there. It was just D.C. What would I do there?" But, anyway, it was nice to be asked. And I thought about it. I talked to other people, and they thought it was a tremendous opportunity. To me, I thought it was a great opportunity. But it was so intimidating. The White House.

Vasquez

What was the job . . . ?

Molina

At the White House, it was called Deputy Director, Department of Presidential Personnel. That's what I asked: "What is this job that you want me to do?" And what it was was that the president has an unbelievable number. . . . I

think it was eighteen hundred boards and commissions that citizens serve on. And, of course, they need a staff of people to pick prominent citizens to serve on these commissions. And that's what we did. There were about twelve of us that did that job. We did nothing but get those resúms.

Vasquez

Read resúms, huh?

Molina

That's right. We had a huge resúme bank. I was assigned to certain boards and commissions that I worked on. And, of course, I was supposed to do *the* Chicano appointments, right? Of course I had to fight tooth and nail to get some. But that's what my job was. And he [Hernández] asked me if I wanted to go back there, and I decided to do it. Like I said, the reason it was intimidating for me is that here I was all of a sudden going to go into the White House and work with, like, the top political heavyweights. I mean, I wanted to have this political experience and learn how to get our community to leverage ourselves politically. Here was an opportunity to be, you know, right in the know. And I had that opportunity.

Vasquez

You got to be one of the shakers and makers?

Molina

No. That's what was intimidating was the fact that now I was going to get to be there. I was going to be one of these. Was I going to be ready? Was I going to be prepared? Could I do the job? That was very intimidating. In fact, I almost turned it down, because it was the same kind of fear that I had initially about, you know, speaking or anything else. So I almost turned it down. But I decided to go back. I said, you know, "If they don't fire me, I'll stay, you know. . . . I'll stay two years and all that. I can always come back, be a legal secretary, and all that, you know, if anything happens."

Vasquez

You weren't married yet?

Molina

No. So I did go back there. And it was an exciting job. It was a great job. But it was like the campaign all over again.

Vasquez

Tell me about that. I understand you were really disappointed. In fact, you have been quoted as saying. . . . There was something you sensed as an anti-Latino bias there.

Molina

Well, the thing is that here I was. At that time, there weren't any Latinas in the White House. Rick Hernández was there and myself, and Rick was working at that time for the Democratic party outside of the White House. He eventually came into the White House. And it was a lonely place to be. I found out that I had replaced a Latina. I'm trying to think of her name. Anyway, they had basically fired her. And, I mean, I went in there with high hopes and I started, you know, doing my job and everything else. But I saw great opportunities in that job. Just absolutely great opportunities. All these boards and commissions. Great political opportunities to get Latinos appointed to these boards and commissions. Which is what they wanted. And let's start doing it. Right? I found out that it was so difficult to get. . . . Well, I guess what bothered me the most is it's one thing to get people named to these. Like it was insignificant to consider that Latinos should be appointed to every single board and commission. I got relegated certain commissions that I worked on and, you know. . . . The idea was you got a good gender mix, you got a good geographic mix, you got all the requirements, you know, whatever the board was doing, so that you had good representation. You always had a black on it. There wasn't the "always" when it came to the Latino, or Asian, or whatever. Sometimes you did. Sometimes you didn't.

Vasquez

Was it on a regional basis or what?

Molina

No. It was just across the board on any of them.

Vasquez

Not even in Texas? Not even in California?

Molina

No. I'm talking about in general. Every commission had. . . . You had to to meet certain criteria, the criteria that was set up. But at the same time, one of that. . . . Within that criteria, it never did say. . . . It almost always said there had to be a black on it. It didn't say there had to be a Latino on it. And that was troublesome. So then I used to fight for [whatever] boards I could get. Then I would make sure the ones I worked on would have a Latino on them. So I used to generate the resúms, the names. I would do everything I could to find out what everyone else was doing. Who do they need? You know, "I need a lawyer who does this kind of law. Who has been in practice for this long, ta-ta-ta-ta. From Oregon." We'll go looking for a Chicano in Oregon. [Laughter] You know, that kind of stuff.

Vasquez

What kind of networks did you fall back on?

Molina

Well . . .

Vasquez

Or did you build into the ones that were already there . . . ?

Molina

Constantly rebuilding them. Within the party, within the congressional members, within the elected officials from the state. Anything that we could do to start pulling in those kinds of names to find adequate people. What used to burn me or what was so frustrating was many times I found wonderful people, just absolutely perfect. And they wouldn't get appointed because they'd get bumped by somebody else. Yet my appointment was just more qualified, more fitting.

Vasquez

So perhaps you were just at the screening level, is that it?

Molina

Oh, yes. That's all we did. We put together these commissions . . .

Vasquez

You screened and recommended.

Molina

That's right. I recommended to my boss . . .

Vasquez

Who was?

Molina

At first, it was. . . . Oh, my gosh. What was his name? He ran for Congress. Arnie Miller. Then he recommended to the president. And that's where my debates were, with my boss. I'd go in and I would say, "So-and-so is working on such a commission here. Or I had talked to them. I really want to lobby that you put so-and-so on that commission." And he would say, "Well, Gloria, you know. . . ." He'd give me the excuses and whatnot. I had to really go in and make a case. With my recommendations for my commissions, I could go in there. And he usually would sign off on them. What was hard for me was to lobby him on other appointments that I wasn't directly working on.

Vasquez

Right. Right.

Molina

And then, I guess, one of the things that was the most disappointing for me was that I wanted to insist on a policy. "The president promised. So I want to hear from your mouth that you're going to appoint Latinos to every position." And what I wanted to do was, of course, get more and more Latinos to be insistent on that. I used to love the Texas guys that came in there. They wanted a Texan on every board. [Laughter] And they usually got it. We in California were not as insistent as that. But, anyway, that's what I did.

Vasquez

Tell me about any other regional differences in the way that Chicanos do politics from California to Washington [D.C.].

Molina

Oh, there were unbelievable differences.

Vasquez

Compare for me, for example, the manitos from New Mexico or the Texas Tejanos you mentioned.

Molina

[Laughter]

Vasquez

People from the Midwest. People from California.

Molina

Well, the Texans were, by far. . . . I mean, they just walk in, and this is what they want. And they always came in. They came in threatening and intimidating right away. And they came in with a little bit of power. They came in connected también [also]. You know, they had the good ol' boy congressman with them, and everything else. So it was like already . . .

Vasquez

They had political savvy?

Molina

Huh? Yeah. In a sense. They really were very savvy about how the process worked. Very, very savvy about it. The Latinos in Arizona, I thought, were fairly sophisticated as well. But nothing like the Texans. But California Latinos were not as aggressive as that. And they didn't go in with that kind of unity. Like, thirteen didn't come at you at the same time. You just had somebody who was attending a conference in D.C. And they said, "Oh, there's a Chicana in the White House. I'll go visit her and ask her for an appointment." It was never an organized, planned thing. The Texans were very bold about it. And then, in certain areas [like] New Mexico, what I found was they worked through the monied interest in the party. [Laughter] "So-and-so called me. You know, one of our major contributors called from New Mexico. He would like to make sure that, you know, Mr. So-and-So gets appointed to a certain commission." So they did it at a different level. The Chicanos from California were not doing that at all. And then, of course, the Puertorriqueños and the Cubanos.

Cubanos were also very, very aggressive. Very aggressive about how they wanted their appointments. And, you know, they didn't meet with me. They wouldn't give me the time of day.

Vasquez

[Laughter]

Molina

They met with my boss. If they were going to meet with anybody, it was going to be with my boss. They wouldn't even meet with me. The Puertorriqueños sometimes were about the same way. But they, too, also were very savvy. They were like the Texas Chicanos. They came in with their congressman and their senator and their so-and-so. They had a lot of unity behind all of their appointments. Every Puerto Rican wanted this Puertorriqueño to be appointed to this commission. When the Chicanos were pushing for a commission, they didn't have that kind of unity. Or didn't express itself that way. But I found a couple of things that. . . . Well. . . . And there were a lot of differences. Then the other thing that I learned when I was there. . . . Again, it was. . . . All my arrogance of being from East L.A. is that I never thought much about Chicanos from Illinois or Minnesota.

Vasquez

[Laughter]

Molina

Because we weren't, you know . . .

Vasquez

You didn't think that they were there? Or you didn't think much of them?

Molina

No, no, no. I'm sorry. I didn't think there were many there.

Vasquez

In places like Ypsilanti, Michigan.

Molina

Right. [Laughter] Yeah, it was. . . . It was not many. I mean, that's what. . . . So I learned all about that. Chicano communities in Montana and places like that. You know, I just thought we were all in East L.A., somewhere in El Paso, or places that I . . . [Laughter]

Vasquez

. . . had some reference to, huh?

Molina

Right. Anyway . . .

Vasquez

So you didn't get Potomac fever?

Molina

No. Not at all. In fact, I was turned off very quickly in a sense. There were a lot of things, in fact. The other thing while I was in the White House is that it was troublesome. We really had not arrived. Really. We weren't even there. We were nonexistent.

Vasquez

Weren't you considered "Hispanic" yet?

Molina

Nobody cared about us. We were Mexicans. . . . I mean, you know, having a Hispanic, there wasn't any need yet. There was no sense of urgency. There was nobody who was responding to issues. Here I was in 1975 and 1976 thinking that we were really prominent. Important. But very frankly, as Latinos, we were such a small, little group in D.C. And we had a couple of congressional members. But there was not really anything there. The National Council of La Raza was there. Which was good. There were certain mechanisms. There was hardly anything.

Vasquez

What kind of power did it wield? What was the perception of it?

Molina

None.

Vasquez

The council?

Molina

What?

Vasquez

The National Council of La Raza.

Molina

That it wielded?

Vasquez

A lobbying group at best?

Molina

Yes. At best. In fact, I remember once when I submitted a whole series of recommendations of top Hispanics. Because, you know, there were Puertorriqueños and Cubanos. I had done a whole list of people that really deserved appointment. I didn't specify. It was like a memo of, like, twenty prominent people that needed to be appointed to something. I wrote a memo to my boss. I remember what he told me when he gave it back to me. He said, "Well, you know, you didn't put on there whether. . . ." He said, "You have to let me know what César Chávez thinks of these appointments." I was so insulted by that. Because that was the only thing that he saw as important. I mean, if César Chávez didn't think these Mexicans were important, then they were not important. I mean, to me, César Chávez was a prominent labor leader-Chicano leader-in California. But I don't know that he would know the professors in New Mexico that had been recommended to me to be appointed to something. Or that he would know, you know, that kind of thing. But that was the level of my boss's understanding of Latino leaders. If César said they're okay. . . . It's like, "If your leader says it's okay, then they're okay. But, you know, you had better call them up and check with them." I found it insulting, because I had written a very elaborate memo about everybody. Just a paragraph about each one and how they came recommended, the support

they had. I thought they should stand on their own. And, instead, I was relegated to go and call César to send me his list. . . . That was insulting.

Vasquez

It was a form of patronage, after all, wasn't it?

Molina

That's all it was. Yes. Really, that's all it was. But at the same time, they were prominent commissions that did all kinds of things. . . . They had a prominent role. And I, again, naively thought that we really were going out there now. It was just a matter of working it hard. It wasn't a matter that we were going to be discriminated against. If I worked really hard and came up with real good names with lots of support, they'd get appointed. It didn't happen.

Vasquez

So what did you learn about power in Washington, D.C., that first time out?

Molina

Well, first of all, that we had none.

Vasquez

[Laughter]

Molina

And that made me very angry that we didn't have any. We had to have some. Our issues were much too important for [Secretary] Joseph Califano and HEW [Department of Health, Education, and Welfare] to be ignoring or anything like that. And he did, and they did. So I felt that what I needed to do was go back home and continue working. Because these folks have got to get it straight. I mean, we are important. Our issues are significant. They've got to start addressing us. And we've got to become politically powerful for them to recognize that. But I think it has been an ongoing battle that I have been fighting in national politics and, very frankly, that I don't think we're doing very well with.

Vasquez

Which is?

Molina

That is getting the political powers to recognize the significance of our community: the people and its issues, its problems, and the things that we need to get done. We are still being ignored politically. We're still important to them and we're getting to be more important to them, but not enough to really have them be accountable to us on the decisions. And that was troubling. So, no. I didn't get Potomac fever. I was there for two years. I wanted to come back home. I felt a real sense of duty to come back home. [Interruption] Uh-huh. Okay. A real sensitive duty to really come back and organize all of that.

Vasquez

So the vehicle that you chose was what?

Molina

Well, it wasn't the best way. Actually, I knew I wanted to come back home, and I started looking around. I knew that I just couldn't come back and go back to and just be doing what I was doing with Art.

Vasquez

Why?

Molina

I wanted to do something different that was, hopefully, going to give me an opportunity to do more of the kind of organizing that I wanted to do. And to have political organizing ability. So I started looking around, and there really wasn't anything. I wanted to be able to, like, come back and do something within the Democratic party. I really had hopes of. . . . "If I get involved in something, if I could work on something like that, if I could do voter registration, if I could do organizing for the party, I'll really show them how to run it," kind of thing. I started looking, and there really wasn't anything, but I did want to come back home. And then there was one of those appointments where we needed to make a recommendation for a political position in San Francisco. And . . .

Vasquez

What agency was this?

Molina

It was Health and Human Services. It was no longer HEW. So I recommended myself. Of course, I had a friend who had told me about the job. I knew it was coming and all that, so I talked to Rick Hernández and a couple of others, and I recommended myself. I really wanted to get out of there and come home. I felt very frustrated. I also felt very frustrated with the Chicanos there as well.

Vasquez

Tell me about that.

Molina

Well, I also felt that they were whitewashing a lot of our problems, too.

Vasquez

For the benefit of?

Molina

For the benefit of just the status quo. Or just to keep going and getting along. I mean, it wasn't good enough for Rick Hernández to be in the White House and Gloria Molina to be in the White House, just to be these token Mexicans there. We really needed to be powerful and bring other people into the pipeline to really make some changes. We got more and more Chicanos in the White House, by the way, in other roles. But there wasn't a sense of urgency to really . . .

Vasquez

There was complacency about their own place.

Molina

Yes. That's what it was. And it was just troublesome. I used to have a lot of problems with it, because I felt we needed to challenge them, you know. I mean, my boss. I was set to kill him the day he gave me that César Chávez number. [Laughter] But he did a lot of other things. I mean, there were a lot of other things that happened. I mean, when I said that I wanted to see Latinos in the Securities Exchange Commission, the Federal Communications

Commission, the major commissions, I was told that we were not going to get appointments to that. I mean, that was just about the last straw. [Laughter] That was the day I said, "I've got to get the heck out of here." I was really disappointed. And, I guess, because I went in there sort of naively. What was interesting about it right before I left is that I went in there intimidated about the fact that I wasn't going to know what to do and that they were going to know so much more than I did. I was just going to be working so hard to catch up, because they were so smart. They didn't know any more than I did. I was really disappointed.

Vasquez

[Laughter]

Molina

I was really disappointed. They weren't the political geniuses that I thought they were.

Vasquez

[Laughter]

Molina

I mean, that was a real disappointment. I mean, I wasn't learning anything. So it was time to move on. It was a good experience though.

1.5. TAPE NUMBER: III, Side One (June 21, 1990)

Vasquez

Councilwoman, the last time that we talked, we had gone over your years in the White House and the things that led to a certain disaffection with what you were doing there and your desire to get back to California. Can we pick up the interview at that point?

Molina

Sure.

Vasquez

Tell me how you got back out here to the West Coast again to do health and welfare kinds of work?

Molina

Well, when I first went out there, I said I was going to stay for two years.

Vasquez

Was this the Department of Health and Human Services Regional Offices in San Francisco?

Molina

Right. And there was . . .

Vasquez

The date? Month and date?

Molina

Of what?

Vasquez

Of when you came back to California?

Molina

I think it must have been about. . . . The month and the year, I'm not sure. Probably around January of 1979. Because I was only there a year, I think.

Vasquez

What was your role there? What was your job description, as it were?

Molina

Well, I was deputy director, and my responsibility was intergovernmental affairs. What that meant was I had a staff of about six people. Our responsibility was to go out and visit and keep in touch-liaison work-with all the state legislatures for, basically, nine western states and all of the territories. So that we made sure that state legislation was in sync with federal legislation, which were all health and human services-all the Medicaid, Medi-

Cal kinds of issues. And that's what we did. So we interfaced with state legislators.

Vasquez

Did it mean a lot of traveling for you?

Molina

It was an awful lot of traveling. But a good deal of my staff did a lot of the direct work. I would go in from time to time when there were certain people that we needed to meet with. But I had to travel into each state's capital for the most part and basically manage the staff with regard to all of those kinds of issues.

Vasquez

What did that traveling do for you?

Molina

Well, I can only say that that job was probably one of the most disappointing jobs I ever had.

Vasquez

Why?

Molina

Because there was no substance to it. It was a prominent position and one that, I guess, anyone should be proud to have. Yet at the same time, I felt that [what] we were doing. . . . We were wasting taxpayer money. The work that we were doing with the state legislatures was important work. But there wasn't enough of it to warrant the kind of staff that we had in many instances. So we found ourselves with having to kind of create work, which is a good thing to do. That is, let's create some enthusiasm so that people will know about what we do and what we're involved in. And, certainly, a lot of the federal issues. I found that when I would get back to my superiors in D.C., they felt like, "No, no, no. Let's not do anything. You know, when they contact us, when they need us, we go in there. In the meantime, just sort of lay low." It wasn't a very exciting job.

Vasquez

But what did you learn about government bureaucracy in that job?

Molina

Well, that there is, exactly like everybody believes, a lot of red tape. People [are] intimidated about making decisions. People want to check off everything before they move on anything that's innovative or creative. A lot of backstabbing. Because there's just so much time on your hands, I guess.

Vasquez

What backstabbing? Well, what's there to backstab about?

Molina

Well, for example, I was a political appointee, and so was my boss. The others were all career civil servants-my staff, everyone else there, including the directors of all the different programs. What we found was that they basically looked at us, who were the directors, as political appointees. Insignificant, you know. Many times when there were policy issues which they philosophically disagreed with, it was literally impossible to get them to implement it. And there was a lot of infighting. A lot of problems. You know, they would get back to the other bosses in D.C. And the whole thing, back and forth. To implement basic issues and basic policies, there was just a lot of backstabbing that went on, you know. Who was really in command? So it was a self-defeating kind of a situation every time. I remember that, because I felt time on my hands. Everything that we tried to do that was innovative and creative was always shut down at the top. So I really couldn't do anything. We were supposed to sit around and wait till the phone rang. One of the things that came across the office was the implementation of the merit pay program. The federal merit pay program. They needed somebody to sort of take a lead role in it. And while almost everyone was involved in it, I felt this was terribly exciting to do. Let's see about implementing something new in the bureaucracy. Now, we were going to institute merit into the federal system for the career civil servant. I felt this would be good because there were a lot of people that didn't do anything that were able to continue going and getting their increases, and so on. And, frankly, we weren't providing the best services. So I started the process of developing it: sitting down with all the personnel folks,

finding out all the guidelines, going through the whole process of doing it. And, oh, the resistance was unbelievable. To think that people would have welcomed it, saying, "Here's an opportunity that if I do a good job, I'm going to get more than the potential. The possibility of more of a cost of living than I get now." But instead, everybody wanted to maintain the status quo. I found that managers were absolutely intimidated at having to rate their employees and rate them other than average.

Vasquez

Why was this?

Molina

Because they were frightened of what that would mean for them and their work product and what they had to do.

Vasquez

So this goes all the way down the line?

Molina

All the way down. From top to bottom. Everybody was intimidated. And it was interesting, because the merit pay program came out of the Carter administration and died within the Carter administration. Because the federal civil servants and their association-their union, they call themselves an association-went to court. And even before it could possibly be implemented, they killed it. That was very disappointing. I used to feel such frustration from those kinds of situations. [Interruption]

Vasquez

Well, let me ask you this, did partisan political participation on the part of these civil service employees loosen that built-in conservatism that you talked about a while ago? To sort of maintain the status quo from one administration? From one party to the next? And really become a bureaucracy that just runs for its own ends and not to [implement] *anybody's* policy?

Molina

Yeah. Well, I mean, I would worry about too much of it coming to federal service. But I do believe if you're a civil servant and you've got objectives that

are created by the people who are elected to these positions, the duty of those civil servants is to follow those policies. Now, if you think that it's an absolutely wrong policy, then I think there should be a mechanism by which you can hopefully work it or challenge it.

Vasquez

Well, there is one already. Isn't there? The slow down or losing it? Or whatever you experienced? There is a way that civil servants can disagree with certain policy. Just not . . .

Molina

Oh, absolutely. That's what they do. And instead of creating a mechanism to say, "This is wrong for the following reasons," and try to find a way, not compromise, but to negotiate that is just as resistant. Absolute resistance. For example, I'm trying to remember one of the things that we did that was very difficult to implement. It had to do with Medi-Cal funding. I don't remember all the particulars of it. But I remember how difficult the bureaucracy was. I think the administration came out with a whole list of what you can't do anymore. "You can't, you know. . . . Weight reduction doctors aren't going to get to use these funds." And there was a whole list of them. Getting that implemented within all the region was difficult because you basically had a person in charge who felt that that's wrong policy. I mean, you know, and all kinds of other things. He created a problem toward that, but I don't remember all the details of it. But that usually was constant. I mean, that's the kind of thing that happened. I think what I used to see also is that there were some who disagreed with the philosophy or the policies. And yet there was no mechanism for them to really say so. Because that was the other thing that came down from the top: "This is the way it is. It's absolute. And you just carry it out." I know that used to be a kind of a debilitating kind of situation for someone who was very anxious about something and felt that this was a wrong policy. The person that used to work under me was a Republican, a staunch Republican. And as a Democrat, it's interesting. . . . Well, philosophically, we both had differences. He was probably one of the most hard-working people within that department. You know, we would see some of the things that we were going to do. He says, "This is wrong. I disagree with it." You know, we would talk about it. But for the most part, we had to carry

out that kind of policy. And he did it very, very well. So one of the things at least that was wonderful about the whole process I guess is, when the Republicans came in, he became the director. Which is good to see. Well, although not of my political party, he was the kind of person that was very fair and very good and knew enough about those issues and cared enough about them. But, again, the way the process was set up, it didn't give the room either for those employees-those, again, civil servants-that want to make changes, that want to be innovative, that want to be creative, that wanted to really put an awful lot of time and effort in what they do. Because the system just wears you out. People used to call it the "walking wounded." That's exactly what they were. They came into their jobs. It's just. . . . With all of the enthusiasm. And all of a sudden, they just became part of this process. It was a shame.

Vasquez

Well, I sort of have an idea what you liked least about the job.

Molina

[Laughter]

Vasquez

What did you like most about it?

Molina

What I did like was the traveling around. Getting to meet with other state legislators and other people. And also being involved at a top level of this type. And having an opportunity to try and move forward the agenda that we had. The Latino, the minority agenda. So that part I felt good about. Because being there and being part of it, we made sure that certain things were carried out and worked out. We did a lot of work during that time with the Vietnamese refugees and the resettlement of . . .

Vasquez

Before we move onto that, you talk about "we" in a Latino agenda. Tell me more about that. Who's "we"? And what was that agenda?

Molina

Well, I was in this position, and there were Latinos that used to get together and talk about a lot of concerns that we had.

Vasquez

You're speaking about at a lateral level?

Molina

Pretty much. There was no other deputy director. But there were other directors. And it's almost at the same level. Mostly all of them career civil servants, because there were very few political appointees in the region. We used to get together and talk about some of the concerns that we had. And, of course, the concerns were about ineffective implementation of affirmative action and about Latinos and Chicanos not having an opportunity to get promoted into the top jobs-all of those kinds of things.

Vasquez

Was the frustration as great there as you saw amongst some of the other ladder-rank civil service employees?

Molina

Absolutely.

Vasquez

Or more so?

Molina

More so, I felt. It was unfortunate. Again, it is so controlled in the way it operates. It doesn't give an opportunity for any of those folks. Unless you just fall into this pattern of playing the game by trying to be an activist or a leader it can be a problem for you as far as upward mobility from time to time. We got involved and went as far as enumerating all of the things we wanted to see changed, and asking Congress-the congressional committee-to come out and to hear our concerns.

Vasquez

As what? A caucus? Or what?

Molina

No. It was more than the caucus, if I remember correctly. Because Augustus Hawkins was part of it as well.

Vasquez

But I'm saying, what did you ask as? As a caucus? As a Latino caucus within the department . . . ?

Molina

Well, I can't even remember what we called ourselves if anything. But it was a lot of us that got together and enumerated all of these things. We put together a document that expressed all of the enumerated problems that we saw and what could be done to eliminate a lot of those problems, how we could expand hiring opportunities for Latinos-all of those kinds of things. This was not just within Health and Human Services. We're talking about all of the regional offices. We had [the Department of] Commerce. We had the [Department of] Education at that time which was just barely beginning. But all of the different regional offices that you have under the various departments. And we sent it. I can't remember if we sent it to the Chicano Caucus at first or whether we went right to the [United States House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor]. I remember Congressman Ed Roybal was part of that committee, because he came out and conducted some of these field hearings. And we had an opportunity to testify and try and make some changes. I didn't stay long enough to see exactly what happened with all of that. But that was part of what we were doing. I-again, not being a career civil servant-was not as familiar to what happens when you are a career civil servant, or a Chicano career civil servant, when it comes to employment opportunities, upward mobility, and so on. So I was getting a lot of information. And I would interface with my personnel department with regard to what we were doing. How these interview panels worked and things of that. . . . It's a very involved and intricate system. How I could make it so that our personnel department was more effective in eliminating any barriers to upward mobility for Chicanos. So I did those kind of things. It wasn't a long period of time. It was a short period of time. I guess I got involved in those kinds of things. So we basically had so much time on our hands from this non-job that I had in managing the congressional liaison. It was fine, and we did

okay, but like I said, it was like, "You sit there, and we'll call you when we need you." So I got involved in other kinds of things.

Vasquez

So you left when? January of the following year, pretty much?

Molina

Let's see. Reagan was elected when? In 1980, right?

Vasquez

Yes.

Molina

I must have left in . . .

Vasquez

'Eighty-one.

Molina

In January of '81.

Vasquez

Then where did you go? You were then appointed to chief of staff of Willie Brown?

Molina

Yes.

Vasquez

Is that right?

Molina

That's an interesting . . .

Vasquez

How did that take place?

Molina

Well, it's interesting how it took place. Because I have one interpretation and, I guess, others would have another. And now I look back. What happened is I wanted to come home desperately.

Vasquez

Home now means Los Angeles?

Molina

L.A., yes. So I was trying to figure out what kind of job. It was the first time since I was eighteen years old that I had the possibility of being unemployed.

Vasquez

[Laughter]

Molina

It was a really difficult thing for me to deal with. I said, "What is it that I want to do?" This was a point in time that I was thinking, "Should I go back to school and finish a degree? What should I do?" And I certainly think about all these different things. One of the things that came about was becoming. . . . Because I became very familiar with lobbying and lobbyists, the possibility of doing that kind of work. I didn't want to do it necessarily for a corporate kind of a situation. But I thought interfacing with state legislators-and doing that kind of thing-and promoting good policies. Good legislation was something I thought I could do. So I started looking around. I think the only thing that I found that was somewhat interesting was working for the California Rural Legal Assistance. They needed a Sacramento lobbyist, and I started talking to them. At the same time, I was talking to Art, Richard, and Lou Moret, and all of them were friends. They said, "Here's what you should do. There's this job coming up with Willie Brown. Why don't you interview with him and see about getting it?" So I did.

Vasquez

Did they recommend you?

Molina

They recommended me. Basically, their recommendation got me the job. Because I went in there, and I interviewed. I thought, "Gee, Willie thought I

could do a real good job for him. So that's why he hired me." But, basically, he hired me because Richard and Art said, "Do it," you know. Whatever payback kind of political situation that was, I don't know. At that time I really felt that I had gotten the job on my experience, background, and my own merits. But now that I look back, I think it was just somebody told him to do it. And he said, "Hey, what the hell?"

Vasquez

Was that wrong?

Molina

I guess what was bothersome for me about that when I looked back is that I really felt I had a lot to offer. And to be just pushed into a job, and saying, "Here's my friend. Do it for me," kind of thing. . . . Well, I guess. . . . I guess that's all right, and I got the job. But I really felt that what I was offering as far as qualifications and capability should have secured that kind of job. But in politics, there are those kinds of situations. And, you know, I have been reminded of it from time to time.

Vasquez

By?

Molina

By people like Art Torres and Lou Moret.

Vasquez

On a payback situation?

Molina

Uh-huh. [Affirmative]

Vasquez

Did you get an opportunity once you got into office to exhibit your capacity?
Your ability?

Molina

Oh, probably more so than he wanted to know about it, Willie Brown.
[Laughter]

Vasquez

Tell me about that. [Laughter]

Molina

Well, what happened is that his office here was also basically a liaison position. I was in L.A. I was sort of his chief-of-staff in L.A. And there were about five others that worked in the office. Basically, what we did is what . . .

Vasquez

Who were those people? Do you remember their names?

Molina

Oh. Well, Marguerite Archie, who is now Marguerite Archie-Hudson, who was just now elected . . .

Vasquez

Yes.

Molina

. . . to the state legislature. Dorothy Walker. Was it Dorothy Walker? Why can't I . . . ? No, it was Dorothy Tucker, who is an activist still. Linda Unruh, who is Jesse [M.] Unruh's daughter. And Steve [Smith]. I can't remember his last name. And Kevin Acebo. All of us had liaison responsibilities to certain segments of the community. I to the Chicanos, Marguerite to blacks, Kevin to Asians, Steven to the gay community, Linda Unruh to the labor community. Our responsibility was to be in touch. Be the eyes and ears of the speaker on various issues to those communities. And also to-well, as we did-to generate any legislation that was needed by these groups. We also dealt with every single Democratic-basically Democratic-legislator who needed us for anything here. We assisted in all the hearings and all of that. So we kept very busy. There was a lot of work for us to do. And I managed that staff.

Vasquez

It wasn't another make-work job?

Molina

In a sense, it was.

Vasquez

In what sense?

Molina

But I made it more than that. Because, you know, I think you could just sit there and wait for Willie to call you. And that would have made him just as happy. What I did instead is I kept a very active calendar of where my staff was going, what they were doing. "When should we get Willie to interface with labor leaders? What's a good time? Let's plan for that, so I can get them scheduled here. What are the highlights of what we're going to be doing in the black community?" Things of that sort. "What kind of hearings?" I was, you know. . . . So I made it a big thing when . . .

Vasquez

How was it different from a scheduling secretary?

Molina

Well, it was different because we also had to be analyzing and looking at the political situations that were going on and what that meant. For example, during that . . .

Vasquez

Anticipating things?

Molina

Absolutely. At that time, one of the things that was beginning to happen was reapportionment.

Vasquez

I want to talk about reapportionment a little bit.

Molina

And what every ethnic group and segment was working on and what was going on. We were supposed to be the eyes and ears out here. So we were gathering a lot of that information so that the speaker would be able to, you know, enjoy the support of every ethnic group. I mean, his goal was very clear. He intended to be speaker for life. He wanted to make sure that his members that elected him were very happy. So we had to go out there and do anything we could to help in any way. From time to time, we took time off from the state office to go do straight political things. Straight political fund-raiser. Straight political, you know, walking and things.

Vasquez

Then you were off a salary at that time?

Molina

That's right.

Vasquez

How did you get compensated for that?

Molina

Well, we basically didn't. Sometimes. But we basically didn't.

Vasquez

So you would lose three months or a month's worth of salary.

Molina

No. It was a very short period of time. We'd do a week, you know, and that kind of thing.

Vasquez

Out of loyalty?

Molina

It was part of the job. I think we all recognized very clearly that we're all political. All of us who were in that office were very political. And believe me, I had the same goals as the speaker did. We wanted to keep . . .

Vasquez

Including him being speaker for life?

Molina

Well, at that time I didn't have a problem with that.

Vasquez

Why do you say that . . ? On what do you base the belief that he wanted to be speaker for life?

Molina

Because he said that.

Vasquez

Really?

Molina

Yes.

Vasquez

And you worked accordingly?

Molina

According to that.

Vasquez

Because even Jesse Unruh didn't . . .

Molina

I mean, I can be a very loyal person.

Vasquez

. . . expect that.

Molina

Huh?

Vasquez

Even Jesse Unruh did not want that.

Molina

He does.

Vasquez

Give me a thumbnail character sketch of Speaker of the Assembly Willie Brown as you knew him at the time and over the years.

Molina

Okay. Well, certainly I knew him very differently then than when I was a state legislator. But he was, I guess, what is associated with Willie Brown all the time is "slick." And slick in a way that he's extremely powerful. He knows how to use his power. Extremely aggressive.

Vasquez

Give me an example of knowing how to use his power.

Molina

Well, for example. . . . There are so many incidents. In the kind of appointments that he makes. The kind of payback that he expects. You know, how he moves around in different groups. And then the demands that he makes and wants back. He buys everybody in. And that makes him powerful. Then he . . .

Vasquez

Is he simply a horse trader? Or does he have any statesmanship to him at all?

Molina

I think that Willie as an assemblyman was probably more of a statesman. Of course I didn't know him that well. As far as a government policy-making kind of person, he really believed that certain things should get done. I found [when] he was speaker and I worked for him that his interest was in staying speaker. That meant a lot of compromising and an awful lot of negotiating on different ends. So many times, I think, he used to lose that kind of edge that

got him to where he was. Because one of the things that people really respected about Willie Brown was that he was someone who absolutely believed in certain issues and was going to fight to the end to get them done. And he was passionate about those things. I think that as he became speaker, he just had to compromise so much more, because there were so many points of views. He had to buy a little bit from each one. He had to keep everybody happy.

Vasquez

Is that the nature of the speakership in California?

Molina

I think so. I think that is the unfortunate nature of a lot of leadership positions. And you can't fault people. I don't particularly like it. I hate myself when I have to do it. But it is the nature of those leadership positions.

Vasquez

Well, it has been said that American politics is the art of compromise. When is the compromise too much?

Molina

Well, I know when it's too much for me. But I think that when you have to give in philosophically, that's too much of a compromise.

Vasquez

Even if you're buying political space for a future time?

Molina

Well, you can negotiate. But when you have to give in, I just think that that's terrible. Like, for example, right now. I'm a pro-choice [on the right to abortion] person. I've always supported and want to see laws maintained that we're always going to have that choice. What we're seeing now is a push-and-shove situation politically. I mean, if you're not pro-choice, you may not get elected. Even as a Republican. And what you're seeing is people switching their position. Now, I support pro-choice, and I'd love them to be pro-choice. But I cannot believe [that] philosophically one day you can be a pro-lifer, and then tomorrow-because you're running for office-switch. I think that's too

much of a compromise. It doesn't make sense to me at all. Either you're there or you're not there. So there are different kinds of things. I think that philosophically, that's just too much of a compromise.

Vasquez

Is that the kind of compromise that you saw Willie Brown was willing to make?

Molina

Well, I mean, he compromises on lots of things and plays different kinds of games. But he's a clever man. He's a smart man. And, again, he saves up his little chits-they're called-and uses them accordingly when he wants to maintain something that he needs to maintain. One of the things he's been able to do is to never allow the death penalty issue to come up in the state legislature, because of how he controls everything that's going on. That even the most conservative members owe Willie something. That they are willing to back off when it comes to that particular issue. And, consequently, he has saved it. Because that's one issue that, I guess, he's still passionately involved with.

Vasquez

It sounds like a philosophical issue to me that he's using power to come out on the winning end with.

Molina

Yes. As I'm saying, he is using that power to maintain those kinds of things that are important. I'm not saying the man has no principles. . . . Is totally stripped of them. Absolutely not. He has them. He has that ideology. And he maintains it. I don't think it's as visible as it probably was when he was just a member of the legislature.

Vasquez

Can he afford to be in a position where he's got to balance all these different forces?

Molina

Oh, sure. Oh, in any leadership role, you must. You must. Obviously, he does it well. He is still speaker. I guess he has now gone beyond any speaker in the state legislature. And that's, I guess, to his credit. It's a tough job.

Vasquez

You don't sound sure. You say, "I guess" and "I suppose."

Molina

Because again, it's up to him. I mean, is it worth it for him?

Vasquez

Is it worth it for the issues he represents? Or does he represent issues anymore?

Molina

Well, I think-because I've disagreed with him more recently-that he does not have issues anymore or have certain issues. Because he allowed too much to get away.

Vasquez

For example?

Molina

Insurance. I was one of those that battled up there against the insurance industry on a regular basis. The insurance industry is one of the biggest contributors to the state legislative campaigns. You go against them and you lose your contributions. The redlining issue on insurance is against blacks and against Mexicans and against poor people, which is the same constituency that Willie has always represented and cared so much about. Yet when it came to really wrestling with the insurance industry, I felt that sometimes he compromised much too much. I know the other side of it was, well, you know, come election time, he needs the insurance industry to keep the money flowing to maintain that Democratic majority. To maintain him as speaker and other kinds of issues. And, of course, that's probably the appropriate way to play it, to do what he is doing. But it was not the appropriate way for me to play it, who has seen people hurt day after day by the insurance industry and this miserable policy. I wanted him to use his leadership to change it. And I

asked him. And he did certain things. But they were just like to the edge, and he would pull right back. We could have cleaned up that industry.

Vasquez

This was when you were in the assembly?

Molina

Uh-huh. [Affirmative]

Vasquez

Let's hold that until we get to that stretch. We're going to get to that in a few minutes.

Molina

But those are the kinds of things that . . .

Vasquez

I want to get back to the period of 1981. And specifically, to one of the most articulate efforts in the history of the Mexican community here in California to involve itself in something as arcane as reapportionment. I'm speaking about Californios for Fair Representation. Tell me how that group emerged and your role in any of that.

Molina

[Laughter] You know, it's interesting. It was probably one of the hardest things that. . . I find myself. . . I'm known to be a very loyal person. And in this instance, I was in the same situation-I guess Willie was in many-in that I worked for the Speaker of the Assembly with the power to make the decisions about reapportionment. And the underrepresented is where I come from. The Chicanos that always got the dregs of reapportionment. When I saw Californios forming, I was tremendously excited about it. Because, finally, it was going to be other than a couple of us on the inside who were going to say, "Give us our fair share." Now there was going to be an accountability out there. There was going to be people participating. And I was very involved, as you know, with Comisión Femenil. What Californios was doing was going to all the organizations and saying, "Let's develop a coalition of all the Chicano organizations and get representatives together. Then we become this

accountability group." I was very excited about that. So I participated. And participated as a Comisión representative. I had to understand my role and my job with the speaker at the same time, and not to compromise that. Yet at the same time, carry out my responsibility, I felt, to my organization and to Californios. So I entered and participated within Californios to that extent. That I would probably not be able to participate in any decisions or involvement with regard to state legislative lines or issues. That I would concentrate my involvement within the city and the county issues of which the speaker had no involvement whatsoever. And that my responsibility with Californios and to the speaker was to do the liaison work with them. To make sure that the speaker was listening to Californios and that Californios was, in fact, hopefully working in a way that would be effective for both Chicanos and the speaker. So that's the role that I took on. I was kind of walking in between that continuously. But I spent most of my time within the city and the county lines.

Vasquez

But the efforts of Californios were primarily at the state level-the assembly, senate, and congressional districts.

Molina

Yes. In the beginning, that's true. That was a lot of it. And all I could do was, hopefully, get the speaker to listen to this leadership group, which, very frankly, he did.

Vasquez

Some criticisms made of Californios: that they didn't spend enough energy on the county and the city, but especially the county; and that they might have been able to bring lawsuits earlier than what we've seen in subsequent times. Did Californios underestimate that? The importance of the county reapportionment?

Molina

No. I think Californios had such a huge job to do. Reapportionment is so tricky. They were watching the congressional lines. We were going to get two additional congressional seats, probably Latino congressional seats at that

time. They were watching the state legislative lines. The county and the city of L.A. And then there were others that wanted to watch other cities and other kinds of things. And the resources were so limited. First of all, like any organization, everybody said, "Rah-rah-rah," you know. Then they came to the meetings, and they said, "You, Santillán, do it. You, John [E.] Huerta, do it. You, Miguel [F. García], do it." Everybody was, "We are going to be there to back you up." But they really weren't. So there was a small group of people doing all of that work.

Vasquez

Who were the people that you saw as being the most active? The most effective?

Molina

Santillán, Huerta, Miguel, Armando Navarro, Leticia Quezada and her husband-I can't remember his name-Marshall Díaz, Elena [Carrasco]-but I don't remember her last name either-was the attorney. They were the core group that were doing all of the work. They were going to the Rose [Institute of State and Local Government] in the middle of the night. They were drawing lines. They were negotiating with each other. They were doing all of those things. They were going in and trying to get meetings with Richard Alatorre. Trying to get Richard to tell them what was going on with the lines. Trying to present their plan. Trying to lobby. Here was a small core group of people doing lots and lots of work on a volunteer basis. Not a paid staff at all. And so it was a tough job to do. So I don't think it's fair to level any criticism at Californios, because Californios was barely making it. If there's any criticism that should be made, it should be at all the Chicano organizations that said, "Yes, we're going to be with you," and in the end didn't raise money, in the end didn't participate, and in the end didn't help us lobby. I think that was the biggest disappointment.

Vasquez

Now you were the liaison for the speaker and this group. How in the world did the speaker come out in the L.A. *Times* and the California press saying things like, "Mexicans are nice people, but they just don't vote"?

Molina

Yes.

Vasquez

That shouldn't have happened, should it, while you were there?

Molina

Well, it shouldn't have happened at all. I mean, why he said those kinds of things and. . . . It was upsetting to me personally. And, of course, he went through the whole thing about being misquoted and that that wasn't the case. But I knew that down deep inside, while Willie wouldn't say that to me, that's really what he felt.

Vasquez

So you really had very little impact on his thinking or his knowledge of the Mexican community?

Molina

Oh, very little. I mean, I wish I could say, "Hey," you know. I was almost like in the congressional office or in the intergovernmental office before. You know, "We'll call you when we need you. In the meantime, keep your opinions to yourself." It was basically the same kind of a job. And that part was very, very difficult. Very difficult to deal with. I . . .

1.6. TAPE NUMBER: III, Side Two (June 21, 1990)

Vasquez

Did you get Richard and Art to help you?

Molina

Yes, and get them to see about getting on Willie for some of these remarks, and meeting with Californios.

Vasquez

What was the response when you tried to do that? Tried to get Art and Richard to react?

Molina

Oh, yes, they said they would. And I guess they talked to him. I don't know. I wasn't part of those conversations. But I set up the meeting with Californios and Willie for them to talk to him. And he was slick again.

Vasquez

What do you mean?

Molina

He told them everything they wanted to hear. And they went off. I don't know whether they trusted him or not. They probably didn't. But for the most part, they bought in. Because he's slick. He's smart. I watched Willie do it a hundred million times, I guess. It's part of, I guess, leadership as well. Give them what they want to hear. And that's exactly what he did. They went off, and he did exactly the opposite, you know.

Vasquez

Can you be more specific?

Molina

Well, for example, they were talking about. . . . I don't remember all their maps, because I wasn't involved in the maps as much. They were talking about creating certain districts. For example-I can't remember-in Ventura [County] somewhere, there was an assembly district, and so on. And he was saying, "Sure, let's do it that way." And, "Absolutely," and everything. But, very frankly, they weren't attaching themselves to anything. They weren't asking hard enough questions.

Vasquez

Which were?

Molina

I think what happens with many of us is that nobody really gets the commitment to the bottom line. And he's good at squirming away, never getting pinned down like that. So, consequently, they had a meeting. And they felt it was an okay meeting. And I guess it went well. But I don't feel that they pinned him down enough to real commitments. He's very effective at not having that happen. Willie's basic reaction was, "What's your problem with

me? I mean, I did the best thing for you. I appointed your Chicano to head up the whole damned thing." So he kept. . . . I mean, his thing was. . . . And it was a good defense.

Vasquez

In addition to having probably the most articulate-undoubtedly the most articulate effort on the part of the Mexican community-on the "outside" in Californios, at the same the Mexican community also had on the "inside" the most powerful single individual involved in that reapportionment, Richard Alatorre. An assessment would have to be that, "Yes, we might have gained some terrain." But not as much as that lineup of forces would indicate we might have. Why is that?

Molina

Well, I certainly don't know. I wish I did. I think that, you know, you might have to know to understand. You certainly get that from Richard Alatorre. I think we did fairly well. Particularly in the congressional seats. Whether we did in the state legislative or the assembly seats, Californios didn't think so and challenged Richard on that. But the inner workings of it, I don't know. One thing about Richard as well is that Richard enjoyed his powerful role. And his power was only as effective as he kept Willie happy and all the other members happy. And that was based on incumbency. And that was based on partisanship. You know, certain seats are Democrats. Certain seats are Republicans. And I think that Richard adhered to that aspect of reapportionment that troubles everybody. That is, maintaining the status quo. I think he did a lot of that. But on the other hand, as he says, no one has ever sued him under the Voting Rights Act for the state legislative lines. And that's true.

Vasquez

Could it be that, in this case at least, the Mexican-American community has not known how to deal with the dichotomy of being both an insider and an outsider? And making the most political gain out of those two positions?

Molina

Sure. Richard has done that very, very well.

Vasquez

But I'm saying in this case, between Californios and Richard Alatorre. I've interviewed every major player in Californios and Richard as well, and it seemed like there was a lot of animosity. A lot of mistrust. And a lot less mileage made out of having both elements involved in the process that might be expected.

Molina

One of the things that Richard does, and it's an ongoing problem, is that Richard is-and I know it's the problem I have with him every so often-he's going to tell me what's good for me. I'm supposed to sit in the wings and wait, and he's going to tell me what's good for me. Well, a lot of us don't like to operate that way and don't like it operated for us in that fashion. And I think that's what he did with Californios. That's what used to make them so angry. It's like, "Hey, I'm taking care of you." And you know, "You'll be fine. Don't worry about it." And he wouldn't give them any information. So, consequently, they were all, as I was, outside of the loop. And that made them angry and hostile. I don't blame them. So, you know, there's no doubt that for Richard it was good. It made him more effective and more powerful in the role that he played. And I guess that can be good. But at the same time, it wasn't very effective for the goals of Californios. Because they felt that with Richard there, there were going to be more gains made. And unfortunately, that was not it. That was not the case, because I think Richard had other loyalties and other duties as well.

Vasquez

So it wasn't just a question of political style. It was a question of substance. Different goals. Different motives.

Molina

Yes. Different motives. Different goals. In Californios, they were only doing one thing: trying to get those lines to get more seats for more Chicanos. It was a single issue. "This is what we want." Richard had to deal with everybody.

Vasquez

What was the biggest gain or the biggest contribution that Californios made in your mind?

Molina

I think that they put in place a mechanism of activism on the whole issue of reapportionment and its significance. I know that in the seventies there was some involvement. But I don't know much about it. But it wasn't like what they did in '81. Besides the fact that it gave all the background so that eventually MALDEF [Mexican-American Legal Defense and Educational Fund] filed a lawsuit for the county and things of that sort. But I also think that the other thing Californios did is it sort of prepared us for this coming reapportionment. I think that people can look back at what Californios did-the good things, the bad things, the things that were necessary-and start putting in place everything that needs to be done in order to be much more effective.

Vasquez

There's a conference taking place, I think, this weekend, isn't there? At the Rose Institute?

Molina

At the Rose Institute.

Vasquez

At Claremont McKenna College. Will you be a part of that?

Molina

No.

Vasquez

That's part of the outcome of that process.

Molina

Right. You know what's interesting for me about that process as well is that it taught me an awful lot. But I also felt that within the Rose. . . . I mean, they didn't lend us that for no reason whatsoever.

Vasquez

We're coming to that. [Laughter]

Molina

I mean, the Rose Institute is basically a Republican mechanism, as I see it. I think what they wanted to see was that kind of disruption to reapportionment that they hoped would evolve. And I think that, very frankly. . . . Again, it was more manipulated and staged than we would. . . . With that information and our capability of drawing those lines, we would instigate and create more confusion, and Republicans would have an opportunity to do something different, as they attempted to do. Because they knew they were going to get the short end. I mean, with Democrats in control of reapportionment, they were not going to get the full extent of what they wanted. And they're battling for it now. But I think . . .

Vasquez

Don't you think that Richard and Willie saw that?

Molina

Yes, absolutely.

Vasquez

And, perhaps, saw Californios as a manipulated group by the Republicans?

Molina

Absolutely.

Vasquez

Sort of a Trojan horse? Might that explain some of their resistance to . . . ?

Molina

Well, there's no doubt that some of their resistance was based on that.

Vasquez

Were you ever able to break that down for Willie?

Molina

Well, I kept telling him that he should have confidence in this group. I told him, "There's no doubt what they want. They want to see more Mexicans elected. That's their single goal." But that's no different than blacks, women, or any other group. But, of course, he, you know. . . . He never did say, "Well, they're just Republican fronts." He never said that. And we weren't. I mean, I really felt we were very pure in what we were trying to do. But there's no doubt about it. . . . I don't think that the Rose was hoping that we would instigate. . . . Whatever that happened. Whether Richard trusted it or not, I don't know. I was never in those meetings or had those discussions with him. I don't think that he liked, that Richard liked the activism that was going on with Californios. I mean, they were militant about a lot of their positions and their issues. There was no room for compromise in many instances. And . . .

Vasquez

Might that had been one of the drawbacks of Californios? Which is our next question: what do you think Californios did wrong?

Molina

One of the things they did wrong was they were just very hard line. They really didn't work at the idea-the negotiating aspect. They knew they didn't have the votes. Yet at the same time, they went in there and they were so adamant. There was just no room whatsoever to negotiate. Also, they also weren't effective in communicating with everyone else as to what the concerns or the issues were. That small group stuck together. They went off, and they knew what they were doing. The rest of us who were outside of that working group knew very little of what was going on. So many times, we didn't understand the pleitos. So they kept a lot of information to themselves. But I think the biggest thing is they created this position of, "We're not going to back off unless we get this." And then there was nowhere else for them to go. I mean, there really wasn't. So they started losing their credibility as well toward the end, I felt.

Vasquez

What was the difference between that and the kind of tenacity that you're known for?

Molina

It's probably not all that different. [Laughter] But I feel that one of the things that. . . I think they had to do what they had to do. And there's nothing wrong with it, because they were still achieving their goal. They could have negotiated maybe from time to time. But I also now think back and say, "It wasn't going to be. . . They weren't going to get-and we're still not going to get-our fair share." So there has to be a group that has to be militant and radical in order to emphasize those kinds of issues. And I think that Californios did that well. Sometimes to the extent it was. . . I even give them credit when they were arrested and when they sat in in the offices. Because that needed to be done in order to raise or focus the issues on what that was about and how significant it was.

Vasquez

What was your role in that?

Molina

I wasn't involved.

Vasquez

You weren't up there? You were not providing information to them at all? Or a conduit anymore?

Molina

No. I mean, all I could do was. . . I told them what I could do, and that's all I would do, and that is arrange those meetings with Willie. Try and help them in any way that I could in creating that liaison kind of situation. But I basically had to stay out of it, because I knew that my job and my responsibility was to do as Willie was saying. Now, again, I was not involved in the inner workings of those lines. In fact, hardly anyone was, except for Richard [Alatorre], the speaker, and his folks. But I was not. I was a liaison person here, and that was the extent of it.

Vasquez

Now you decided to leave Willie Brown's office when?

Molina

It didn't really work that way.

Vasquez

Tell me how it did.

Molina

What happened during Californios is that one of the other. . . . My other personal goal was that hopefully we would get a congressional seat out of this. And within that congressional seat, we could get a Latina to run.

Vasquez

You?

Molina

No.

Vasquez

You weren't thinking of yourself?

Molina

No. Not at all.

Vasquez

What district are we talking about?

Molina

We didn't know.

Vasquez

Okay.

Molina

We knew that it was going to be somewhere in what was known as the greater Eastside. You know, the San Gabriel Valley . . .

Vasquez

The San Gabriel Valley?

Molina

Pico Rivera. Somewhere out there. And what we wanted was to be the mechanism to help that Latina get elected.

Vasquez

Who's "we"?

Molina

It was a group of us in Comisión-including myself, Leticia Quezada, Yolanda Nava, Sandy Serrano-Sewell. What we wanted to do was. . . . We started talking about how we would become that team that would support that Latina getting elected. It wasn't. . . . I mean, we didn't, like, meet every week. We talked about it. We would meet occasionally and talk about it. One of the things I felt I could contribute was I could be the campaign manager. Others talked about fund-raising. We just thought we would be that mechanism that would get somebody elected. Well, we had to wait until the lines were drawn and see where the lines were and find that appropriate Latina that could run for that particular seat. At that time, one of the people I was thinking of was Julia Silva. Julia was. . . . I don't know if you know her. But she was the councilperson and may have been mayor at that time of a little town called Hawaiian Gardens. She was a young Chicana whom I felt would be somebody perfect for this kind of a seat. I felt that we needed somebody who was already . . .

Vasquez

From a city council to Congress?

Molina

Right. Being elected would be a better opportunity.

Vasquez

Did you have the blessing of Ed Roybal on any of this?

Molina

No. No. This was all . . .

Vasquez

No discussions?

Molina

No. This was just us talking about it. We didn't even know it was going to happen. We just talked about it and all those kinds of things. It wasn't like, you know, we didn't define ourselves. This is exactly. . . . We talked about it and said, "Let's create that kind of opportunity." We felt that it would be time. Well, that didn't happen. As quickly as the congressional lines were drawn, up popped the congressional members that were going to run. It was a done deal.

Vasquez

Where were they in? Who did it?

Molina

It was [Matthew G.] Marty Martínez and Estebán Torres.

Vasquez

Who anointed them? Where did they come from? Who supported them? Who backed them?

Molina

At that time, I guess, it was a Chicano political leadership all around Richard and Art.

Vasquez

Did you feel that you had no input into that?

Molina

Oh, I knew it. We had absolutely none.

Vasquez

Who did it? Somebody must have.

Molina

Oh, Richard and Art and all of his fund-raising people. TELACU [The East Los Angeles Community Union] was very involved with it. All of those folks. They. . . . It just. . . . And when you saw the lineup, you had an assemblyman, you had

a labor leader, a former ambassador, former White House person. . . . Chances of a Latina were slim and none against those two folks, you know. So it was. . . . I mean, we weren't crazy either. We just said, "Well, that blows that opportunity." [Laughter]

Vasquez

What was your role in those elections? Any? Did you help?

Molina

No. Because what happened was. . . . In my own backyard, little did I know- and I didn't know-Art Torres decided to challenge Alex [P.] García. So lo and behold, all of a sudden there was going to be an assembly seat that was going to open up. So we quickly gathered when we found that out, the possibility of that. Art mentioned it to me. He said, "Are you going to run?" And I said, "No. Not me. By gosh, we're going to have to huddle and find us a candidate. And we'll be right back to you" kind of a thing.

Vasquez

But he came to you and asked you that? To your group?

Molina

Me.

Vasquez

Me?

Molina

He asked me.

Vasquez

Did he encourage you?

Molina

He, in a sense, did. Because we had talked. He had talked to me about it when I worked for him. At that time, I had gone-been in the White House-had gone to the San Francisco regional office. I was really not kind of in the staff

anymore. Not as close to him, in a sense. We still had good relations and all. But. . . . And he talked to me about. . . . That he was going to challenge Alex.

Vasquez

Well, it seems that you have to go to a press conference right now. Why don't we cut it off for the day?

1.7. TAPE NUMBER: IV, Side One (July 12, 1990)

Vasquez

Councilwoman Molina, the last time we talked, we were just beginning to get into your decision to run for the assembly seat held by Art Torres when he challenged Alex Garcia. You've been quoted as saying that was probably one of the biggest heartbreaks that you had ever had. < [Note: Mills, Kay. *Gloria Molina. Ms.* (January 1985): 80, 114 . Molina was featured on the cover of *Ms.* magazine's Woman of the Year issue.] The lack of support that you got from Art Torres and Richard Alatorre: two people that you had been very impressed with, had worked for, and considered to be important political allies. Tell me about that.

Molina

[Laughter] And who I had loyally supported. It's interesting. My decision to run for that assembly seat was not done in a vacuum or by myself or something about, "It's time." It didn't work that way at all. It stems from a group of us who wanted to see a Chicana get elected.

Vasquez

This is the group that we were talking about?

Molina

Right, that we were talking about.

Vasquez

Electing someone to Congress.

Molina

That's right. That really was our focus. And we saw that kind of taken away from us. We were-as a group-disappointed, but said, "Hey, that's politics," kind of thing and continued to move on. I mean, we had always been respectful for the most part of the process that was laid out there in Chicano politics. We didn't say we liked it 100 percent for the most part. We knew that it was doing good things. The bigger good.

Vasquez

What process was this?

Molina

The process of the leadership that was there, the people who were there. We didn't always agree with Art Torres. We didn't always agree with Richard Alatorre. We didn't always agree with a lot of their decisions. But we also knew that they needed our support in order to keep going and doing the bigger good, as we said. So even in the congressional seats, you know, when they made those decisions, there wasn't much of an argument that could be made. I mean, it's not like we had somebody there. We had this Chicana who. . . . We're all set to go, and she got aced out. I mean, it didn't happen that way. We were . . .

Vasquez

[Despite the] organization that you had.

Molina

Right. Because all we were doing was basically saying, "If there's a shot, let's really go out there and look for someone and put her in the hopper." Little did we know that as quickly as they drew the lines and kind of let it be known, [there] also came the candidate. We felt a little shortchanged from that process.

Vasquez

Were you out of the loop?

Molina

Yes, we were out of the loop in that regard.

Vasquez

How did the loop work, then?

Molina

Well, the loop worked as they were elected officials; we were not. We were a support group and all of [that]. We were not elected officials. *They* had decided.

Vasquez

Without consulting supporters?

Molina

We were nobody to be consulted. In a sense, when we say, "We were nobody to be consulted. . . ." In the way things were set up at that time, we were a group of Chicanas who played this supportive role. We were leadership with Chicana organizations and Chicanas. But at the same time, I guess, we weren't as assertive as we needed to be, so that we needed to be consulted, that things needed to go through us for [them] to be okay. We hadn't had that kind of presence. They didn't look at us in that fashion. But we didn't understand that yet. I'll tell you, we didn't understand that yet. We were still growing and we were still trying to understand how everything worked. But we did know that one of the things that we wanted to do was to make things happen for Chicanas. And, like I said, we didn't buy into-as a group of Chicanas and feminists-the majority feminist philosophy and style. We didn't buy into the Chicano political guise and their style or the movement's style. We were always kind of developing our own way and our own style.

Vasquez

What were the differences?

Molina

The differences between . . . ?

Vasquez

In style or in content as you saw it.

Molina

Well, with other feminists or white feminists, we were not going to go in there and say to the old boys in our community, "Hey, that's it, you know. We're part of the environment or the picture here, and you need to consult us. And if you don't. . . ." We weren't as confrontational with them. We weren't as accusatory as. . . . "You guys are part of the problem." We were always willing to say, "The problem is racism. Sexism as well. But the problem is racism, and we've got to come out of all of those things." So we weren't willing to confront them and to blame them as quickly as most Anglo feminists were doing with men in general. With the Chicano movement, we weren't as willing to dismiss our priorities as women. Which many times *they* [Chicano men] felt we needed to dismiss and say, "Wait a minute. The bigger issue is racism. You know, the sexism thing is not as important." We weren't willing to do that. So, like I said, we were between the two. And we were making our own way. I think we were very unique. We were [one of] the very first groups, and I think probably still one of the few feminist groups around. Because there are not many. There were many other Latina or Chicana organizations, but they weren't feminist groups and they weren't willing to sit there and say, "Wait a minute. We're operating in the best interest of the Chicana woman and her family, and these are the goals." We weren't willing to submit ourselves under to another umbrella, but say that we were unique. We needed to come up with our own ideology, philosophy, and our own leadership and all of those kinds of things. One of our big goals was learning to become leaders. Not to become followers to the white women's movement, and not to become followers to the Chicano movement. But to become leaders for ourselves, for other women. That was very important to us.

Vasquez

Summarize, if you will, what your feminist philosophy was at the time as a Chicana feminist.

Molina

As a Chicana feminist, we felt very, very firmly that women should have every single opportunity available to them-no different than the Chicano would say-and that it had been denied historically and traditionally. And that we as Chicanas and feminist women had to continue to fight for that. We had to play leadership roles to make sure that the Chicana and her family was going

to have every single opportunity available to her. That no matter what decision she made-whether she was going to be a blue-collar laborer or whether she wanted to be an engineer-that Chicanas were going to have that kind of opportunity. So it involved a whole lot of things. But again, that was our philosophy. It was a feminist one. That we should be treated as equals and looked upon as equals. Nothing that should say we were not equals. That was very feminist of us. Yet at the same time, our style was different. It wasn't coming in and making those demands. We had resolved to ourselves that we just had to work a heck of a lot harder to be equal. And somehow that was, I think, the Chicana part of us. We were willing to accept that yoke around us and to say, "We had to work a lot harder."

Vasquez

The burden of proof was on you. Was that it?

Molina

Yes.

Vasquez

And you were willing to carry that?

Molina

I would say that most of us as Chicanas did that.

Vasquez

Did that cause problems for you with the white feminist movement?

Molina

Yes.

Vasquez

How so?

Molina

Well, for example, we would go to a white feminist conference, and one of the very first things was they would use the "macho" term a lot. We said, "Hey, wait a minute. You know, we don't necessarily think that's a negative term." I

mean, being macho in our community means being a man who lives up to his responsibility and his duty. I mean, you're not necessarily a pig. [Laughter] "We're not going to allow you to slander our men." And so we used to challenge them for saying things like "macho men."

Vasquez

Did you ever write anything on that score?

Molina

No.

Vasquez

As a group?

Molina

As a group?

Vasquez

Because that became a very important dichotomy, if you will, between Chicana and white feminists. That never got clarified enough. And it was used effectively in some cases, wasn't it, by Chicanos that were other than enlightened on the score, to sort of paint everyone with the same brush?

Molina

Yes. That was not us. I don't know if any of us did any writing on that or. . . . Francisca Flores may have. In her newsletters, she might have pointed those things out. But we were very proud of that difference. And we were very proud of saying so. I mean, we weren't shy at those meetings either. I know that even when someone would say something very boldly and very strongly about how we had to confront something. . . . We did not look at it necessarily that way, because again these were women who were operating under the impression that the only barrier out there was because of sexism. We had to tell them every so often, "That's crap if you're a Chicana or a black woman, you know." At the beginning, that wasn't the case. They were very adamant. Just like the Chicano movement about, "We're feminists first, and that's it." In fact, there was always a challenge about, "Are you a feminist first, or are you a Chicana first?" And I was saying, "I'm a Chicana first all the time." And that in

itself was different. That doesn't mean I was not a feminist. It didn't mean I'm not part of the Chicano movement. So it was always this identity kind of situation. But I must say that within Comisión and within this group of women, we were very proud of what we did. And we held firmly our ground with the white feminists and with the Chicanos.

Vasquez

But did you continue to consider yourself a part of the feminist movement?

Molina

Yes, very much so. Even though we disagreed with them in certain things—we disagreed with styles and things of that sort, and we disagreed with them on some of the basics—we firmly agreed that there was sexism going on everywhere. And it needed to be challenged and confronted. We needed to develop strength and groups of people [with the] leadership to continue to battle that. Sexism was indeed a major problem, and it was a hindrance for us as Latinas. So we felt very strongly. . . . We still connected ourselves with [the feminist movement]. We didn't disown [it]. We never said, "No, I'm never going to be a part of that." We participated. But we wanted to participate as Chicanas. As Chicana feminists. We would go to groups, and we would proudly introduce ourselves as Chicana feminists. Because we wanted them to know and respect us for the kinds of things that we were doing. And we didn't want to be sucked up by them and be nonexistent. We wanted them to know that we existed and that we were a very, very unique kind of a group.

Vasquez

What segments of the community did you find the most receptive and the least receptive to your coming into [community] issues as Chicana feminists and activists?

Molina

Well, the groups that were involved in social service programs welcomed us tremendously. They really did. And [it was] certainly a natural type of thing. Most of us were social workers, kind of.

Vasquez

Many of those social programs had women on their staffs, predominantly women.

Molina

That's right. So we were very welcome. We were like part of that scene. Most of our membership came from those kinds of groups. The political group and the political Latino leadership? Hah. It was as if it was a whim. They initially looked at it as, "Oh, it's a whim. Wait till they get married and have children. Se les va quitar." [They will get over it.] [Laughter] There was that group that treated it like that. "It's insignificant, because it's women." Then there were others that were threatened by it. I don't know exactly why. But I think they had this fear that. . . . Well, it manifested itself in different kinds of actions. Like some man said, "I don't want my wife to do that." Like something was going to be taken away from him if his wife was going to get educated or involved in this, and that she would be taken away from him. Again, I think there were those in the movement that probably felt-as has been said before-that we were dividing. We were dividing the movement. Consequently, it was going to curtail or somehow hold us back.

Vasquez

Were you made to feel guilty for your feminism by those folks?

Molina

No. I never . . .

Vasquez

Was there attempts to make you to feel guilty for your beliefs by those folks?

Molina

Oh, I think there were always those kinds of attempts. But, you know, they didn't land anywhere, at least for us who were very serious. I remember at one point in time something that made me so angry. And it hurt me a lot, because it was said so that I could hear it. I know it was said so I could hear it. The remarks by men about women anytime they establish any kind of leadership. Their feeling is always that, "These women don't have anything better to do." And I think when I heard this discussion between two Chicanos, it was this business, again, very sexual. I mean that, you know, we were just

looking for men and looking for sexual opportunities with some so-called "great Chicano leaders" that we had at the time. That was a very, very painful experience for me. It hurt me because I didn't want people to perceive me as that. I was hurt by that. It was a very painful situation. I was single. I mean, we were young women who certainly were interested in men, right? But to be pegged in this fashion. That somehow that was our only interest. It was a real painful thing for me.

Vasquez

Or to minimize it to that?

Molina

Yes. I made it a point after that that I was just not going to have anything to do with any of these men ever on a social level. I was going to keep my distance from them, because this was so very important. But I remember being very hurt by that. At one point in time, I thought of stepping back, because I didn't want them to look at me that way. For my own personal dignity, I just couldn't. . . . The thought of continuing on and being looked upon that way was, again, something real personal for me that I couldn't handle. But then afterwards I thought about it. I said, "That's nonsense. That's part of what men do to intimidate you." And stepped right back into it. But I did resolve myself. . . . "These guys. [Laughter] They're so egocentric [to think] that all we are [doing] is chasing them around." Anyway, so there were those instances.

Vasquez

Now how did you move from that feminist effort into your decision to run for the assembly and your disappointment in not being supported by the established Chicano leadership?

Molina

All right. Very frankly in mid-1981, I didn't work for Art Torres. I worked for Willie Brown. I had heard rumblings that Art was now considering running against Alex García. Of course, our little group got together and started discussing that. And right away, they said, "We've got to find somebody to run." I mean, here's a real opportunity and the whole thing. Of course, within my group everybody quickly pointed to me and said, "Gloria, it's like your

backyard. You should run for the seat." I said, "No, no, no." I remember being very hesitant initially.

Vasquez

Why?

Molina

[Laughter] I don't know exactly why. Because I remember saying, "Wait a minute." I had seen myself in a different role. I had pictured myself as being a campaign manager.

Vasquez

The behind-the-scenes person.

Molina

Right.

Vasquez

What you had been doing already, right?

Molina

Right. That's where I had been most comfortable and what I really enjoyed doing at the time. So for me now to be the candidate was. . . . First of all, I didn't have enough confidence in myself. Which has been a constant all the way through in everything else that I've done. "I can't do it. I can't win. I can't do those things." All of that stuff went on.

Vasquez

Where do you think that comes from? I was rereading the first three sessions that we've done, and you mentioned that a number of times. Can you identify the source of that?

Molina

I don't know. But I sure did grow up with it. I mean, I'm not sure if I'm totally rid of it, right?

Vasquez

Uh-huh.

Molina

Then I would go into these things, and I would find, "Gee, I can do this. Gee, I can handle this." But why did I feel so inadequate and insecure? I don't know.

Vasquez

You felt the same way going into the White House?

Molina

Yes. That's right. Or getting involved in the Carter-Mondale campaign. "Oh, gee, I don't know if I can do that." The same kind of thing that I set up for myself every single time. That doubt. That self-doubt. Why? I don't know. It must have been ingrained in me somewhere along the line. But, you know, it's something that I find most Chicanas say that to themselves.

Vasquez

It's a function of being a Chicana, do you think?

Molina

Well . . .

Vasquez

Is it cultural? Is it gender?

Molina

I think it's something that maybe is cultural and reflects what happened to us. And I think about it. I'm sure that my mom did not intentionally or anything like that, but probably it comes from that. I remember my mother reminding me at thirteen that I was going to get married and have kids, and I was going to be like her. I mean, "So don't get your hopes up," kind of a thing. It wasn't meant to be negative or anything, but I just remember those kinds of things.

Vasquez

Do you sense in generations subsequent to yours of young Chicanas that there's still that attitude?

Molina

Not necessarily. What I've seen in young Chicanas is very, very different. And it's great. Young Chicanas now who have no problem when they get accepted to Stanford [University]. I mean, they're not sitting there and going, "Oh, gee, can I do it? I don't know if I should. . . ." [Laughter] "Can I afford to go? How am I going to . . . ?" A whole different set of, you know, elements that are evaluated instead of "Gee."

Vasquez

Have you thought about it enough to have an opinion of what changed? What happened in a very short period of time?

Molina

It's just like these gates just burst open-of opportunity. I mean, think about it. I mean, what motivates us? Or how do we see ourselves? If we don't see women in some of these roles, women in some of these situations, then how do we see ourselves there? We don't see Chicanas in those kinds of roles and the role modeling that we talked about in Comisión years and years ago. We used to say, "Well, is it important?" Heck, it is very, very important. If all of my role models-and certainly growing up all of my models, except for Anglos, were all of my mother's friends, all of my tías-all were wives.

Vasquez

Homemakers?

Molina

They stayed home and took care of their kids. Period. I mean, in my family, we didn't know anyone who was a librarian, or a teacher, or anything else as far as the women were concerned.

Vasquez

Is this why people like Francisca Flores had such an impact on you when you met her?

Molina

Oh, I think so. Oh, Francisca and people like her, they were just unbelievably amazing. Yes, they were very, very important people. They were brand new people. It was like a whole new world that I entered when I got to meet women like them.

Vasquez

All right. Now . . . [Interruption]

Molina

Now back to this. [Laughter]

Vasquez

You were being talked into being the candidate. Tell me more about that.

Molina

Well, again, the self-doubt. Then, of course, "Well, wait a minute. Can we do it?" and dah-dah-dah. And we finally decided, "Well, let's go and check it out." I guess we decided not to go and meet with Art. Or at least I didn't meet with Art right away, because he had his own thing to do. I mean, he was going to challenge Alex García and everything else. I met with a very good friend of mine at the time, Lou Moret. He was Richard Alatorre's administrative assistant. Lou had been very, very helpful to me and had taught me a lot of the ins and outs of being a . . . He assisted me in becoming Art Torres's AA and had been really been very helpful. I had worked with him for years. So I trusted him. I had an awful lot of confidence in him and felt that he was somebody I could talk to. So I went ahead and had a meeting with him. It started out that, "I'm thinking of running for the seat. What do you think?" And it was the way he responded that was the most disappointing, and I'll never forget that. All that self-doubt? He threw it all back at me. "You can't run. You can't win. What are you talking about? You can't raise money. You can't get endorsements." I mean, all the "You can'ts" that I said to myself, he just laid it all out there for me. And I said, "But, of course, I could try. I think I can raise. . . . I think I can do it." All this doubt. It was a very, very hard meeting, but I had already settled these things for myself. And then he had turned around and just threw it all back at me and said, "You can't." So I sort of tried to make a case for myself. But I know it wasn't very forceful, because I

know it also reinforced everything that I already said to myself. So, you know, I was sort of discouraged by the meeting and walked away from the meeting confused about it. So I went back to my little group and told them that he really felt I couldn't do this, couldn't do that. And we started thinking about it to ourselves. But within hours or within days of that conversation, I had heard who they were thinking of as a candidate and . . .

Vasquez

Which was?

Molina

Which was Richard Polanco.

Vasquez

Did you know Richard Polanco?

Molina

Oh, very well. [Laughter]

Vasquez

From?

Molina

From when I used to work in Casa Maravilla as a volunteer. When I was a secretary, I used to work in the evening. In fact, he was originally one of the gang guys that used to hang around. He belonged to the Arizona [Street gang] group. So I knew him even before. Then he became more of a gang counselor and got moved up through that. So I really did know him very well, and I had worked with him. When he was [Los Angeles County Supervisor Edward D.] Ed Edelman's AA, I was Art Torres's AA. So we had a working relationship. Then I called up Lou Moret, and I said, "I just heard that Richard Polanco's going to run for this seat." So he said, "Yeah, yeah." I said, "Well, you can't support somebody like that." And, basically, he was telling me that he was. I think that was the biggest blow that I had. Because what I had seen as a good friend, whom I thought I could go to in confidence and talk to about these things, all of a sudden was telling me that, "Hey, it's already been decided, and you're not it." He was just feeding into exactly what was going on. That's when I

started finding out that they had already decided who was going to run for this seat. Richard Alatorre, everybody around that group started being very noncommittal. "Oh, yeah. Give me a call. I'll meet with you. Yeah, yeah, yeah." That kind of a thing. You would call, and they'd schedule it for, like, four months in the future. And here's a good friend I had worked with, whom I had supported. And all of a sudden, they were giving me the runaround. "What's going on?" I talked to Art, and he said that it looked like that was going to be the situation.

Vasquez

What were the problems you had with Polanco's candidacy?

Molina

I had worked with Polanco. First of all, he's not a very hard worker. I had always found that Richard Polanco was. . . . He's always been promoted by others and has had great granddaddies or grandfathers in the process. There are a lot of people who are very lucky in that regard. He's one of those people that's very lucky. But he personally is not a hard worker on issues or anything. He has never done anything on his own. He's always attached himself-in a leadership role-to other things that are going on. And I knew that about him all the time. I mean, that's just his style. I also used to find him. . . . Of course, I didn't know him as a totally honest person. I knew him as somebody who would say the right things to lots of people in order to get into their little group and so on. So I didn't know him to be as honest and have as much integrity. I had problems with him. Not that we didn't work together. Here I was, and here was Richard Polanco. So Lou Moret had shot me down, because all of these things I couldn't do. Then they put me up and said, "Polanco was it. . . ." I looked at that and said, "Hey, wait a minute. I mean, with all due respect, we might be equal in footing, but I'm not less qualified than this individual to be a candidate." And that's what I couldn't handle.

Vasquez

The only difference being that you were a woman?

Molina

Well, that's what I wanted to find out. What is this? And that's when we got the runaround and everything else. I could only conclude that. I *had* to conclude that. It was the men deciding, and only men in that group, who made that decision and who wouldn't tell you why. Anyway, we went back and forth. Finally, the more they said they were going to exclude me, the more I was persistent and insistent. That was like the silent pleito that went on for about six months. And it was an important time, because that was for me at one point. . . . I mean, I had all the self-doubt. I was ready to step back, right? I just needed people to tell me, "Gloria, you really can't win." And I wasn't stupid, you know. I wasn't going to go and just do it, because I had to run. So I would have accepted at one point in time what Lou had to say, because it's sort of how I felt about it. You know, "I really can't do these things." I didn't feel like I was a public speaker. I didn't feel like I could go up to Sacramento and really talk eye-to-eye to every member of the legislature and so on. So I had a lot of self-doubt. But when they said the candidate was Polanco, that's when I said, "Hey, wait a minute here. This is a different situation." And we had a lot of meetings during that time. A lot of game-playing went on. The so-called "Golden Palominos" went off and met and . . .

Vasquez

Who were the Golden Palominos?

Molina

Let's see. The Golden Palominos included, of course, Richard Alatorre, Lou Moret, at that time David Lizarraga. I think George Pla was involved. Congressman Roybal was at that meeting. Estebán Torres was at that meeting. Marty Martínez supposedly was at that meeting. I don't know if Polanco was there or not. I don't know. But there were a lot of the elected leadership of that time and kind of the fund-raising base of most of those guys.

Vasquez

What did Golden Palomino refer to?

Molina

Well, at that time, there was a reporter with the [*Los Angeles Herald Examiner*] by the name of Tony . . .

Vasquez

Castro.

Molina

Castro. And Tony had his own column. So he had his own opinions, as he wrote about them an awful lot. At that time, he wrote about that. He wrote about that meeting, and he wrote about it being the Golden Palominos. You know, the men getting together and doing their things. Gosh, I don't even remember the columns anymore, but that's how that phrase came about. They met, and they did that. I mean, we said that it was inappropriate, even though it was sort of behind the scenes and Tony was keeping up with what was going on. We were now challenging their right to hold a meeting of this type. To exclude us from the process and to make a decision.

Vasquez

They were all elected officials and you weren't.

Molina

That's right.

Vasquez

What was the basis for you being included? What was the argument that you would use?

Molina

Well, that's just it. I wasn't saying, "I need to be part of the decision-makers," but just, "I've decided to run. I've decided to be a candidate, and I deserve to be considered."

Vasquez

All right.

Molina

That's all I was asking for. If I was going to be dismissed as a candidate, I needed them to tell me that. That's when they started fudging an awful lot. But it got very heavy duty. I think a lot of it was that they looked at me and

said. . . . Again, like they did in 1974: "Just a whim. She'll get over it" kind of thing, right? That's exactly what I think they thought. So when I talk about that period-six months of the silent pleito-it was like on their part, you know, "Se la va olvidar." [She will forget about it.] "Don't worry about it. She'll back off." But we became very, very persistent. We did everything. We kept meeting and we kept trying to figure it out. We sat down and we took everything they said about me negatively. We wrote it down. "Can I get endorsements?" I took out my list. "This is why not." Tum-tum-tum-tum. "This is why I think I can get these endorsements." We laid it all out. And they were pretty good endorsements. Because I had worked that district. I knew those people. I knew a lot of the other people that I helped. Good endorsements. We laid it out, "Can I raise money?" And we laid out a plan where I thought I could get money. It wasn't a whole lot, but it was pretty good.

Vasquez

What kind of endorsements are you talking about?

Molina

The other local elected officials: the local mayors, local city council members, other people I had worked with who were heads of groups and organizations, again that social service group-leadership-that I felt I could get. So they weren't lightweights.

Vasquez

And in fund-raising?

Molina

In fund-raising, not only did we look at a lot of people that I had been working with that I knew or I thought would commit to me for money, but I had a whole cadre of feminist women and leaders that I had been involved with. People that I had been involved in their campaigns and helped them get elected. I thought I might be able to turn around and get money from them. So it wasn't anything to sneeze at. I mean, we were doing that. Now, we said to ourselves, one of the things was, "Chicanas never run. Men are not going to . . . I mean, they're not going to elect a Chicana." And this is a very Latino district. Very Chicano. Very macho, as they say. So we did an analysis of the

district, and we put together \$5,000. All of us kicked in some money, and we went and talked to a political consultant. We said, "We want to know. Can a woman win in this district? What kind of problems would she have?" There wasn't much you could do other than analyze a couple of seats. At that time, all you could do was analyze how [Secretary of State] March Fong Eu ran in that district. How Yvonne Burke, who had run for attorney general, had done in that district. What we found in those figures was that basically they ran as well as they did in other similar Democratic districts. So that it was not a hindrance necessarily . . .

Vasquez

To be a woman?

Molina

Yes. We wanted to destroy everything that they had said I could not do. Like I said, we always accepted the fact that we needed to work twice as hard; we really physically went out and did that. I mean, I didn't dismiss it and say, "Oh, yeah. I'm better than you, because I say I am." We were sitting there figuring it out. "Am I better? Can I do it?" And we had all of this in place. We spent a lot of time putting that together. We didn't just go back to the men and say, "I should be considered just because I'm a woman and because I decided to run." We wanted to go back and say, "I should be considered, because I can raise money. I can get the endorsements. I can go out there and campaign. And I could do all these other things." We wanted to physically show them documentation that was the case. So we didn't go in there as some kind of a blank wave. So we were, I thought, very, very credible in our approach to them. Here we were doing all this work for a bunch of guys that told us we couldn't do it.

Vasquez

Did you ever get a hearing from them?

Molina

Yes.

Vasquez

Tell me about that.

Molina

All right. What happened was we were very persistent, as I said, and we demanded. We demanded that opportunity to be considered. Basically, they figured they would wear us out. But eventually it got to a point where they had to grant us that opportunity. To make that presentation, it was all a hush-hush kind of a meeting. Very few people knew about it-that I was supposed to go. I would go and make my case. Polanco would make his case. And they would make a decision. If I was willing to abide by the decision.

Vasquez

Who gave that caveat?

Molina

Richard Alatorre had set up that situation. And I submitted to it. I said, "I just want to have an opportunity. . . . I know I don't get to select the people that go in there, but I'd like to have an opportunity to take a couple of people that I want in there." He said no. He said I could take just one.

Vasquez

Who did you take?

Molina

I took Sandy Sewell. Sandy Serrano-Sewell.

Vasquez

Who was in that meeting?

Molina

In that meeting were Richard Alatorre; Lou Moret; [Daniel] Dan Arguello, who was AA to Richard Alatorre; George Pla; David Lizzaraga; Art Torres; Richard Polanco; and myself. The others, for the most part, had fallen off. In other words, Congressman Roybal was not that opposed to my candidacy.

Vasquez

So he wasn't there.

Molina

He wasn't there saying, "No, no, no." And Marty Martínez didn't seem to care. He was busy running for Congress. Estebán didn't seem to participate, although I think he had a proxy from David Lizarraga. So I got invited. Basically the rules were made by Richard. And I sat there and basically said okay. Interesting dynamics went on in that meeting. They really wanted to screw with your mind, in a sense. I know it's not an appropriate term to use, but all the intimidating things that could be done were done before a word was ever said.

Vasquez

Like what?

Molina

Well, for example, when we got in there, it was an early morning meeting. Everybody's reading the paper, writing, starting to have a discussion about the stock market and about how the stocks were doing and, "How's your stock doing?" and "How's this thing?" And I mean, here we were, a bunch of poor Chicanas, right? [Laughter] Even if we knew about stock, we wouldn't have the money to invest in it. And here was this discussion going on, you know, as they were having their coffee and their rolls. A lot of it was to, I think, intimidate us. Of course, the question was something about stocks or investing in something. And Sandy was very good. She didn't let them intimidate her. She threw it right back at them. She goes, "No, I'm doing this with my money and this and that." She played right into it. I thought it was very good. It just stopped them, sort of. But it was, by design, intended to create that kind of intimidation. The setup of where they sat and how they sat. It was Richard's office, so he was going to sit at his chair. And then there were three chairs like this. They had taken them, and then there was a couch in the back. [Laughter] So that was the only space left for us. And you could tell. But there was a little conference table next to the chairs. So Sandy and I went and grabbed one of those chairs and pulled it up right next to the table. It's all part of a game. It's all part of the thing. We had learned about it [Laughter] as feminists, to know that's part of what goes on, this whole power-playing that goes on. And we didn't allow them to do it to us. It's interesting. Those were the silent dynamics. Nothing had even been said about it. I mean, there was no meeting yet. Richard hadn't arrived or anything. We were all kind of getting ready for it. So then the

meeting proceeded. Richard outlined the rules and said, "This is how we're going to do it." Boom-boom-boom-boom.

Vasquez

Why was he running the meeting? As the chairman of the Chicano Caucus, or what?

Molina

No. He was just kind of the head.

Vasquez

Recognized?

Molina

Not appointed by anybody or elected.

Vasquez

But recognized by the rest?

Molina

Yes. Everybody else recognized him, and we had to recognize him. He was the one who held all the resources for that particular seat. Normally it would have probably been Art Torres, but Art was busy trying to run for a senate seat. So it was pretty much Richard who was calling all of these shots, who took the leadership role right up front. So like I said, Richard was outlining the rules. So right away I had to challenge the rules because I didn't think the rules were fair. Basically, the rules said that they would listen to both of us as candidates. Then they would make a decision and they would let us know. One of the rules was that both of us would adhere to their decision. In other words, if they decided Gloria Molina, Polanco would not run. If they decided Polanco, then Gloria Molina would not run. So they asked Polanco, first of all. They didn't ask me first. They asked him if he agreed, and he said no. I felt like one of the guys was going to go up and say, "Pendejo" [fool]. He didn't. He said no. He said, "I think I should run." One of the guys said, "This is just the rule part. We are just trying to get this down. All we want to do is. . . . Will you submit to it?" So he finally said yes. Kind of a conditional yes. Then they asked me, and I said, "Yes, I will agree that if you decide to run that I should not be the

candidate. I will adhere to it, and I will not run for that seat. I just want to know the reason why." Richard said, "No, no, no. There's no reason. No reason." I said, "No, no. I have to know the reason why. I have to know why I would not be selected by this group to be the candidate. So I'm willing to adhere to it. I just want to know the reason why." Then *that* was the pleito. "We don't have to tell you." I said, "But, oh, you do have to tell me. Because I think the reason why is because I am a woman. And if that's the reason why, I want you to tell me that." "It's not the reason." "Then I'm just asking you. If you decide against me, I just want to know why. Can I not raise the money? Can I not get the endorsements? Why won't you select me as a candidate? I need to know." So that's all I asked for. The entire meeting, which lasted about an hour, was over the discussion of that. We tried to get off of that and go back into like a meeting: "Okay, make your presentation" type of thing. Very frankly, Polanco didn't do very well. I think it was, again, one of those situations where he felt like, "I have to prove nothing to nobody. These are my friends. They're going to vote for me, right?" And I came in loaded for bear. "What do you want to know? Money?" [Laughter] "Votes? What do you want to know?" So we were kind of all prepared to make a presentation. Which they didn't appreciate, by the way.

Vasquez

Why do you say that?

Molina

I don't know. It was like we had it, but he didn't have it. The design was to select Polanco. I mean, we knew that going in, but we weren't going to give them any room. So we said, "Do you want me to start with endorsements? Do you want me to start about the demographics of the district? Do you want me to start with money? What do you want me to do?" They really didn't like that at all, because they were hoping that I was going to sit there and say, "Oh, gee, you should select me, because I, gee, helped you, Richard. Gee, I helped you." That kind of thing. And we didn't. We were very prepared to make a very solid case as to why I should run. We weren't sure that we had all that, but we believed ourselves that we were going to make our case. One of the things that was funny about it is. . . . Because one of the things Richard said is money. "So how much money can you raise?" We put a figure out. I can't

remember. Fifty thousand?"You need more than that."I said, "Well, if we need more than that, we'll raise more than that."One of the others-I can't remember who it was-Lou Moret or one of them said, "How much money do you have?"And I said, "How much money do you guys have?"And so Sandy said, "We've got \$22,000."And he said, "You don't have \$22,000." "Sure we've got \$22,000. How much do you guys have?" And she said, "I'll bring my checkbook if you bring yours." It was that whole pleito over nothing. And it was just a matter of understanding what we were in there for. Very clearly, I think after, what, forty-five minutes, they decided they weren't getting anywhere with us. I mean, they didn't intimidate us initially. They had not gotten us to submit to their rules 100 percent. Everything that they thought they were going to do in that room didn't occur. So then I stepped out of the meeting. We felt really good about ourselves when we went to the airport. And we felt really good because it was an intimidating situation.

Vasquez

The meeting was up in Sacramento?

Molina

It was up in Sacramento. It was extremely intimidating. I mean, the whole thing. I mean, here you are, this candidate, and you're going in there sort of begging in a sense.

1.8. TAPE NUMBER: IV, Side Two (July 12, 1990)

Molina

So it was a very, very intimidating kind of a situation. At one point in time I said to myself, "I'm glad I didn't cry." I mean, that's how I felt. That at least I was able to get through that meeting.

Vasquez

Cry from anger?

Molina

From anger and from frustration and from being painfully hurt by these guys. And I would say as a woman. I didn't. All we did was we kept up with them. No matter how fast they ran, we were right there with them, neck-and-neck. No

matter what they said, we were prepared. No matter how and whatever direction they tried to trick us, we were ready. And it was because we had prepared for that meeting. We had really said, "What are they going to do? What are they going to say to us? What are they going to want? How are they going to . . . ?" You know, we figured out what was going to happen, and we had figured out that we were not going to come out of there as victors.

Vasquez

At least without an endorsement?

Molina

Yes. I mean, if I would have gone in there very naively and thought, "Gee, let me make my case, then make this presentation. . . ." They were going to say, "Let's make this. . . ." We knew that going in, the intent of that meeting was to get me out of the race. That was the intention. And they weren't successful in that regard. I had basically counted on the fact that they would not be willing to make a decision. They would make the decision, but the fact that they wouldn't tell me the reason, I was not going to abide by it. And I challenged them. I said, "I think you're going to tell me it's because I'm a woman. And I want you guys to say that."

Vasquez

This was already 1982. Why would being a woman be seen as a drawback by them?

Molina

Oh, for a Chicana, it was still. . . . We were still way back there. We were still way back there. I mean, March Fong Eu may have won for her seat. There were women in the legislature, but there were no Chicanas. There were practically no Chicanas anywhere. I mean, Polly Baca [Barragan] may have been elected at that time in Colorado. There weren't many of us out there. There really weren't.

Vasquez

Do you think it was a pragmatic concern by these fellows that they would not be successful in running you? Or that there was something inherently weak, wrong, or unacceptable about a woman in politics?

Molina

Well, I think what it really comes down to. . . . And there are differences between men and women in office that have been proven time and time again. First of all, the so-called old boys network. It really is a very, very functional part of politics.

Vasquez

What is it based on?

Molina

It's based on how they get along and what they do for each other.

Vasquez

On trust?

Molina

I don't know if it's similar values. I don't know what it is, but automatically, a man is part of it.

Vasquez

By virtue of being a man?

Molina

Yeah.

Vasquez

Any man?

Molina

Almost.

Vasquez

Any man can become part of the old boy network?

Molina

Almost. What they want is someone who is going to be. . . . That they're going to be comfortable with. To invite in. To be part of that process. I mean, a woman's different.

Vasquez

I'm trying to get at what it is that's different. Early in the history of the California legislature, there were some theories. They made the argument: there were no bathrooms for women if they came up there. That was an argument. Where were they going to go to the bathroom if they are elected?

Molina

I mean, let's face it. Sexism was going on. It was fully operational amongst these guys for all different kinds of reasons. Some of them were worried their wives were going to get taken away from them. Here was this woman all of a sudden. "What are we going to do when we get together and go drink? Have this woman with us? What about decisions? What kind of decisions? Is she going to be able to go along?" All of these things, I think, were doubts that they had, because they had never worked with a woman at the same level, or had those kinds of opportunities. So it was a difficult thing for some of them to accept. I think a lot of it is because of the sexism that continues to exist, you know. All of them were strong on. . . . They were very proud of the fact that they took feminist positions. They were pro-choice.

Vasquez

Right. Exactly.

Molina

That they supported Comisión Femenil and all of that.

Vasquez

And welfare mothers.

Molina

Yes, the whole thing. But I think down deep inside, when it came to the issue of the relationship with one another, one, and the power. . . . I mean, "A woman? We're going to give her power?" I mean, there were very few of these seats available. Very few of them. So to be sharing them with women

was. . . . You know, I'm not so sure they necessarily wanted to do that. It was a matter of power and diluting that. So they were very intimidated by it all. And they have been. There's no reason why they should be, but they are. Anyway, we ran. It was a tough, tough campaign.

Vasquez

Wait. You're getting ahead a little bit.

Molina

Am I?

Vasquez

Yes.

Molina

[Laughter]

Vasquez

You got back from the meeting, what was the discussion?

Molina

What do you mean what was the discussion?

Vasquez

What was the discussion? Were you going to run anyway? Had you already decided you were going to run anyway no matter what happened in that meeting?

Molina

No. No.

Vasquez

All right.

Molina

No, no. We went into that meeting. We knew that they were not going to endorse us, okay?

Vasquez

But there was a hope they might?

Molina

There was a hope that there would be something there that they would listen to. In here we had made a good case. There might be a chance that somebody might let us make a good case, but we didn't believe. . . . It was more so that maybe if they saw how effectively we handled that meeting, they might be willing to support us. But that wasn't the case at all. It wasn't the case at all.

Vasquez

So how, when, and with whom did you decide that you should run anyway?

Molina

Well, the thing is . . .

Vasquez

It couldn't have been an easy decision.

Molina

No. It was a very tough decision. We still weren't sure after that meeting. Richard said he'd get back to us. That we were supposed to not say anything about that meeting. It was supposed to be kept secret.

Vasquez

Did you abide by that?

Molina

Yes, at the time. Absolutely.

Vasquez

Did *you* get back to *him*?

Molina

Well, the thing is, he didn't get back to us right away. So we had to call him. And there was no decision that was made at the meeting. And I said, "What do

you mean there was no decision that was made?" "No, we didn't make any decision." And I said, "What does that mean?" "Well, what can I tell you? We didn't make a decision." It was another part of their game. You know, what should I do? Sit around and wait till they made a decision. Come on. So that's when we felt there were a lot of games going on. That's when we decided, "Let's go. Let's go for it. Let's try to put it all together. Let's go for the endorsements. Let's try it all." And that's when we went. We started putting it all together.

Vasquez

What was the immediate reaction from this group of men when you did announce that you were running anyway?

Molina

That I was disrespectful.

Vasquez

Explain that.

Molina

Well, you know, they said that they were going to make a decision, and I wasn't sitting around waiting for their decision.

Vasquez

So it was nondeferential?

Molina

Yes. Exactly. So they were really resentful of that. I felt, "I've got to move on. I've got to do these things." Then it continued with the game. I said, "Richard, one on one, I want to talk to you. I want your endorsement." "Yeah, yeah, yeah. Call my secretary, and get a meeting." And even with Art Torres, it was hard. It was real hard.

Vasquez

Art Torres wasn't in that initial meeting?

Molina

He was in the initial meeting, but he wasn't in the . . .

Vasquez

The showdown meeting. We'll call it the showdown meeting.

Molina

Actually, he was. He walked in at the end.

Vasquez

All right.

Molina

He walked in at the end. And it was interesting, because he didn't like the dynamics either.

Vasquez

How do you know?

Molina

Because he said something about it in one part of the meeting; when we talked about, "I need to know why," he reinforced it. He said, "She's right. You've got to tell her. You've got to tell her." That kind of thing. So he was more supportive in that meeting. I mean, he didn't sit there and make a case for me. But then again, I didn't expect him to. He needed these folks to help him run against Alex García.

Vasquez

Right.

Molina

So he wasn't going to . . .

Vasquez

Which was not an easy race.

Molina

So he wasn't willing to go in and say, "Hey, come on, Richard" and all the others. He didn't do that. But at least he was creating a much fairer kind of situation by interjecting every so often.

Vasquez

Now he ultimately did come around to your side. How did that happen? And why did he?

Molina

We worked him hard. [Laughter] We lobbied him. We did the whole thing. We had to make a presentation. "I really need your endorsement. It will be very important to me." We told him how I had a chance of winning and about all the people that were going to endorse me and support me. We had to make a real case for Art.

Vasquez

Was this before or after the group had said, "You are not [it] . . ."

Molina

Oh, after.

Vasquez

Okay.

Molina

This is after. Because Art didn't give me his endorsement right away. We worked it. The other thing is I had to make a commitment that, "I don't plan on taking anything away from you." In other words, "You've got to raise money to run, too, and so do I. All I want is your endorsement. I'm not going to ask you for money. I do need those things, but I know you've got a race to do."

Vasquez

Was it a quid pro quo? What did you give him?

Molina

Well . . .

Vasquez

What were you going to give him in return for his endorsement?

Molina

You know, I'm trying to think of when I sat there and we negotiated. . . . No, I was automatically endorsing him whether he was going to endorse me or not. And our group of women were automatically supporting him.

Vasquez

Why was he different than the others?

Molina

What others?

Vasquez

Why was he perceived as different from the others in that meeting by the feminists and the group around you?

Molina

Not only because he had hired me and I worked for him and I had brought him closer to a lot of those feminists, but he was married to Yolanda Nava, who was also part of Comisión Femenil and also a very active feminist in her own right. So there was a lot of that kind of a connection that was . . .

Vasquez

But Richard had also opened some doors for you?

Molina

Yes, initially. Richard was the one who, first of all, got us up in Sacramento the first time. And he, you know, was very helpful. Absolutely. But we had worked with both of them very much.

Vasquez

I'm trying to get at what the difference had become by then between the two. Was it that Art seemed more supportive or more open to things?

Molina

Art was more supportive.

Vasquez

And more open to women in politics?

Molina

Art was not necessarily as caught up in the intimidation of having a woman around.

Vasquez

Was he less of a member of this "in" group?

Molina

He was less of a member. I mean, you know, he wasn't. . . . I mean, he didn't do the "drinking buddies" kind of routine that they all used to do.

Vasquez

Do you feel that endorsing you cost him anything?

Molina

I think, yes, it did. He got criticized from that group again and probably threatened. I don't know what they did. Somebody probably said, "Hey, I'm not going to give you money," or "I'm not going to" whatever. That may have occurred. I'm sure he paid the price for it. But I also know there were a lot of women who supported me-who would walk for me on a Saturday-and the following weekend, "I've got to go walk for Art" kind of thing. So, hopefully, it helped him as much.

Vasquez

Was this the beginning of a political alliance?

Molina

Oh, we had a political alliance.

Vasquez

Already?

Molina

Yes. We had worked together. So we did have a political alliance, and I was very grateful. And Art, believe me, didn't help me at all.

Vasquez

In the endorsement?

Molina

Right. He couldn't. I mean, he had a big job to do, and it was really, really rough. Sometimes we got into little battles about style and things of that sort, because I think he was taking a beating from those guys. Every so often, Art was hard on me.

Vasquez

How so?

Molina

Oh, critical of what I said. How I moved around. Things like that. I think a lot of it was because those guys were probably constantly critical of him. Because I was such a pain to their other candidate. Because they were all supporting him. But they were also now having to raise money, "Because she's raising money and campaigning" and doing all those things. They thought I was going to be a pushover.

Vasquez

Okay. Tell me about the race against Polanco. The results were pretty close.

Molina

Yes.

Vasquez

Tell me about that.

Molina

Well, I'll tell you. It's interesting. Once you got into a campaign. . . . And I had great people around me in this campaign, really great people. I must tell you

that I can't remember as much about Polanco as a candidate as I remember about everything that I did. Because I don't know exactly what they were doing. But we were working our fannies off.

Vasquez

So it was a pro-Gloria rather than an anti-Polanco campaign, is that it?

Molina

Yes.

Vasquez

Tell me about the Fifty-sixth Assembly District as you remember it.

Molina

Well, it's the most Latino district in this state and is, unfortunately, the lowest registered as far as voters are concerned in the entire Southwest. It's very low. It was made up-at that time-of about 80 percent Latino.

Vasquez

Mostly Mexican?

Molina

Mostly Mexicanos.

Vasquez

It was also one of the poorest, wasn't it?

Molina

Yes, very poor neighborhoods. It's the Eastside and the Southeast portion of L.A. It included all of unincorporated East L.A. and Boyle Heights and the downtown portion. The inner city portion of Los Angeles. Then it had communities like Maywood, Bell Gardens, city of Commerce, Vernon. They were all kind of poor. A lot of their voters are white, but they're poor communities in L.A. But, again, it was mostly a Chicano district. And it's all compact. It's very compact. A lot of the assembly districts are scattered. Again, we had learned to become good planners and very effective at developing a plan and implementing strategy. I hired people to help me with all of it.

Vasquez

Who were some of the people that worked for you in the campaign?

Molina

Well, I hired a political consultant by the name of [Patricia] Pat Bond, who is my consultant now. And Fred Register. Those were the two consultants, political consultants, that we hired. Sandy Sewell was the key fund-raiser. She was doing a lot of the activities around of the fund-raising. Pat and Fred were wonderful in devising a plan that was going to work: what I needed to do and how I needed to do it. I was sure that I wanted to walk the whole district. Which we did. I was a good walker. I had been doing that in other campaigns, knocking on doors and talking to voters. That was the best thing in the world. Some of them disagreed with me; some slammed their doors on me. But for the most part, it was just a wonderful, very embracing kind of situation where people were glad that I came to their door: glad to see a woman making a decision to run, who wanted to talk about issues. They were impressed that I could articulate them, and all of those kinds of things. It made you feel really good to go out there. Even though every so often, one would slam their door, and that would make you angry, there was always somebody next door. I was particularly impressed with the older women, because I felt those are the ones that aren't going to support me. You know, there were a lot of them. They were very good voters, those old women! And I was nervous about them, because I had been led to believe that-for the most part-they were very traditional, and they were going to see me just out of my . . .

Vasquez

Element?

Molina

Uh-huh. And they were . . .

Vasquez

But it was different?

Molina

Huh?

Vasquez

It was different?

Molina

It was different. That was one of the best parts about that campaign that I remember: going and knocking on doors. A lot of senior citizens, for example, in Boyle Heights and unincorporated East L.A. Older women who said, "God, that's. . . . Qué bueno que estás corriendo por esto puesto." [It's good you're running for this post]. I mean, just really were wonderful about it.

Vasquez

I think they're going to pull you out in a couple of minutes. Why don't we stop here?

Molina

But I think that was important. To me that was the part I remember a lot.

1.9. TAPE NUMBER: V, Side One (July 19, 1990)

Vasquez

We were having a fascinating discussion on some of the things that you learned in your first campaign for the assembly. One of the things you were elaborating on was the issues that you expected middle-aged or older Latinas to be conservative on, but they were not.

Molina

That's right. They were not.

Vasquez

And they were sometimes more enlightened than any of your advisers indicated. Do you want to tell me more about that?

Molina

Well, what was interesting was that the profile that I had gotten about the older Mexicana, the older Latina voter, was that she was going to be too conservative. That more than likely, she was not going to support someone

like me, a woman running [for office]. That I was going to be too progressive on a lot of issues. My position on [reproductive] choice and so on. But, instead, in walking door-to-door, I found a tremendous amount of reception from them, which was really interesting. First of all, they were very interested in seeing another woman run. That gave them a personal kind of joy. They always said that to me, you know. And that was so nice [to hear] at the door. "Gee, you're really going to run for office?" And, "That's wonderful. It's about time." All those kinds of things. "I know that you could do a good job. We women. . . ." So all that broke down. Then as far as issues were concerned, I certainly didn't raise the pro-choice issue. But that was not their big concern.

Vasquez

What was?

Molina

Their big concerns were just keeping the neighborhood together. You know, a good, clean neighborhood. "That I want my little house. . . . I hate the graffiti. I hate the gangs. I hate the crime." All the regular issues that people really care about. "I hope you'll do something about it." They had a tremendous-as a group-sort of distrust of some politicians and yet an unbelievable admiration. . . . They talked about how they admired the Roybals and the congressman. You know, "He really represents us. He takes good care of us. We need people like that." But for the most part after that, they were not so sure about other politicians. And I don't mean Mexicanos, but just other politicians.

Vasquez

How did they feel about the new generation of politician: Art Torres, Alatorre, and [Assemblyman Peter R.] Chacón?

Molina

Well, most of the people that I was working with knew I was running for Art's seat, and they liked Art. So they would ask if I had his support. Which I did. And the congressman's support. That was really helpful. They really admired them, but they sort of had a distrust for politics or politicians. But they were very loyal to voting. Which is something we knew about.

Vasquez

Did they see a new generation of politicians coming up?

Molina

I don't know. I didn't spend a whole lot of time in talking about it. But I'll tell you this: I remember one incident where an older woman. . . . When I started talking, she said, "I want you to wait here just a minute." So she went obviously into the backyard, and she brought out her niece or something. She said, "M'hija, I want you to meet her. She's running for office. She's going to get elected." And she already had me governor.

Vasquez

[Laughter]

Molina

And she talked about how her niece-or her goddaughter, granddaughter, I don't know what she was-was going to have a chance to be like me. That made it exciting for her. And she talked about how, "When I was a young woman, we didn't have these opportunities. My daughter graduated from college, and now her daughter"-I guess, it must have been her grandchild-"is going to have a chance. And I want her to be like you." That kind of thing. So there seemed to be an excitement about those potential opportunities. Certainly, through these discussions they talked about the things that they didn't get a chance to do themselves. One said, "We never had a chance to run for office." But the other [interesting] thing about [this was their] even having an opinion. I don't know. Maybe I solicited their opinion more. I don't know. Or there was a relationship where there was a dialogue going on. So I think they felt good about it. But I ended up with tremendous support from the older Latina who accepted it very, very well. That a woman running is a good thing, and all that kind of stuff.

Vasquez

Where did you get resistance?

Molina

I got resistance from younger men. The twenty-five to thirty-five-year-old. Not the very young men, but the twenty-five to thirty-five-year-old who wouldn't give me the time to talk to them.

Vasquez

That's interesting. You would expect that generation would be the most attuned to rising female participation in politics as well as in everything else.

Molina

Now the Latina, I think if there's any apathy, the apathy is strongest [regarding] politics. At least in the Eastside. I don't know if it was just the woman but they didn't want anything to do with politicians. "I'm not interested. . . ." It was just like there was no room to discuss anything.

Vasquez

Was there a difference between the native-born and the immigrant male twenty-five to thirty?

Molina

Well, you know, very frankly I don't know which one was the immigrant born. Some of them you could sort of tell. But I don't remember that. I just remember that group seemed to be uninterested. And it used to make me angry. I remember sometimes I'd go out like on a Saturday, and they'd be washing their car. Or they'd be out in the front cleaning up. These were the people I saw. I would go to one, two, three, four. And all of them didn't want to talk to me. That would make me angry, [so] that number five got zapped by me. [Laughter] "This is important, and you should pay attention. And that's why we don't have what [we need]. . . ." I'd start to lecture the poor guy washing his car, right? But it seemed like those were the ones who were sort of uninterested. Some of them might have been uninterested because [it] was a *woman* that was campaigning. But they just seemed to be uninterested and didn't find any real connection with politicians, or politics, or government. And they weren't the sure voter. They weren't the "A" voter. That is, the senior citizen that remembers election day and goes and votes. They were the "sometimes" voter. They had registered somewhere along the line, and they voted. But, you know, they weren't interested. And that bothered me. I did [get] resistance from men who were interested and who were good voters. I wouldn't say [any particular] age groups, but those who were interested. And I was challenged fairly directly by some of them.

Vasquez

In what way?

Molina

Well, first of all, by the fact that I was running. One guy that I talked to was really good. He doesn't realize how good he was, because he was very blunt and very candid: "Why should I vote for you? You'll go up there. And, yes, you might be a good representative, but nobody's going to pay attention to you. I mean, everybody's going to ignore you. You know, women in politics? They don't pay attention to women in politics. So why should I select you . . . ?"

Vasquez

And waste his vote?

Molina

Right. "To go and represent me, just to be ignored?" I thought it was fascinating what he was talking about. And, of course, I used the whole thing about, "Then are you going to say the same thing about Mexicans?" I turned that whole thing around. Then you should say that, "Mexicans shouldn't be placed anywhere, because people are going to ignore them. So we continue racism and. . . ." We had a good, long debate. But it was interesting. Well, he told me there were other people who thought that, who felt, "She might be okay. And, yes, she knows the issues." But that feeling that we ourselves put on ourselves. "You know, they're not going to pay attention to them, because he's a Mexicano. They're not going to pay attention to her, because she's a woman." He said it to me even though I think there were others who felt it very strongly. He was one of these people, but I fought very hard to get his vote. And I said, "I want you to watch me during this campaign. You're going to find that I'm a fighter for the people, and I'm a fighter for this community." Dah-dah-dah. I said, "When I get elected, I want you to watch me, because I will earn your respect. And you will see that people. . . . You're right. They will try and ignore us. But I'm going to change that." And it was interesting, because it was such a challenge from this man. Many times, people who would get into dialogue with me gave me an idea of how a whole segment of people felt. One other man who basically was very, very sexist. . . . His thing was that, "I want to vote for the right person. No, it doesn't matter whether you're a

male or a female. But the other candidate supports this-this-this-and-this." He obviously knew the other candidate. I said, "But I support all of those issues. I mean, I don't understand. If that's what is important to you." So then he tried to find a reason that he could get to not support me. He worked really hard at trying to figure out what that was. It finally came down to, "Well, do you support homosexuals teaching in schools?" And I think there had been like a bond measure, an initiative that had gone through somewhere a couple of years before that. So I talked about that. I said, "I really feel that everyone is free to teach in the schools. Their sexual orientation has nothing to do with that." And that's what he needed. That's all he wanted. He had worked hard at trying to find out what it was that he could [use to] say, "I'm not going to support you." And that's what he did.

Vasquez

By process of elimination?

Molina

Uh-huh. [Affirmative] It was just like an inbred sexism. He couldn't possibly support a woman, and he had to find a reason why. I know that my opposition was supporting the same position that I had, as far as homosexuals teaching. But he needed to have something. And he didn't feel good about himself until he had an issue that he could pin to it. And it's interesting, because I see him around a lot. Now, he's a great supporter of mine.

Vasquez

Tell me, did this notion-or this challenge to you-that you would be ignored have anything to do with the subsequent style you adopted?

Molina

Well, the thing is that when he said that to me, I mean, it rang a bell. Because it was true. I knew it was true. I mean, it wasn't anything that was so foreign to me. Hey, that was going to be, *if* I got elected. It was going to be a huge challenge to go up there and build my credibility. In fact, I knew once I got elected, that was going to be a reality. I wasn't spending a lot of time dealing with that. The first thing was to get elected. But that had been true of anything else that I had done. So I didn't expect that to be any different. In

fact, I expected it to be much, much tougher. But what this man said was so very true. And, you know, "Why do that? Waste my vote."

Vasquez

What else did you learn about the electorate in that first campaign?

Molina

Well, the other thing, and the disappointing thing about it, was that there are very few people that do want to get into that dialogue. I mean, the people that I talked about-this small group of people. Most people are not that interested in really wanting to know the difference between candidates and sometimes will just wait around for the slick mail and all of that kind of stuff. Which taught me a lot about campaigning. There's a technical aspect of all this, but it's what the voters want to see. I was one of those that [said], "Well, I stand firmly on these issues." If I tell them, "These are the issues that I represent," these should be good enough. But if you would take a picture with a policeman, that's important. My campaign consultant had a heck of a time. I mean, how does someone who is four foot eleven, a woman, how does she look tough on crime? [Laughter] How do you relate that to the voters, you know?

Vasquez

How did you do that? [Laughter] How did you look tough?

Molina

Well, that's just it. It's, "How did she do it"? And she had to find those pictures where I was next to policemen and those kinds of things, and getting those kinds of endorsements and that kind of support. But it was a tough one for her to do. But a lot of it, the pictures was the staging, [that's] how she did it. What I used to say was, "I can't believe that this is really what [works]." But it is. It is what works. It's those kinds of things.

Vasquez

Image over substance?

Molina

Image over substance, yes. And that is unfortunate. We saw it time and time again, but they kept presenting me with all these things. Like one of the things they wanted to do was, "Can you get Jimmy Carter to write a letter for you?" You know, this community loved Jimmy Carter. "You worked for Jimmy Carter, and that will do it." And I said, "Well, you know, Jimmy really didn't know me. I was in the Executive Office Building. I was one of 1,800 people in that place." So we wrote, and he did. He wrote a letter. It wasn't a letter of endorsement, it was a letter for me, and they used it. And people thought it was, "Jimmy has said, 'Vote for Gloria Molina.'" you know. I hated doing those kinds of things, but it is what makes these campaigns function and work. I wish it was those open debates that we could go and call a community meeting and just hash out the issues and answer questions from constituents. But it's all this packaging that goes on and how you present yourself as a candidate: how you look, who you're next to, what issues you focus on, what colors you use. Everything. It's all part of the very technical aspect of a campaign, which I learned an awful lot about.

Vasquez

In that first campaign?

Molina

Yes, that first time around. Because I had always looked at it as being. . . . I still am more issue oriented. And it continues. The issues become kind of insignificant. I mean, if you come out for the death penalty, come out tough on crime, get a couple of police endorsements, you've got it. And hopefully, you get a campaign that can appropriately package you. It's all this slickness, and that's troublesome to me. And it continues. It's getting slicker. Since 1982, it's much slicker than it was then. I was resisting it, but it was the reality of what I needed to do.

Vasquez

You mentioned in one interview that you liked working with Pat Bond because both of you were persons who could get into detail. Tell me about that relationship and perhaps in the context of what we're talking about now.

Molina

All right. Pat Bond is a consultant that a friend of mine had taken me over to meet. They said she was very good. So she had done a lot of smaller campaigns in Pasadena, had elected the first black woman [Loretta Glickman]- a member of the council there-and had been involved in various sort of progressive liberal candidates. She wasn't someone who got involved in a lot of campaigns, but just a selected few. And at that time, she was working with Fred Register. Those were the two people who were involved in the campaign. They're the ones who assisted me and did a lot of that technical work. Pat was the one that I worked with more closely. What was interesting was that Pat had all the same values that I did-about politics, the integrity of politics, the integrity of campaigning, about being honest to voters-but she knew how to put that all together within the framework of a so-called slick campaign, in a sense.

Vasquez

She brought you the best of both worlds?

Molina

That's right. Which is an absolute wonderful thing to have in a consultant. Because there are so many consultants who will outline a strategy. "This is what you need to win. Here's what you need to do. Here's what you need to say. Here's how you need to say it." Tah-dah-dah-dah-dah. That's not what she did. What she did was she really tried to figure out, "Okay, what are you about? What do you care about? Why are you running? Why is it that you want to go up there? And what are all these things?" She spent a lot of time pulling it and pulling it and pulling it. Then we talked about how to present things. And I really liked that style. I think a lot of values were in sync. That's why we worked so well together. But she felt that her shortcoming was that she would not be able to pull the whole campaign out. I mean, it involved a lot of mail and a lot of work. And so she felt that I should hire someone else to do some of the mail that she wasn't capable [of doing].

Vasquez

That's Fred Register?

Molina

No, no. That was another group. We hired another group of consultants.

Vasquez

Who was this?

Molina

Gosh, their names escape me at the moment. It was Leslie Winner and Rick Taylor. They were consultants, and they basically put together my mail package. Now, they were kind of different. Of course, they were different than Pat. They looked at the campaign, they looked at the issues, and then they did the mail. They said, "This is what you need. You need a crime piece that says this. You need this; you need that. Here's what we want you to say. Here's how we want you to say it. Here's the picture that we need." That kind of stuff. So I was supposed to fit in somewhere in this mail. And there was a difference. A tremendous difference.

Vasquez

Who was your campaign manager?

Molina

At that time, we had gotten Geneva Vega. Remember, it was [taken] from Enrique Valenzuela. We went to Geneva Vega. And Geneva Vega was doing the day-to-day kind of ground operation.

Vasquez

Did she try to coordinate all the consultants? Who did that?

Molina

No. Basically I did that.

Vasquez

That's what I want to know.

Molina

Yes, I did a lot of that and worked very closely with Pat on all those details.

Vasquez

Usually, they say it is anathema to do that.

Molina

It is. It's a crazy thing to do. It's about the worst thing you can do. But at the same time, I'm the kind of person that has to [be] in control [of] some of these things. And I was very intimidated about how they were going to present me. I wanted to be in charge of that. [Laughter] And I wanted to have. . . . I didn't want anything to go out without my approving it. I had been involved in campaigns where I had seen stuff that went out, and later on the candidate said, "Oh, I had nothing to do with that." I was involved in *all* of it. Again, I wanted to sit down and have that outlined for me.

Vasquez

At any point of the campaign did you have to disclaim anything?

Molina

Not from the standpoint of what we mailed. I mean, there are things that I was criticized for mailing.

Vasquez

An example?

Molina

My opponent, Polanco, did a hit piece on me. Well, he did two of them that I didn't think he was going to do. The idea was, first, we're going to do all of these positive things. All the positive issues. I worked very hard. Then they started to play a little rough with their mailings. Well, the most disappointing one was the César Chávez letter. He got César Chávez to write a letter to the district saying, "Polanco is my person, and Gloria is antiunion, antifarmworker." That just broke my heart. I mean, here I had been in all these marches. I had gone over to La Paz [California]. At one point, I was going to go and commit my life for five dollars a week and the whole thing. I mean, here I was, one of the so-called followers that had always been involved with César Chávez, whom we idolized. Then all of a sudden, the man writes that letter. He didn't even know me. He had met me a couple of times, obviously. But he really didn't know me. And he writes this awful letter about me. I was really personally upset. Pat and others told me, "He doesn't even know this has

happened, okay? I guess he's got Polanco's endorsement [request] so they just wrote this letter. I'm sure that if you called César right now, he doesn't even know this letter came out." But it was really a very painful letter for me to receive, because I had been part of that activist group out there who was boycotting regularly. While I worked for Richard and Art, I worked so hard to make sure. . . . One time they had a problem with the farmworkers. Building that unity was really important. And to have César Chávez write a letter and say, "Gloria Molina doesn't support farmworkers and is antiunion," it just ripped the heart right out of me. But that was a hit piece, okay? An unfair hit piece. Untrue. The whole thing. Then later on, they did the thing about. . . . I had gone out to speak to a group. I went to speak to a very Anglo audience. This one woman stood up and said, "Well, the problem with East L.A. is all those gangs and all those problems." Tah-dah-dah-dah-dah. She was just dropping it. And I said, "Well, wait a minute. The Eastside of L.A. has lots and lots of problems. There are gangs, there's no doubt. But these are kids that get together, and granted some of them carry out violent actions and so on, but at the same time, there's nothing there for them. The Boy Scouts aren't necessarily there for them. They don't join little troops and things." So they wrote a piece that said, "Molina says that the gangs in East L.A. are like the Boy Scouts," okay? Which was totally wrong. Totally wrong. It made me so angry that they took it out of context and sent it out. Then the other thing they did that went with that same piece was there was a picture of Polanco. Polanco and I are about the darkest Mexicans you want to meet. We're pretty dark, right? So here was a picture of Polanco and the good crime statements that he made. Tum-tum-tum-tum. With this angelic-looking face, that's very white. Then on the other side are my remarks about, "Hey, gang members are just like Boy Scouts. So why worry about them" kind of thing. Whatever my statements [were]. . . . And my face. . . . All you see is my teeth and the whites of my eyes. [Laughter]

Vasquez

Do you think that was done purposely?

Molina

And it was sent to the white communities.

Vasquez

Oh.

Molina

It was sent to Bell Gardens, it was sent to whites in Maywood, it was sent to Anglo voters. Again, it was one of those, "This is not true." Well, they said it. So anyway, the people who were analyzing all the mail lists and what needed to be done put together a couple of hit pieces. And they were tough. They were mean. They were hard-hitting stuff that they had found out.

Vasquez

For example?

Molina

Huh?

Vasquez

Give me an example.

Molina

I'll give you an example of it. It's really awful stuff. Polanco was not paying child support. I guess his wife had called the campaign. While I didn't know about it, his wife started a dialogue with one of the campaign staffers and then later on with the consultants. And it was pretty bad. She wanted it exposed. So when they came to me and said, "This is the situation. He owes all this money." "Gee," I said, "I know the little kid." I guess he had remarried. So the whole issue was on child support. So they started building this piece. It was a really awful hit piece, but it was the truth. And we sent it out eventually. We sent it out after they did a couple of things to us. We had one of those awful meetings-every campaign has them-where you sit there and you make the tough decisions.

Vasquez

Which decisions are these?

Molina

Well, like the mailing of these pieces and how you're going to respond on some of these things that they're hitting you with. My feeling on the César

Chávez letter was, "Hey, I'll go get César Chávez." You can't do that, right? I mean, you have to figure out how you're going to handle it. So anyway, we had one of these meetings where they presented these hit pieces. I thought they were awful, and I didn't think it was anything I wanted to send out. They told me that the way they were evaluating the race, we were neck-and-neck. I said, "No. My reception is wonderful out there. I talked to these people. I know they're going to vote for me." And tah-dah-dah-dah-dah. And they said, "That's not the way we're reading it. Here's the situation." They had done some polling.

Vasquez

Who did your polling?

Molina

They did.

Vasquez

The same persons?

Molina

Same. . . . And it was just some informal polling that they had done to see where we were. We were neck-and-neck, and I knew he wasn't working as hard. He wasn't walking it like I was walking it. I knew he wasn't doing those things.

Vasquez

Did you find that strange? Because some of the people that supported him are known for hard campaign work.

Molina

Well, I don't know why they weren't walking. It was shocking me, absolutely, that we would go into areas that had not been walked. The way we set up our plan, we were going to walk the whole district. I was going to walk all the high voter turnout areas. So I spent all morning long making phone calls for money, and then all afternoon-till about 7:30 or 8:00-walking, and then attending various meetings. That's what they were telling me at the time. Then they told me we were going to do this hit piece. I said no the first time. Then I got

bloodied up by the consultants who felt, "Hey, you've got to do it." I remember it was a really awful, four-hour meeting with everybody advising me that I had to do it. And I kept resisting it. I thought it was just too rough. Then there was an incident that occurred with these stupid little lawn signs. And it was a petty kind of situation. Everyone in my family worked in my campaign. My mother would cook meals on Saturdays and bring people things. She'd come and assist. My dad did a lot of things, but one of the things he did was put up lawn signs. So, I guess he and my brother had been out putting up lawn signs. We would put up lawn signs wherever people would call us and say, "You can bring a lawn sign." They found that they had been followed. And they went back to where they put up the signs, and all of them had been taken down. So my dad came back and told me. That really made me very angry, that Polanco was getting to be so petty. That where we were putting up a lawn sign, he was sending people out to go tear them down. And it just got to be that bad. Finally, I just called them up and said, "Do it." And then I made that decision to do that hit piece. And it was a very hard-hitting hit piece.

Vasquez

Did it make a difference, do you think?

Molina

Yes, it did. It made a difference, because it hit at the basic integrity and honesty of a politician. And, yes, it made a difference. I hate to believe that's what put it over one way or the other. But basically what we were doing was we were now swinging, and swinging tough, at both ends. He didn't stop hitting me. He continued to do so. But I remember it was one of those decisions that were made. But in every campaign, you've got to do it. Everyone talks about doing those campaigns, and you don't send out that kind of literature. You're absolutely not going to do it. But the reality of campaigns nowadays is that you need to respond. You need to defend yourself. You need to be hard-hitting and straightforward and direct, because people will generally believe a lot of those things. I think that the shot on the César Chávez thing was really a painful one. People admired César Chávez. To have the top leader of this country as far as Latinos were concerned say, "She's a bad girl," really was hard-hitting. It was totally untrue.

Vasquez

So you had to balance that. Did you?

Molina

Oh, we had to. And then, of course, the crime issue. "Oh, Gloria doesn't really care about crime. She thinks that gangs are just a bunch of Boy Scouts." You know, those kinds of things. So tough decisions needed to be made. We made the tough decisions. We stood by them. I didn't back off from any piece. I felt firmly that we did what we needed to do in that campaign. Of course, we felt that we worked very, very hard-maybe even harder than they did. We had lots of volunteers. That's the other thing. We were able to attract lots of people to the campaign. A lot of young people that hadn't gotten involved in campaigns before. A lot of activists that normally didn't get involved in campaigning. We had people from all over, a lot of women, who came over and had never walked the streets of East L.A.

Vasquez

This occurred when it was said that volunteerism was dead as far as political campaigns?

Molina

Yes.

Vasquez

How much did you spend on that campaign?

Molina

We spent about \$220,000.

Vasquez

All in all?

Molina

All in all.

Vasquez

That was a relatively inexpensive campaign.

Molina

It really was. They spent about the same thing. One of the things about having Pat Bond is she knows how to get the biggest bang for the buck, as they say. So she was very good at managing the money and getting us what we. . . . You know, maximizing our opportunity to use that money every single way by leveraging every single opportunity. So she was very effective with regard to that. But we had to raise it, and it was tough, tough money to raise. Because my money came in little checks. The \$25 checks. The \$50 checks. I mean, we jumped for joy when we got a \$100 check. But most of it was little money. Lots of little money. I had lots of little contributors. So to raise \$220,000 the hard way is really hard. [Laughter]

Vasquez

Who were your biggest contributors?

Molina

The biggest contributors were women's PACs [political action committees]. They just formed a couple of them. The National Women's Education Fund [NWEF], I think, in the end probably gave me about \$3,500, which is a lot. The State Women's PAC gave me about \$2,500, and then later on, maybe, \$5,000. The largest contributors were women's PACs. After that, a couple of labor unions sent in \$500. I may have gotten a couple of \$1,000 checks from them, but not many. I had a couple of good friends who wrote \$500 and \$700 checks at the time and later on who lent me some money. But the big chunks of money were from women's PACs. But the other thing that I also got, even though it wasn't a big chunk of money, was I would get those women's PACs to turn around and get other women to contribute to me-the \$100, the \$50. I got lots of small donations from women's groups throughout [the country]. I would get the NWPC [National Women's Political Caucus] of Bakersfield that sent me a check, or something like that, that was really kind of nice. So we had support groups all over, and we made a big campaign about getting the first Latina elected. We used it-there's no doubt-saying that was an important goal to be achieved. And getting them to invest money in it.

Vasquez

Some people say that instead of being a detriment, your being a woman and running as a woman candidate in fact really got you the benefit of an emerging woman's movement. And that has been a hallmark of your career. How do you respond to that?

Molina

Oh, it's true. We took advantage of all of that. I mean, my activism comes from the community and my involvement with Latinas and women. So I was able to turn around and utilize all of that. And it worked. Pat Bond, who was the campaign consultant, was very nervous. She said, "Well, women's groups. They talk, but I don't know if they're really going to invest money and really give you the dollars." Instead, what we did was send some strong, strong letters and made it the issue with these women's groups, so that we got the dollars. In fact, toward the end of the campaign, we were short on money that we really needed. At this point, we hadn't really gone into a deficit. We were very thrifty all the way through. But we really did need some money to do a last-minute mailing. And we were getting ready to send out a letter. Then the *L.A. Times* started doing its final little political review. Their writer wrote about me in their review, "Well, she's capable. She knows the issues. She's on the right side of all the issues. But more than likely, she'll lose that race, because she's a woman." [That's] what he wrote, more or less.

Vasquez

Who was this? Do you remember? Yes. Kevin Roderic was the writer with the *L.A. Times*. A good guy. But that was his conclusion. So his basic assessment was saying that Polanco would probably win this race. That was a painful article to get, because we had been working so hard. Here was the last week, and here was somebody that just threw cold water over the whole thing, right? And it was interesting because Joy Picus, who is in city council here, called me up. She said, "Oh, that makes me so angry, what he said." She said, "I'm going to call up some people and get them to help you." I had called her two weeks before that to help me with some money. And after that article came up, she said, "It made me so angry. I'm going to get you some money. I'm going to call up some people and get you some checks." What we did was we quickly turned around from that and decided to write a letter with a copy

of this article. And we sent it to the women's groups all over again for a second hit of money. Did it work?

Molina

It worked. We quickly got in an awful lot of money. In fact, we went over our budget. Not only were we able to do that last little bit of mail. We had this extra money. All of a sudden, we had, like, \$7,000 or \$8,000 that wasn't in the budget-that we really didn't need. Well, what are we going to do with that? Either have a great victory party or defeat party.

Vasquez

[Laughter]

Molina

We decided to put it into radio. We did a couple of radio ads.

Vasquez

Tell me about those ads.

Molina

Well, it was interesting. They were a last-minute kind of thing. It was almost the last week of the campaign. Pat wrote them up. It was interesting the way she did them. She used [John] Kennedy in the background, which is the other symbolic thing for the Latino community. Kennedy was in the background making some kind of a statement, and then an announcer came on and basically talked about the campaign and my running. I don't remember all of the actual thing. But I remember the Kennedy [background].

Vasquez

So you used the "L word"? You used the L word, liberal?

Molina

[Laughter] That's true. Of course, at that time, it was very different.

Vasquez

It was different then?

Molina

Yes, it was different.

Vasquez

I raise things like that, because for future readers of this interview, it might be interesting to see how quickly political labels and images changed in our time.

Molina

Yes.

Vasquez

Did you use Spanish radio at all?

Molina

Uh-huh. [Affirmative] We did about two Spanish ads and one English ad on the radio.

Vasquez

What was the thrust of the Spanish-language ad?

Molina

It was basically the same thing.

Vasquez

A translation of the same thing?

Molina

Yes, I think it was the same thing. But it [also had] a Kennedy kind of speech and music that was . . .

Vasquez

Whose idea was the Kennedy background?

Molina

Pat Bond. See, she really believes-and like everyone-what you needed was Kennedy. And I couldn't get Kennedy. Polanco got Kennedy, by the way. He

got [United States Senator Edward M.] Ted Kennedy. And so that's how she sort of introduced it.

Vasquez

Which of the Kennedys was in the background? John Kennedy?

Molina

Yes. It was John Kennedy's speech going on in the background. It kind of dies down, and then this announcer comes on in the tradition of Kennedy. [Laughter] Sort of like that. I can't remember it exactly, but we had extra money to do those ads. And you'll never know with radio if it works or it doesn't work. But we found that with the Spanish-speaking radio, press, and so on, that in many instances, you had household situations very similar to my own. And that's one thing that I told Pat about. I said that my mother listened to the radio. My mother watches Channel 34, Spanish-language TV. And she doesn't vote. She's not a citizen. But she talks about those things at the dinner table and all the rest of it when it comes to voting. She'll tell the rest of the family how she feels, because she's been listening to it or knows about it. So I said that was an important tool to be using in our community even though if you use it on Spanish language radio, more than likely, the major group that's listening are your nonvoting, noncitizen folks. But if they're anything like my mother-and a lot of moms that I know on the Eastside . . .

Vasquez

Who transmit the message, huh?

Molina

That's right. You know, if your mother says, "M'hijo, you go and vote for her," I mean, that's a real important message. [Laughter]

Vasquez

That's a good endorsement, huh?

Molina

You bet.

Vasquez

Okay. You got elected, and then you went on to run against Donald Hyde [in the general election]. Tell me about Donald Hyde. Is there anything worth . . . ?

Molina

[Laughter]

Vasquez

Do you even remember anything?

Molina

I never met him. I didn't meet him until about four years later. But he's a man that used to live in the housing projects in Boyle Heights. He was an activist within the Boyle Heights kind of housing community there. He's a Republican, and I always wondered why he would run. But later on, people told me that Republicans who run for these seats [in predominantly Democratic districts] automatically get to sit on their central committee. And that's why they do it. So I don't know. He never campaigned. He never did anything. He never said anything. I think when he ran against me, maybe it was his second time. He might have said something in the press at that time. But other than that, he wasn't anywhere to be found.

Vasquez

He was just a name on the ballot, huh?

Molina

Yes.

Vasquez

Okay. Tell me about your first term. Did you get an orientation?

Molina

[Laughter] You know, you think you've been around. I had worked for Torres. I had worked for Willie Brown. But very frankly, I had always been in the field. I hadn't been up in Sacramento. So now I was on my way up. And it was interesting, because the majority-or the leadership-of the Democratic Caucus was not expecting me to win either. They were expecting Polanco. So it was sort of like, they were going to open the door and say, "Richard, come on in."

And then they found me, right? So they were sort of stumbling over themselves. They had given him money, and they had found all kinds of ways to do that. So they didn't support me. They supported him. But I had my supporters. [Senator] Maxine Waters was a big supporter of mine. And some of the other women. [Assemblywoman] Theresa Hughes.

Vasquez

Did she help you in the campaign?

Molina

Oh, yes. By the way, it has to be said that Maxine gave me my first money. I had worked with Maxine Waters when we were both AA's. I used to be with Art Torres, and she was, I think, with [Los Angeles Councilman David] Cunningham here in the city council. So we used to work together, and we used to go to all those white women's groups, Maxine and I. And Maxine was no different than I was. I mean, she went to those meetings and attended and participated. But she wasn't going to let them dictate to her. I mean, she was the black woman at these things, and she went back to the black leadership kind of thing. So we had a lot of similarities. So when I decided to run for office, I went and I sat and talked to her.

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Molina

Well, I went and met with her and I told her I was going to be running and gave her the whole story about why I thought I could win and so on. And very frankly Maxine said, "Well, what you need is some money," and wrote me a check right there and then and gave me my first \$5,000, which is how we opened the office and got the first set of phones. Because she was absolutely right. That's what we didn't have. We didn't have our little seed money.

Vasquez

You had everything else? You had endorsements.

Molina

Right.

Vasquez

You had volunteers, you had issues . . .

Molina

We had all the little [money]. . . . We had not gotten \$5,000 from anyone.

Vasquez

So she started you off?

Molina

Yes. She sort of primed it and got it started. It's an important stage. She was very important. Later on, the other women legislators did assist me and sent me checks, but Maxine was on board right at the beginning.

Vasquez

That's way before you got elected?

Molina

That's right. Way before I got elected. She was right in the beginning of it. Like I said, they [Democratic incumbents] were not expecting me to win. A lot of them had supported my opponent. But I went up there.

Vasquez

Was there an official orientation of any kind that you remember?

Molina

Yes, they do have one. And keep in mind, I entered the legislature with almost twenty-three other members. We were the so-called largest freshman class they had ever had. Both Democrats and Republicans. There were a lot of us, new people. So it wasn't like two people came, and, "Let's give an orientation." They actually set up little programs for us. "Here are the rules, here's how you get an office, here's how you do this, here's how. . . ." They did the whole thing, and they did little seminars in the beginning.

Vasquez

Were they useful for you?

Molina

Yes, it was helpful to me. I certainly knew a little bit about it, because I had been around it. But for the most part, yes, it was helpful. There are certain things that even though you go through them, you really don't know about the basics about how to get started. But I went up there and did. . . . You know, I hired my staff and put together all the beginning parts of it. Basically, we met with the speaker and told him what committees we wanted.

Vasquez

What committees did you ask for?

Molina

Well, at the beginning, I asked for the Health Committee, Finance and Insurance Committee, and the Revenue and Taxation Committee.

Vasquez

There's an apocryphal story of you being greeted by one of your new colleagues saying, "Oh, good. Now we have someone to deal with child care and health" or some other domestic issue. And you said something to the effect . . .

Molina

Right. I said, "It's about time."

Vasquez

[You wanted to be] on Finance and Insurance, or Revenue and Taxation, I believe.

Molina

For exactly that reason. Because that was exactly what people were expecting from me. "Oh, here she comes, the Chicana, the feminist. Now we're going to have somebody who's going to deal with our child care issues and affirmative action and things like that." And that's all. I mean, they placed a little social service crown on me, and I was supposed to be on my way. By the way, that continued in my first year a lot. I went up there with labels galore. Most of those people didn't know me, but they had already heard of me. Of course,

because I was a Chicana, I was obviously liberal. A feminist. Every single label they could put on me was there. Now with me, in selecting the committees, I said to myself, "What is it that I want to work on?" Now I knew the health issues. The other thing was people said, "Oh, you've got to work on educational issues." And while I didn't want to work on educational issues, I also found that that's where all the minority members were, in that committee. So I looked at all the other committees, and I knew the most powerful one was Finance and Insurance. You know, to start out with, you ask for the most powerful one, right? The reason is that I also wanted to work on insurance issues. Then the other one was Revenue and Taxation. The reason that was important to me was also to understand the fiscal aspect of everything that we do. The so-called liberal title that we always get. I'm very supportive of social services, but how do we figure out how we pay for them? How do we maintain them? So I wanted to learn more of the revenue side of the state. I wanted to get on that committee, because I didn't know enough about it. So I felt that was an important committee to get on. Once you can figure out how to keep it funded, then the other things can all work out. Because everybody supports good education and good health care so long as you have money for it. They don't support it when there aren't funds there. So I really wanted to know the revenue side and the taxation portion of the state being on those committees. But, anyway, I got shot down in basically all of them with . . .

Vasquez

You drew vice chair on the Committee on Public Employment and Retirement?

Molina

Right.

Vasquez

Labor and Employment, Revenue and Taxation, Utilities and Commerce?

Molina

Right.

Vasquez

Select Committee on Small Businesses, the Commission of the Californias.

Molina

Yes.

Vasquez

Do you think that was a terribly bad draw?

Molina

No, of course not. It was pretty good. But one of the things that you have to remember. . . . First of all, what Willie did that year was he allowed no Republicans to be chairs. So that meant that every single Democrat either got to be a chair or a vice chair. So all of us freshman members got to be vice chairs of something. The public employees retirement system is not one of the most prominent committees. I got to be vice chair of *that* committee. Which was good though, because I enjoyed doing whatever I sat on, by the way. I'm one of those that. . . . The most obscure committee I can find interesting and make something out of it. But I did enjoy my tenure on that committee. I was vice chair of that committee, which meant basically no duties or responsibilities at all other than the title. He did give me Revenue and Taxation, and I liked that. And I really wanted to learn it. It was a tough committee.

Vasquez

Why?

Molina

A tough committee because it is such a complex area that you had to devote a lot of time to understand how our taxation system really does work and how you pull together the revenues. All of that. And I must tell you that I did not do it the justice that it deserved on my part. Because I ended up doing so many other things the minute I got there that I thought, "Oh, I'll be able to devote more time." But I didn't have the time to devote to the learning of that committee. And I always said to myself, "I need to go away and forget all this and just read up on how it all works." So I was sort of learning as I was going through the process.

Vasquez

But this was the committee you wanted?

Molina

This was one of the committees I wanted. There's no doubt about it. So that committee. . . . And then they didn't give me the Health Committee. I got put on the Labor Committee, which was fine. Those were. . . . I enjoyed everything that I was selected on. Somebody had come up to me and said, "Oh, you should be on the Commission of California. You should get these great trips to Baja." Tah-tah-tah-tah-tah-tah. And I said, "Well, gee, I'd be very interested in working on the immigration issue if that's what we're going to be doing." I was interested at that time in a lot of the border health issues that were going on. But, no, the Commission of the Californias was you go to Baja and you have tea and drinks with the governor. You can say, "Quién sabe que más" [who knows what more], and then he goes and visits you. It was nonsense. Absolutely nonsense.

Vasquez

Was it?

Molina

I went to one, and that was it. They play golf all day Saturday. They go on a boat all day Sunday. It wasn't what I thought it was going to be. I think I went to one meeting in San Diego.

Vasquez

It wasn't a serious effort in your mind?

Molina

They weren't going to discuss anything that was going to be worthwhile. I mean, if you wanted to go on these little junkets, you know. So it wasn't very interesting, to say the least. But anyway, you have all this committee work, and then you get there. And all of a sudden, "I'm a legislator. I've got to introduce legislation." Of course, there's nobody that helps you with that or assists you with that. And you've got all these great ideas. Well, let's see. . . . You know, you're almost in this situation. But the reality is you only have a certain period of time to introduce certain legislation. There were some people that came to me with bills, and they were like the bills that nobody ever took.

Vasquez

Why? They thought you were an easy touch?

Molina

Yes. Yes.

Vasquez

Give me some examples of some of the things that they brought you.

Molina

Let me see if I can. . . . I can't even remember some of them. Some of them dealt with affirmative action, and the legislature wasn't going to be a big fan of it. Some of them were certain kind of social service programs that were very elaborate. I got things like, you know, mandatory. . . . Which is a good issue now. It's a very prominent one. Mandatory. . . . Under health coverage of all employees, that they have mandatory psychiatric counseling. You know, the social workers or some association brought it to me. That that should be part of it. I mean, now we see a lot of it, but at that time. . . . A lot of things that had never passed came to me. I wanted to do some things in education. I wanted to do some things on insurance. I introduced my insurance bills. I did a couple of things in education. But it was very hard, because I didn't have. . . . I mean, I had a secretary and an assistant. And it all started going real fast right away. There was no research time. There wasn't a day that you could go and say, "Okay, I'm going to go and sit down and do this research." I mean, where do you start on all of this legislation after figuring out, you know, who introduced . . . ? If I'm going to do stuff on high school dropouts, what's the status of high school dropouts? I needed to go to somebody and be briefed about all that's going on. And I found myself. . . . My schedule was I would get up at 5:30 on Monday morning, get to the Burbank Airport, catch the 6:55 to Sacramento, we started session, and then we had our hearings that afternoon. Then the next day, I had hearings, and the following day I had other hearings. Then all of the lobbyists that want to come and meet with you and meet and greet and all of this. . . . Then every evening, there were three or four invitations of people who. . . . Every association was in town. The beer retailers association. Beauty shop operators. Everything. You name it. They

were all having receptions, and you had to go around visiting every single one of them

Vasquez

Why?

Molina

As a freshman member!

Vasquez

Why?

Molina

Because it was this thing about introducing you. The lobbyists would call and say, "I want you to meet some of our association." You knew that you had to get to know them. You knew that part of the reality of being up there is knowing these various groups and these lobbyists. Fundraising was going to continue. They're the ones that gave you the money. So I found myself every evening going boom-boom-boom-the cocktail parties all over the place-and going home and just being totally exhausted. And then you go through all of that. You go through session on Thursday. You get on a flight back to L.A. at 1:30 or 3:30. You've got all the stuff in the district. Now, you've got to run off and go to the Mexican-American Bar Association installation dinner on Thursday night and present a plaque. Then the next day, you've got Friday in your office. You're meeting with constituents and staff and catching up and everything else. On Saturday, you run around and you do all these other things. Sunday, here you go. Then you get up on Monday at 5:30 and get to Burbank and go. . . . Where was all this thinking and creative time? I couldn't find it. That was the beginning of that whirlwind. And let me tell you that within three months, I thought I was going nuts. I felt so absolutely useless. I felt like, "I got into this system and I'm running this treadmill, and it's taking me nowhere. Why am I going to three and four cocktail parties an evening? For what?" Because everybody says you've got to do it. Everybody says you've got to do it. You know, "When am I going to get to stop those meetings with the lobbyists so I can sit down and prepare for all these hearings that I'm in every day? So I can ask decent questions? So I can make good votes?" If you're

serving on four committees-for the most part, three or four committees-every week, you're having a hearing, listening to anywhere from six to twenty-two bills. Some of them are simple, and you're going to vote no. Some of them are very complex. Some of them are borderline issues. You've got to ask the questions. You've got to be prepared. You've got to be briefed. I served on Utilities and Commerce, another complex committee. Understanding nuclear energy. Yes, I'm against it. But it's in existence. So now you've got to regulate it. How do you regulate it? Complex issues on all levels of everything. Even in this retirement system.

Vasquez

Your staff wasn't adequate, you felt, at that time?

Molina

Well, they were new, too. They didn't give you a whole lot of staff. You didn't get six research people. Of course, the best people are the ones They got paid higher salaries, and they went on to the ones that had a lot of staff people. But when you first start as a freshman member, you get absolutely nothing. You're supposed to get some assistance. It's something known as majority services, but it's sort of leftover people. They weren't really. . . . So I must tell you that what scared me in my first couple of months was the fact that I was now in this position. And if I didn't get control of it, it was going to start controlling me. Then I'm going to be a useless person. Because I'll never get to go. I mean, I'm always going to be reacting to lobbyists. I'm always going to be reacting to their requests. I'm always going to be reacting to every group that comes in here that wants to have a little meet-and-greet session. I'll never read what I need to read. I'll never legislate. I'll never be smart enough to keep up. So I had a real tough time. My first six months were. . . . They took their toll. In fact, it was personally a very frightening time for me. I had wanted this position. I fought so hard to get in there, and I had so many people who volunteered and so many people who gave their money and so many people who had the highest hopes in the world for me. Not only that, I, for myself. . . . If I screwed up, they were never going to elect another Chicana, ever. I mean, here I was. I had to go out and make it, not just for me personally and everything else, but all those people that supported me and all those women and all those other folks that were counting on me. I was finding

myself just absolutely overwhelmed by that duty and responsibility. And I kept firm and strong. I mean, I'd go and make my bold speeches. I would go and legislate it. I would go and make my decisions before a committee. But I almost wanted to go home every single night, just shrink into a corner, because it was such a frightening and tough experience. Personally, I had some very rough times. Very few people know about it. Because, you know, on the outside . . .

Vasquez

Tell me about those tough times.

Molina

Well, the tough times were exactly that. That you went through the day, and you were just constantly moving. Boom-boom-boom-boom. But you went home empty-handed. You didn't really accomplish much.

Vasquez

Is it . . . ?

Molina

And I felt tired and exhausted. I mean, what was I doing? I'm not fighting for my community. I'm not legislating anything great. I didn't make any marvelous or wonderful decisions. I mean, here I am. I'm a useless person. Why did all these people make that investment? And I felt that duty and that responsibility. Not that anything magical was supposed to happen in six months, but in my mind it was supposed to.

Vasquez

There was a big gap between being an advocate and being an incumbent.

Molina

A huge one.

Vasquez

Or is there one between being a legislator and having that gap between that time that you make the legislation and you see the results? Which of the two?

Molina

No, it was the issue of being an activist and an outsider for most of it. All of a sudden being an outsider and being responsible for it and having to develop your own plan and your own strategy. I didn't have a whole lot of people that took me under the wing. I mean, Maxine was a great supporter of mine, but she wasn't the kind of person that I felt comfortable about saying, "Let me tell you about my woes, Maxine." I mean, she's a strong, firm person. I'm not going to go over there and present myself as someone that's going, "I don't know what to do." I really didn't have anywhere to go and talk to anyone.

Vasquez

Was there a Women's Caucus?

Molina

There was a Women's Caucus that was superficially meeting and would meet every so often, but it didn't. . . . I didn't feel close enough. And I was very intimidated with my experience. My experience was just my own. It's always that feeling like, "There's nobody else having this experience. It's just me." My other freshman members, by the way, particularly the male freshman members, they were having a great time. Drinks at Frank Fat's, with Willie here, "y andaban por donde quiera." [They all went over.] They partied all night long. They didn't show up at a hearing. And they didn't care. They had a very different kind of situation. They get a little-what you call-cheat sheet as to how to vote, basically. Here's what the Democratic line is, and you could follow it.

Vasquez

Sort of a slate [vote].

Molina

Yes. You could follow it and sit there. And you could be effective. But I don't want to do that. I felt that I had to read everything. I had to touch it. I had to ask questions. I had to feel it.

Vasquez

Why?

Molina

I don't know. [Laughter] Because I'm intense that way. I just felt that I had to do it. Plus that's my job. My job wasn't to have a little cheat sheet and say, "Okay, that's a good bill. That's a good bill. That's a good bill. And that's how I'm going to vote." I felt that my job was to be there and to think on behalf of my community, to vote on behalf of my community. To understand what impact that was going to have on the people that I was legislating for. I mean, I took it so seriously.

Vasquez

What happened to the old adage, "To get along, go along"?

Molina

[Laughter] That has never worked for me. You know, I know that makes life easier, but I've always seemed to find it the hardest one to take. I didn't want to use the little Cliff Notes along the way. [Laughter]

Vasquez

I'm going to footnote that one. You were in college long enough for those, huh?

Molina

No. Very frankly, I didn't find out about them until much, much later. [Laughter]

Vasquez

How about the Chicano Caucus?

Molina

It was nonexistent.

Vasquez

Nonexistent by then.

Molina

Well, I mean, it existed in name, and all Chicanos belonged to it. But they never met, which was another big disappointment.

Vasquez

How about Art? Why didn't you meet?

Molina

Why? Because we have nothing to talk about.

Vasquez

Oh, really? That was the answer?

Molina

I mean, you know, they all looked at each other. And, "What do you mean? What do you want to do?" We got all these things to do. [Laughter] All these issues. It's interesting, because they didn't see it that way. They had been there long enough, and they didn't see all these issues. So then they said, "Put Mikey in charge. Okay, Gloria, you want to do something?" Well, I became the chair of the Hispanic Caucus in my second year.

Vasquez

Is that the way you became chair? By default?

Molina

[Laughter] Absolutely. And I made lots of things happen. I made them come to meetings, we made decisions, we got money together, and I did a conference. I did all those things, because I was very intense about everything that I did. In the process, I drove myself practically crazy. [Laughter]

Vasquez

Let's go over some legislation that you were responsible for and identified with. There's one thing before I start, and maybe starting on . . . Well, why not? Let's follow your pattern of doing things.

Molina

Okay.

Vasquez

One of the controversial pieces of legislation that you didn't author, but supported, was having to do with work, the GAIN [Greater Avenues for Independence] program, [Note: A.B. 861, 1983-1984 Reg. Sess., Cal. Stat., ch. 522 (1984).] which my research indicated is really a pretty insidious program for people on welfare. They start out working for part of their money. And then it becomes another hurdle that they have to jump to get their funds. What was your thinking on that?

Molina

Well, one of the things that happened when I first got there was, again, the liberal label. The liberal label means certain things. So when the workfare issue was being introduced-the first year that it was introduced-it died almost as quickly as it was introduced. Republicans had introduced this hard-core, ugly thing. It was very easy to oppose. It was ugly. But the concept was not a problem for me. The concept of having people working for their income-for the income of the family-was not a problem for me. Getting people off of welfare was not a concept that was a problem for me. I think people should get off welfare. I don't think they should be on it. Those kinds of things didn't sit [well]. They were things that, you know, in my upbringing . . . My father never wanted to be on welfare-that was a very important thing for him-and felt that people on welfare were lazy people. Well, I didn't believe they were necessarily lazy people. I believe they were people who never really had an opportunity or were in situations or circumstances that didn't permit them to be like my father. But I was brought up with that.

Vasquez

The work ethic that you talked about earlier in this interview.

Molina

Yes. So during that summer as I developed a closer relationship with a couple of members, I started talking to them. I felt Democrats should get behind the workfare program, but not the way the Republicans wanted to do it. Because it's going to pass. The basic concepts of workfare are the basic concepts that everybody agrees with: people should not be on welfare; people should be off of welfare; people should not be given an income-free kind of situation;

people should have to work. All those things. Those are concepts that almost every average person dislikes. Consequently, someday. . . .So I started talking to some people, and I felt that we should as Democrats formulate our own plan. Of course, the other Democrats that I talked to-the liberals-thought I was nuts. Like, "You're not supposed to support workfare. That's a Republican thing. How can you think of welfare recipients working?" How cruel of me. Well, I said, "I don't see it that way." I see it as a real opportunity to do some things. In fact, I talked to two people, like Maxine. Maxine was absolutely opposed to it. I talked to someone like Diane Watson, who was in the senate, who said, "Gloria, it's because you don't know about this program. You go to San Diego where they're operating a similar program, and it will turn you off in a minute." So I did. I wanted to know more about it. I didn't have such a problem with it. So it was during that year that I started talking to [Assemblyman] Art Agnos about it. It's interesting that Art and I were in sync on that proposal, that we both felt that the Democrats should embrace workfare in some fashion, develop our own package, and by far not let the Republicans design something that we were going to have to follow along on. We did a couple of study things together. I didn't get to go to the first one, but Art Agnos put together a delegation of Republicans and Democrats. They went back east to study the programs that had been put in place-the program in New Jersey and, I think, the program in Boston. So anyway, they came back with a lot of ideas. To put it all together, Art Agnos and I started working together with a couple of people-a small committee of Democrats-and we started formulating our own workfare program. What did we want, how did we want to see it, what was important? I told them that I felt what we needed was. . . . And we did; we structured it. What we want is an opportunity. We want to get these people into situations where they can take advantage of opportunities. Whatever the deficiencies are. If they need an education, they should get them into school. If they need to be trained and retrained in another job, we should do that. We should do all of these things. So there should be a whole menu of things that they should do to transition from welfare into a meaningful, good-paying, decent job. Not a three-dollars-an-hour job. So we set up all kinds of parameters. How much income they should make after that. What kind of benefits they should receive. All of that. My big thing was supportive services. I wanted, particularly, women and families that There should be absolute assurance that there was going to

be full child care. That there were going to be full health benefits. All these kinds of things. So I worked a lot on developing the child care component and everything else. But let me tell you, we developed the program, and it was tough negotiating with the Republicans. [Assemblyman Ernest L.] Ernie Konnyu was the Republican lead on this particular issue. I mean, Ernie Konnyu was this kind of conservative Republican who believes that there shouldn't be any welfare system whatsoever. He's a Hungarian immigrant, or comes from a family that is Hungarian. He is very conservative. He absolutely doesn't believe that anybody should get a free ride at all. "These are all freeloaders. They are lazy people." All those concepts were coming back. "They're not people that have fallen in these circumstances. They created these bad circumstances for themselves." That's what he believed. But a lot of us got together, and we formulated that. And it's interesting. We had to give in an awful lot. There are certain things. . . . For example, we would not give in on mandatory. We did not want to make it mandatory. I did not have a big problem with mandatory, but for the most part we wanted to make it voluntary. Why not? Why not create a mechanism where a welfare mother-if she wants to-can go to college while she's getting her welfare check. Why not facilitate her capability of doing that. And let her volunteer for it. She doesn't have to. . . . Why make her do it? They wanted mandatory. . . . They insisted on mandatory. They didn't believe in child care services. "Hey, the grandmother can take care of those kids. You know, when my wife and I went to school, that's the way we did it. I mean, they can leave them with the neighbor." That's what the Republicans would comment. I said, "Uh-uh." We pay for child care. If a woman is going to go off and either go to college or training, or she's going to go OJT [on the job training], you've got to assure her that her children are going to be well taken care of, and not just be given to the sixteen-year-old to take care of. You know, maybe and maybe not. So we negotiated a lot of it. We worked very hard and we compromised certain things that we didn't like and certain things that they didn't like. But we worked together. We put together a package of workfare that is the best in this country. It really is. I still believe very firmly in it. I don't believe in what L.A. County has done in butchering the GAIN program here. We were very disappointed in how the governor and the governor's people had let L.A. County get away with what they got away with, because we put in provisions. I mean, they have to do child care. They have to do all those things, but they had been administering it the way Ernie Konnyu wanted

to administer it. Exactly that. "You get out there, and you work." They don't even want to give the opportunity for training. They don't even want to do the ESL [English as a second language] component. They don't even want to do the counseling. They have gotten away with creating that basic workfare program that Ernie wanted initially. And that's been unfortunate. The governor has allowed them to get away with that. A Democratic governor [could] make the GAIN program work. The GAIN program and the workfare program in this state will be one of the most successful if they fully implement it. They would be smart if they did it, because that. . . . Initially, it's a big investment. Upfront it costs a lot of money, but I think also for the dignity of the welfare recipient. . . . I'll give you an example. Someone in my office whose mother-in-law was on welfare in San Diego, she hated me for supporting workfare. And she really tried very hard as a staff person. She said, "Gloria, why are you doing it? It's an awful program. My mother-in-law is going through it." So I followed her mother-in-law through it. First of all, the workfare program in San Diego was not a good one. They used to just get sent off to jobs in the county or wherever. Her first job, she got sent to the county. She was like. . . . I guess she was in her mid-fifties or late fifties. She had been on welfare, and I think she had a sixteen-year-old at home, or something like that. Basically, all she did at the county welfare office was staple all day long. They would bring her papelitos [little papers], and she would staple them. That's what she did. So she really had to work off her welfare. That's basically what they were doing to her. What was interesting is what happened to her there. First of all, she didn't like going there at all, because they all spoke English and they wouldn't speak Spanish to her. Even though she could speak English, she didn't want to speak English. She was stubborn, and she didn't want to do that. So she didn't participate in a lot of things. She didn't like stapling and any of that. What happened is the dynamics of what started to happen. That is, she found herself as a translator very soon. Not because that's what they asked her to do. She found herself helping people to do that even though they had formal translators there in the office.

Vasquez

But there are never enough.

Molina

There are never enough, and she didn't think they were good enough. She. . . . This woman would say, "She's not translating for you well." So she'd go over and help the social workers translate more effectively than whoever they had hired to do this translating that she didn't think was good enough. So she started getting involved in that. Eventually, this woman decided that she wanted to be a translator for the Department of Social Services in San Diego, and that's what she does now. She went into the program and was able to do it all-get her English up a little better. And I told Maria. . . . I said, "Why don't you think that worked?" She said, "Because they made her do it." I said, "There's nothing wrong. Would she have come out of her house? I don't think she had the self-confidence to come out of her house and look for a job." She spoke English, but she's like my mother, who says, "Ah, no, no, no." She didn't, but she really did. She just didn't want to come out. So in this instance, even though it was mandatory and it was, like, done. . . . It's not so bad. It's not so terrible. What was terrible was the fact that she was going to spend the next eight months-next three years-stapling for the rest of her life. Now, that's dead-end and that's unfair. We don't support that program. I support the program where hopefully this woman is going to come and say, "I want to be a translator," or "I want to do this job," or "I'm willing to do these kinds of jobs. How do I get prepared?" We provide the educational preparedness, the training, the OJT, and then finally transition her out of that initial job and counsel and guide her.

Vasquez

So you saw it as a vehicle that could be used for . . .

Molina

Achieving the same goals as the Republicans. Getting people off welfare. It's a terrible, terrible system. But, no, liberals still hated me for it.

< [Note: Matthews, Jay. *Los Angeles' New Councilwoman Reflects Changing Ethnic Politics*. *Washington Post* (April 14, 1987): A4 .] In fact, later on Maxine Waters and I debated it before a group of women at a convention, and it was an interesting debate. I felt so passionately for it, and she felt so passionately against it.

Vasquez

Who won the debate?

Molina

I thought I did, but then again you know how strong she is. [Laughter] It wasn't a matter of who won, but we presented both sides very strongly.

Vasquez

Did this begin to take the edge off of your liberal image?

Molina

I think so.

Vasquez

Did that help?

Molina

I think so. Well, a lot of people were surprised. Ernie Konnyu was just shocked. I mean, you know, they had considered me a slamdunk liberal feminist.

Vasquez

Did it cost you with anyone?

Molina

Well, yes, it did. It cost me a lot of those liberal groups and organizations. The unions were appalled that I took that kind of a position. The progressive social service groups were appalled that I took that position, but I felt so strongly about it. And I wasn't in bad company. I mean, I was with. . . . Art Agnos was one of the key leaders. He was involved. I felt good about what I was doing. Even though Maria would come in and plead about her poor mother-in-law, in the end I said, "I don't think it was bad for her, and maybe that's what it was going to take to get her out there." And you know, I hated it for her going through that kind of a painful process, but. . . . Sometimes we've got to make those tough choices. And many times, they have to be made for us. I know that sounds very patronizing, but that system has to work. The worst thing about the welfare system is that it works backwards. It creates a dependence. It's an awful system. I think it will always need to be in place,

because there are always going to be people in unfortunate circumstances. But it has become an ugly monster.

Vasquez

So long as we index a certain amount of employment figures in the country, I expect there's always going to be people on the margins.

Molina

Sure. We need to help them through that. I mean, there's going to be a point in time when even training them. . . . If there are no jobs, there are no jobs. But we also put that in there, by the way, when unemployment gets to a certain level. I mean, there's no use having. . . . There's no use trying to get people onto jobs that are nonexistent.

Vasquez

But it's a handy way not to give people any assistance if there is no job to send them to. That's what some people are afraid with this GAIN program. That they either get sent to menial, dead-end jobs where they're being exploited, especially in the private sector.

Molina

Well, they shouldn't be. The Boston program, which is the one that we formulated our program after, has been very successful as long as there have been jobs out there. The women have gone Most of the families have gone through major transitions, and they've been very good depending on the quality of the training. Now, I'm not going to vouch for L.A., because this board of supervisors. . . . If I go there, that's one of the first things I'm going to straighten out, because we put in a good program. It didn't intend to be butchered the way they've done it. And they have done that. So they've damaged the credibility of what I intended that work program to be. Even though we put in a lot of safeguards, they still have to do a lot of things before they can ever take away welfare from a person.

Vasquez

Let's move to another one.

Molina

Okay.

Vasquez

A.B. 1745, [Note: A.B. 1745, 1983-1984 Reg. Sess., Cal. Stat., ch. 890 (1983).] which was a health care bill, had to do with prenatal care, which permitted certain organizations to utilize sliding fee scales. What brought that about?

Molina

You mean . . ? Are you sure it's not the teenage pregnancy bill?

Vasquez

No, no. This is something else.

Molina

That's a different one? Oh, gosh, I don't even remember that. All I know is . . .

Vasquez

Let me read to you some of the language. It might help you.

Molina

I don't remember all of the details of that particular legislation, but I think it's one of the ones that was brought to me that had to do with the indigent health care population, not just in L.A. but throughout the state. And it wasn't just farmworkers. It was people who made a lot less money than most. In many instances, there would be a way to bring down the cost they had to pay, because they were making so little. But I think at that time, the way the schedules were set. . . . That even in certain instances, that was eliminating health care for a lot of indigent people. So it was just adjusting that formula. I know very little about it, but I do remember that the rural health care people did bring me legislation like that. It may have come from that. One of the things we did.

Vasquez

Okay. A.B. 1405, [Note: A. B. 1405, 1983-1984 Reg. Sess., Cal Stat., ch. 897 (1983).] which had to do with the state park system. And it speaks to the El Pueblo de Los Angeles State [Historic Park], which required the Department of Recreation and Parks to request [time] to extend until January 1, 1986, length

of the term of any [lease]. Given some recent events around Olvera Street, is this some background to that?

Molina

It is.

Vasquez

Tell me.

Molina

In 1983, the state of California decided that they were going to put all of the concessions at Olvera Street, which is a state historic park, out to bid. Which is the same process that is used. . . . Like in Yosemite, if they have a popcorn concession or a hotel or whatever, they put them out to bid when their contracts are up. So, basically, what they were going to do was put up all those concessions out to bid, which horrified the Olvera Street Merchants [Association], because they didn't know what that meant. And all they could see was that it was going to go to the highest bidder, and there were like no elements of what kinds of business they would be. You know, Taco Bell could now come in, that kind of a situation, and just take over restaurants as the highest bidder. They would have various little franchise groups that could come in and do that, and that terrified them. So they came to me, and I went before the state. I said, "You can't do this. This is a unique park. It isn't a popcorn concession. And you have to develop criteria to maintain Olvera Street," and so on. And they said, "Don't worry about it. Trust us. We'll do it right." And I didn't. What I did is I prevented. . . . Well, at first . . .

Vasquez

You extended the leases . . .

Molina

Right. At first, I wanted to not allow them to do it, but I could see that I was not going to have the votes for that. So the best that I could do was to allow them to continue their leases as is, not to put them out for bid, and convince the state to develop a criteria as to what kind of people could bid for those concessions-what kind of things-in order to develop a master plan as to what kind of things were going on in Olvera Street. I was concerned that there were

many generations of families that had been there and that they should get some credit, because they were the people that have maintained the street in all these years. So that was extension legislation basically to say, "Stop what you're going to do. Let's sit down, write out a plan, and figure out how to do that. So let's get an extension on this issue." That's basically all that was. At that time, Olvera Street belonged to the state, the city, and the county. So they were all supposed to get together and figure out what to do. But very frankly, I had to redo that again, I think, in '85 and maybe . . .

Vasquez

So it was a series of extensions?

Molina

A series.

Vasquez

But not a resolution of the problem?

Molina

No. Because what happened was-and, in fact, we got into a real fight with the state-the state did not like my interfering in their business. They see it as a state park. "I don't care who this legislator is, we're not going to do it." They refused to negotiate. In other words, they were just going to backpedal on the whole thing and they were going to make it rough for everybody. They refused to meet. They had a couple of meetings. They disagreed on every element raised. So they wrote memos back and forth for a year about clarifying what they first said at the first meeting. It was a waste of bureaucratic time. Then. . . . And they didn't like my involvement. They told me very frankly. One of the things that was insulting to me right at the very beginning of the process was they had one of their state historians come to me and tell me that. . . . He had outlined something about some of the criteria of Olvera Street. And I said, "What does early California mean?" I said, "I've always known it as a Mexican, you know, kind of theme." And he said, "No. It would not be Mexican. It was early Californian." I had studied early Californian in the fourth grade, and I just knew that as the California Indians, right? [Laughter] I didn't know what he meant. The Spaniards and the Indians. What is it that we're doing here, you

know? I didn't see it that way. I was offended by that interpretation, and I told him so. Then I would come to Olvera Street Merchants saying, "What's he talking about?" I kept going to Grace Davis: "Grace, this is a birthplace of L.A. The city of L.A. should be the lead on this." But the state was playing lots of games. At one point, even though I have this extension bill there-and it was in existence-they put in the budget. . . . And the budget is so big. There was one little line that took out that provision. (The bill that I had passed the year before that gave them this two years to negotiate.) That's how devious they were-the state was-in trying to get control of this. So the entire time that I was up in Sacramento, I fought the state on Olvera Street, because it was their intention of really putting these things up to bid. If they're going to put any theme in there, it was going to be a so-called early California theme that nobody could tell me what-it-was kind of thing. So that was my introduction in 1983 to the beginning of the problems of Olvera Street, which I have brought here to the council. [Laughter]

Vasquez

Which have come up again. Maybe you can deal with them out of chronological context, but now that we're on the subject . . .

Molina

Well, very frankly, what it. . . . It's been the same issue. The same issue is how those businesses are going to continue to operate. What happened . . .

1.11. TAPE NUMBER: VI, Side One (July 19, 1990)

Vasquez

We were talking about Olvera Street . . .

Molina

When I got here what happened is that all of a sudden I didn't represent Olvera Street. I represented across the street from Olvera Street for my district. So it was a little bit tougher. But the problems have continued. The state finally gave up and said okay. They cried uncle and said to the city, "You run it. You're in charge of it. It's still a state historic park, but we don't . . ."

Vasquez

This is under Grace Davis?

Molina

Uh-huh. But we want. . . . You design what's going to go on there. During all of this time, there were all kinds of. . . . I mean, it wasn't like things weren't being discussed. It's just that, at least now, the state was not going to be directly in control of it. The biggest problems in Olvera Street, we all know, are the fact that those are seismically deficient buildings and they need to be upgraded and repaired. It takes an awful lot of money, and nobody knew how to pay for it. And it was all kinds of . . .

Vasquez

Are most of those buildings owned by most of those merchants?

Molina

No, they're not. They're owned by the city. The state. They are. . . . The merchants just have leases on them, and most of them have month-to-month leases on them. So they basically have been there as sort of serfs on the land almost. I mean, it's just. . . . Generation after generation . . .

Vasquez

In several families, there are several generations, right?

Molina

Right. But they just lease. That's all. So even the basics, like if they want to make repairs to the building, they can't go to the bank and say, "I want to repair my business," because it isn't their building. So there's all kinds of deficiencies in the way it is operated. So they're saying, "Instead of that, we would like to have something that is more comprehensive. How is it that we could not have ownership of the buildings, but at least have long-term leases, you know, for thirty years?"

Vasquez

Some kind of equity on it?

Molina

Right. "So that we can go out and get loans to repair this." And so they . . .

Vasquez

Because some of those merchants have made a pretty decent living out off of that street.

Molina

Very. Off of little puestositos [small stands].

Vasquez

Yes, but those puestositos on Cinco de Mayo can turn \$15,000 in a day.

Molina

Oh, my girl. . . . I went to school with my girlfriend Mary Lou Díaz, and her father is a glassblower there. Let me tell you, when I went to school with Mary, she's the only one that had a car and lots and lots of clothes after this puestosito . . .

Vasquez

The Mexican Chamber of Commerce and the fight that goes on every year about who gets a stand for three days, because of how lucrative it is.

Molina

They make lots of money. Well, they can. They have rough times like any other business, but they do well. So then the whole issue became a saying, "Why can't we as merchants put together our own little development company and do something? We'll manage the street." A lot of ideas were thrown out during that time. And then, of course, here the other thing is there were some people who had designs on the street, and we knew about it.

Vasquez

Like who?

Molina

TELACU.

Vasquez

The East Los Angeles Community Union?

Molina

The East Los Angeles Community Union. They wanted to . . . There was discussion that they wanted to step in and manage the street and get it operational. Now, that would have been fine. But I know personally. I had a history with them, and they have a history with the community, and it wasn't the kind of history that one could trust Olvera Street to. And so the merchants didn't . . .

Vasquez

In a summarized way, tell me about that history. As I've got it in other interviews, I think it bears repeating from different vantage points of community leaders or representatives.

Molina

Well, the concept of TELACU was to be a community development organization that received a lot of community development dollars. That is, federal funds-poor people's money-to do good things in a poor people's community. But they violated that trust of the community-and I think it was something around the mid-seventies, beginning of the eighties-because they were finding that a lot of the investments that they were making for so-called community development were not being made in the community. They were being made for Mercedes Benz dealerships, for the development of corporations that weren't even based in the Eastside, and that there were people who enhanced themselves financially from these particular ventures. Many of the principals were almost indicted, although they weren't in the end. Well, they were indicted.

Vasquez

David Lizarraga, for example?

Molina

Yes. Then they were eventually cleared. What happened is even after they sort of got away with that or got out from under that cloud, they continued their sort of mana [stubborn habit] . . . I don't know how to say it in. . . I mean that same kind of situation like that. That they could continue to operate in this fashion and that nobody in the community was going to say

anything. They became just a greedy, self-serving group of people that, very frankly, very few people trusted. The concepts that they began with were good, but I think somewhere along the line, the money really deteriorated a lot of their goals, and their achievements were no longer very beneficial to the community. So when they were stepping into Olvera Street, there was a lot of that residual kind of sentiment about TELACU.

Vasquez

How did you detect that they were stepping in? Did they make a bid?

Molina

They started talking to the principals here about how they want to be one of the major concessioners.

Vasquez

By here, you mean city council?

Molina

Yeah.

Vasquez

That would be Councilman Alatorre. He represents that area.

Molina

Right. Then they started talking to Grace Davis. And they started talking to some of the merchants. The merchants right away, they didn't like them at all. They didn't like the ideas. They just thought, "No, we shouldn't have them." But Richard continued to pursue that relationship and that possibility, and that's what started the real pleito.

Vasquez

This was after Grace Davis left?

Molina

Uh-huh. [Affirmative] It just got to be very, very ugly, because. . . . And then, of course, what has been going on in the Olvera Street Merchants themselves is that they-even TELACU can be faulted-they've created factions and, you

know. . . . In any organization, there are always pleitos, and there are always people who don't like certain leadership, and they don't like the way certain people do things. But in this instance . . .

Vasquez

From my understanding, in talking with some of the merchants, there isn't a monolithic organization. There never was.

Molina

Well . . .

Vasquez

That there was one group of people around Vivian Bonzo, to be exact, that perhaps represents, at any one given point, a majority number. But even within themselves, they're not necessarily all that . . .

Molina

There was always the Olvera Street Merchants Association, which was always the association that the merchants automatically belonged to. They were supposed to be the mechanism by which they worked collectively in the best interest of the merchants to work with either the state or whatever. When Vivian was elected as a chair, she was probably the one that really solidified that group. I mean, she made them start paying dues. They all used to belong, but they never paid dues and they never really participated. Some liked it; some didn't like it. She started really working hard at getting them organized in protesting. Not just, you know. . . . "Don't just send a letter. Let's go out and lobby the members of the legislature on this issue. Let's do this. Let's do that." And she started doing . . .

Vasquez

Was she the one that came to you with the legislation back in the assembly?

Molina

She wasn't the first one, no.

Vasquez

Who came to you in the beginning?

Molina

It was two or three merchants at that time who said, "Look what they're doing to us." I said, "Oh, no, no. They're not doing that." "Yes," they said, "they're going to put us out to bid." And this is. . . . I can't remember exactly who the merchants were.

Vasquez

But it wasn't Vivian or her group?

Molina

No, not yet. In fact, I didn't meet Vivian until almost a year after that, because it was a group of them that came to me and said this was going on. Of course, I didn't think it was going on, because I had always said, "No. Olvera Street can't change. It should always be just like I've always known it." But then I saw what the state was actually doing, the possibility of that kind of a dramatic change was there. So what happened is Vivian has been a very tough leader and has really pushed them. Let me tell you, many of those merchants don't like any kind of change. They are like anyone else. "Hey, I've been running this place since 1942. I don't need anybody to tell me. This little cigar box is where I keep my money. Nobody wants me. . . . I'm not going to use a computer, and I'm not going to do inventory." You know, that kind of thing. They don't want those kinds of changes. I know that one of the things that Grace Davis has had problems with that she used to tell me about is that she really felt that she didn't like the stuff the merchants were selling. You know, they should stop selling Laker t-shirts. They should stop selling little flags and the postcards from everywhere. I mean, they should really have more crafts. They should have more artwork.

Vasquez

Better quality of merchandise.

Molina

Yes, that they should do this. Very frankly, the merchants felt like, "You know, she's not going to tell me what to sell. If I want to put little Chinese dolls up for the Chinese tourists. . . ." You know that's what they were doing. So there are

a lot of the merchants that don't like anybody telling them what to put or sell in their puestos, you know.

Vasquez

But these are the same merchants that want some kind of protection?

Molina

They want . . .

Vasquez

They want that street a Mexican street.

Molina

They want protections. . . . It's like anything else: "Only my way," you know. So, again, developing leadership and an organization has been tough. But what I think TELACU did is it took advantage of those situations and created different factions. It isn't unanimous. But I think that for the most part, Vivian has most of the merchants surrounded. The majority of them. And they're frightened about getting gobbled up. And she defends them. She defends a lot of the old-timers and all of that.

Vasquez

The problem that some people have is you move around in the community and you talk to people about this, and these are merchants that you have never been able to count on for anything other than looking for their own bottom line—education reforms, police relations, housing, whatever. These people may not even live anywhere near where the so-called Mexican community lives, but all of a sudden they're fighting for the integrity of the cultural birthplace of the Mexicans in Los Angeles. Do you find a hypocrisy in that or a contradiction in that? Does it matter?

Molina

It doesn't matter to me, because the place matters more than anything else and the integrity of the commitment that many of those families have made for a long period of time. I mean, I also know while Mary's father makes an awful lot of money from his puesto, I also remember that Mary's father was never around at Christmastime or weekends or any of those kinds of times.

They work very, very hard for what they get. So, you know, it works both ways. They've made a tremendous commitment at keeping it going. I know one time he was offered kind of a glassblowing situation in Disneyland or one of those very. . . . And he decided to stay on Olvera Street, because he really felt that's what he wanted to do. So there's commitment there on the other side. But I will tell you, that's true of any situation that I've been involved in, particularly when it comes to legislation. Legislation affects nobody until it affects them. It's not important what you do. It's unimportant. But then you start legislating, and all of a sudden, it stirs people up. Yeah, they're going to try and get that support and lobby you. For the most part, I mean, I've gotten people who have never supported me for anything. All of a sudden, they're begging, "Please pay attention to. . . ." You know, "This is so important," and they never gave you the time of day. That happens a lot in the political process. I think those are the dynamics of what has gone on. There is no doubt. They've always been on the street and taken for granted what's there. All of a sudden it was going to be taken away from them, and taken away in a big way from them. So they've been able to get the support. But it's also a generated support, because some of the attacks were so blatant. You know, they really wanted to come in and pull the rug out from under these merchants. There was that intent. "Let's get a developer. The developer will tell them what's good for them. Let them operate it" kind of thing. There were a lot of things that merited our involvement to protect the street. But I think that now you're going to see maybe some of these people stepping up and being much more supportive of these other kinds of programs-because they've seen a lot of people come by-and help them all of a sudden when they need help. And you're right. There are people that sort of sat on the sidelines for a good deal.

Vasquez

By the same token, there were people in this last series of press happenings-if you can call them that-who are at everything.

Molina

Yeah.

Vasquez

Who, if there's a camera, they'll chase it. They'll get in front of it.

Molina

Yes.

Vasquez

And that had created skepticism among some quarters also.

Molina

Sure.

Vasquez

Is that part of the same dynamic?

Molina

Yes. But I think the issue is so prominent that we had always intended to blow the lid off of this thing from that standpoint. The only people who were going to step up and defend it was going to be the Chicano community. Because incrementally behind the scenes, they were trying to dismantle it.

Vasquez

Tell me how that was going on.

Molina

Well, for example, if you look across the street, you have Olvera Street and then you have what is called the. . . . What are they called? The other side of the street. The Pico House on the other side of the gazebo.

Vasquez

Right.

Molina

Well, that's been out to a developer for ten, twelve years.

Vasquez

So who is "they" we're trying to dismantle?

Molina

The Recreation and Parks Commission. The Recreation and Parks Department. What they have done with this developer. . . . I mean, basically, that property is laid there. There has been nothing going on over there. There's no activity, number one. But second of all, they've come in with their plans. . . . In ten years, they didn't do anything. All of a sudden, they have fast food restaurants in there. They . . .

Vasquez

In the Pico House?

Molina

Uh-huh. [Affirmative] They're going to take the theater that was there that, I mean, people have requested to use for Latino plays and everything, and, basically, they're not honoring any of that with the use of it. They are developing a French restaurant, which is going to be like the center point of the place-a French restaurant-because Pio Pico, when he had his mansion or his house there, whatever, had a French restaurant. They found those convenient periods in history when they want to do what they want to do.

Vasquez

Early Californian?

Molina

Right, maybe. I guess that's what it is. And those are things that create that sort of distrust.

Vasquez

All that has been going on since before you and Richard got on the city council.

Molina

Uh-huh. [Affirmative]

Vasquez

Let me ask you a question I was going to ask way down the road, but let's go with content here. Why is it that people ask-and I got asked this a lot doing

what I do-why is it that you and Richard had to go toe-to-toe about this in front of television cameras . . .

Molina

Because he wouldn't . . .

Vasquez

. . . rather than dealing with it among ourselves, if I may use that term, the way other communities in this city have learned how to do or know how to do so well? And, thereby, leverage a greater amount of money-uniting all the power-after some kind of a knocked-on, dragout and then compromise unity situation? Why wasn't that possible?

Molina

It was.

Vasquez

But . . . ?

Molina

Richard refused to do it. And, I guess, I did, too. I spent the last three years here honoring his role as a councilman. He represents Olvera Street; I do not. So all I could do is. . . . In a sense, I knew what Richard wanted to do with it, and he knew that I was going to fight him on it. Wrong. I felt he was wrong. I told him very clearly he was wrong, and he tried to assure me, "No, no, no. That's not going to happen." "Well, if it's not going to happen, then assure us by doing the following things." Boom-boom-boom-boom. He said okay, and then he didn't do them. So when I went to him again, I said, "Well, Richard, you've got to get the park people to at least give long-term leases, to do some of these things. You've got, you know. . . . Are you going to eliminate this developer? I mean, you're still going to bring in TELACU." Then he would say that it was out of his hands. That it was in Art Gastulum's hand in the mayor's office. He wasn't in charge. The mayor's office was in charge. I ran over to the mayor's office. I said, "Grace, aren't you in charge of this thing anymore?" She said, "No. They took it away from me. Art Gastulum's in charge." I go to Art Gastulum, and Art Gastulum is playing games. You know, "Well, the merchants can't do it. The merchants can't develop that property. You know, we need to

bring somebody with some bucks to do that whole thing." And I said, "We have the possibility of changing the whole character of that street if you do that." And he said, "Well, you know, it will be good." Anyway, I was having lots of problems. So that's when I knew they were going to play games with me. You know, Richard said, "The mayor's doing it." They said they're sort of doing it, but really Richard's in charge. Back and forth, back and forth. So I think I was very respectful of Richard for a long time, because I didn't challenge him on it. I knew what they were doing. Then Richard had thrown it to the mayor. So during the mayor's election, one of the things that happened is that if the mayor was going to ask for my endorsement-and I told Art Gastulum that-I'm going to insist that he kick Olvera Street out of his office and get it on track. That is, what are we going to do with Olvera Street? How are we going to manage that street? I mean, bring it to the public. Why is it behind the scenes again, in the backroom where things are going on? "But they're not going on." I said, "I want the mayor to come out and have a press conference and say, 'I'm going to support the merchants. Whatever we're going to do, we're going to do it public.'" Congressman Roybal and I had been working on it. The congressman said, "Well, we won't endorse him until he makes that commitment." And, certainly, I thought that's great. So the congressman met with the mayor and said, "Well, Gloria and I aren't going to endorse you until you make that commitment." He says, "I make the commitment." So we endorsed him. Then as quickly as we did that and as quickly as he won is as quickly as he forgot about the issue. I mean, you know. . . . I told Congressman Roybal. I said, "You should be angry that he's ignoring you. I'm angry." I went to Art Gastulum, and I said, "Boy, I'm not going to trust you guys ever again." Basically, he felt, "Well. . . ." He got an endorsement out of me. That's all he wanted at the time. I went back to Richard and I said, "You know this is really rotten the way that you guys are playing it." And it was kind of, "Hey, it's my district" kind of thing. And I said, "Well, there's a lot of people out there that don't like the way you're doing it, Richard. They really, really don't." And it was a sort of, "Back off. It's my district" kind of thing.

Vasquez

But you've known him for going into other people's district.

Molina

Every so often if I think [he did], I told him. I said, "I just don't think it's right." So what I did is about six months ago after hearing ongoing problems at Olvera Street, I'm going. . . . Problems, the pleitos they would have about not having a bathroom. The pleitos they would have about who is going to get the next lease. I was hearing all of these. And not just from the Olvera Street merchants. Even within the advisory committee that was set up that was supposed to oversee Olvera Street. So then I said, "Okay. The only way to flush this thing out is to have a hearing on it." I went to [Councilman] Joel Wachs and I said, "Joel"-who is a chair of the committee that oversees Rec and Parks-I said, "I want to do a hearing on Olvera Street under our jurisdiction. I want Rec and Parks to come in and do a status report of Olvera Street: where it's at, where it's going, what they're doing, how they operate the place, how it's functioning, how it's going to function tomorrow. The whole thing." So Joel agreed, we did an outline of all of it, and sent it over to Richard. So he could see. "Richard, I'm bringing it to the public. Here's your chance to. . . . Either you do it, or I'll have this hearing." Because Richard is like that. I mean . . .

Vasquez

Was it an ultimatum kind of thing?

Molina

Yeah. I hated doing it, but it just kept lingering here. It was not going anywhere. So then Richard moved to the commission. They had always been working on a so-called-I forget what it is called-like elements of a major concessioner. Of a development agreement. Of an RFP [request for proposals], they called it. A request for proposals for the major concessioner/developer. So all of a sudden Richard put it on the agenda of the Rec and Parks Commission. So when he did, I pulled back my hearing. I said, "Richard, if you're going to do it, fine. I won't have this hearing." But then as quickly as he put it on the agenda, he had it continued, and he had it continued, and he had it continued. So I called up at the Rec and Parks Commission. I wanted to know why it was being continued. And it was, "Oh, well, the councilman had some questions. Oh, this commissioner had. . . ." Every single time, they had a reason. It was here we go again. So now I'm getting the runaround by somebody else. "Put my hearing back on." I put my hearing back on, and we did it. We took that department, and we exposed it because it was so easy to

expose. You have this guy named Jerry Smart who is basically—they had in Rec and Parks—who's been managing it. He called it "my park." He said, "This is what I do with my park." So I asked for policies. I asked for procedures. I asked for rationale, none of which he had. I said, "What makes you in charge of that park? It's the city's. It's the birthplace of Los Angeles." We really exposed a lot of things. Then we were going to do a follow-up hearing, where I was going to come in with a series of recommendations. Number one, let's take Olvera Street out of Rec and Parks. Let's put it in a separate kind of venue. Let's . . .

Vasquez

What did you want it . . . ?

Molina

Like a commission.

Vasquez

But not back in the mayor's office?

Molina

No.

Vasquez

Not under the mayor's office?

Molina

No. I wanted. . . . Well, I mean, the commissioners would be appointed by him. But I had to allow some of that. I mean, he is the mayor. But I was not going to have a public commission that did exclusively the work of this. And I started making these recommendations. Sent them over to Richard. "Richard, this is what I'm doing. You've got another chance to do the right thing." So he went before the commission, and that's when they set up that hearing. He was going to do the right thing, which was good. What happened was the day before that hearing, they tried to present some things that we disagreed with.

Vasquez

Which were?

Molina

The equity issue about a developer. Before we had said that the merchants would have 51 percent.

Vasquez

By combining a group, merchants would have 51 percent of equity or the street?

Molina

Right. So that the developer would have some financial benefit to him, but at the same time, the merchants . . .

Vasquez

Uh-huh. Not control.

Molina

Not control. All of a sudden, Richard diluted that in one of his amendments. Of course, that's when that whole thing was being introduced, which we think Rec and Parks did. All of a sudden, the Chinese Museum is the issue. All of a sudden, the Italian Hall is the issue.

Vasquez

Who brought those in and why?

Molina

I think it was Jerry Smart and Rec and Parks people.

Vasquez

Why?

Molina

Because they wanted to create the dissension. It wasn't, you know, "Mexicans shouldn't be controlling that street." They felt that it should be other people. I think they wanted to stir it up, and that's what they wanted to do. What happened in that confrontation on TV between Richard and I is because

Richard continued to be devious in his process. And he didn't have to be. But he did. He . . .

Vasquez

Was he plugging for TELACU?

Molina

Yes.

Vasquez

At this late stage?

Molina

Uh-huh. [Affirmative] Yes, he was. Very much. And they were in the audience. They were there, and they had hired a lawyer to come and do their presentation and everything. The commissioners were very devious as well, because he had gotten them all. He had gotten all five votes. When he introduced those amendments, I said, "We don't want these amendments." They all said, "Oh, okay. We won't support them, and we won't do this." But they were lying. What happened in the end is they did it just the way Richard wanted, and the crowd went crazy. They went crazy. Everybody. . . . And I got angry, too. I got angry, because I felt very betrayed. I think I had given every single opportunity for Richard, as I say, to do the right thing. We had spelled it out. It wasn't like we didn't spell it out. The thing is, if he wasn't going to do it, then he had to take the consequences of not doing it. But, I mean, I wasn't going to lighten up on my end, and neither were the merchants and neither were a lot of people who had gotten angry over this issue. Vivian had worked it very, very hard. I mean, she had been developing constituencies that were going to be monitoring what was going on.

Vasquez

Apart from merchants?

Molina

Apart from them.

Vasquez

Academics and activists?

Molina

Right. A whole lot of people. And . . .

Vasquez

All kinds of people.

Molina

Uh-huh. [Affirmative] She did. She knew it was going to be a fight, and it was going to be a big political fight. The way that this council operates it, it does, "Oh, my gosh, it's the councilman's district." And everybody will back off and allow them to do what they want to do. Very frankly, that is advantageous when it is your side that you want to win. But disadvantageous when not. The council usually will defer to that council member, and she knew that.

Vasquez

Does that happen to you? People defer to your council district?

Molina

Oh, very much so. Very much so.

Vasquez

Isn't that detrimental to you?

Molina

Is it detrimental to me?

Vasquez

Yes, isn't it? You're one good government?

Molina

[Laughter] I am not as intimidated when people challenge me and say, "I may be in your district, but I don't like your position." Because I'm good at going into their districts and not liking, you know. . . . I don't have to have. . . . I mean, just because it's my district, I don't stand up and say, "It's my district. I want you to do it this way." I think that I hopefully can make a good case for

them if I have to use that, "It's my district," and "Leave me alone." I don't usually drop that line on folks. I usually try to tell them, "These are the reasons that I don't. . . . I don't want this, or I want this, or I'm pursuing this." But I've had members vote against me on certain things.

Vasquez

Since the last series of meetings and hearings and the television coverage, have you been able to come to any kind of a rapprochement about it?

Molina

Oh, absolutely. I was also. . . . I didn't appreciate, in a sense, when we had those meetings of the kind of public display that we were . . .

Vasquez

That a lot of people did?

Molina

Yes. I mean, you know, good guy/bad guy kind of stuff. It's not appealing to anybody. It really isn't. I mean, you know, sometimes you have to go to those meetings in order to get things done. I mean, I'm going to do it if I have to, and this was serious enough for me to have. . . . But I didn't particularly like it. And I didn't think Richard was that off. If he would only back off from the TELACU, from the people grabbing on there, from the people. . . . You know, if they would just let people on that street make their own decisions. The so-called self-determination.

Vasquez

Isn't Olvera Street more than the belonging to the merchants and making money off of it?

Molina

That's right. It belongs to the city.

Vasquez

It belongs to a lot . . .

Molina

It's the birthplace of the city.

Vasquez

Right, right.

Molina

So, consequently, I'm not just willing to turn it over to the merchants either. That's why I want to create this city mechanism that is going to allow it to work in the best interest of the city. The merchants should be a part of it. But let me tell you. I agree with what Grace Davis said. I don't like Laker t-shirts being sold on Olvera Street. Now, granted, I'm not going to have a merchant go broke . . .

Vasquez

That's why some people argue that it was unclear what was happening.

Molina

Yes.

Vasquez

Was the tail wagging the dog there?

Molina

No. And I know it looked that way.

Vasquez

Who was shaking you around, or were you giving directions? Who was leading this thing?

Molina

Well, it's no doubt that it has gotten to be a very, very big thing. But I am also one that does not believe that I'm going to make merchants sell expensive pottery and go broke in the process. I mean, I hope we would be able to market and facilitate a lot of things for them in how we do it. But I really believe that they have to have some input into how it's done. I don't agree that they can just do what they want to do out there either. It is belonging. . . . It belongs to the city. It is the birthplace of the city. It is more than just "those

Mexican merchants" or "those merchants." But the point is, how do you develop that balance that you need? I went to Richard and. . . . I mean, I was angry with Richard, because Richard let, to me, happen what happened. It's not that I didn't give him any room. It's not like. . . . You know, a lot of people don't know that either-how many times, how long we waited, and how many opportunities he had to go in and do it. Now, if he wasn't going to do it, then he was going to have to deal with repercussions from his actions. But since then I have. . . . We've talked, and I'm . . .

Vasquez

Was there a proposal to bring a nonprofit?

Molina

He wants to bring in a nonprofit. I disagree with him only for one reason, and that is a nonprofit does not have public scrutiny. A nonprofit is . . .

Vasquez

Couldn't it be made to have?

Molina

Well, that's what I want. Because it can be like a nonprofit board. The directors of the nonprofit make the decisions, and they don't have to have any public hearings. They're not under any government responsibility to have public meetings. You know, all of those kinds of things.

Vasquez

You would like to see a commission.

Molina

I would like to see some kind of a commission. Now, not that the nonprofit could not continue to operate. So what I did is I talked to Richard about the parameters of what I'd like to see. I told him. I said, "Richard, you do it. It's yours." I mean, I don't want to come in and say, "Do it. Me, you know, Gloria Molina has to do it. You do it." But I do want him, in a sense, to do it within certain parameters that are going to have public scrutiny. That it's not going to be a group that is just going to be appointed by the mayor. They go away, and there's no accountability anymore.

Vasquez

It depends a whole lot, in that case, on who the mayor is and what attitude a mayor-he or she-would have to the street.

Molina

That's right. And to the puestos. The way he . . .

Vasquez

What's your system?

Molina

I just want to create a commission. An appointed commission that would probably have five members or seven members. A mayor would appoint them. Maybe the council could appoint two of them. However he wants to do it. Basically, it would be the same kind of commission structure as the airports or the harbor or anything else. Their sole responsibility is to carry out the function of Olvera Street. They should design a master plan. They should design all the elements of how they want it to function. How we have money that we could get over to them to do the seismic repairs. They could develop a nonprofit group that might be the management end of it. You know, that might hire a manager or a major concessioner to manage it. They would do all. They would do everything. But they would do it in a public setting. And that's all I want. I just want it to be public. I don't want it to be a backroom deal. That way, everything is going to get scrutinized. I think there are certain protections in that. And that's what the merchants want, too.

Vasquez

Is there room for something like that in the city charter?

Molina

Yes, very much so. I'm hoping that. . . . At our last discussion-Richard and I-he's going to do it. I'm really hopeful that he will. I think he should take the lead, and I think he should build back that confidence of the merchants. Because if he's going to represent them, they should work closely with him. It's to their benefit. I think he should kiss off TELACU, in my opinion. [Laughter] They can go off and do other kinds of things. Then I think that, hopefully, he's going to

be the kind of person that a lot of people are going to look to in the city of giving direction to this commission. So I'm hoping that will happen. I think Richard is very receptive. I don't think he particularly has enjoyed being on the receiving end of having so many people be angry with him.

Vasquez

There was some pretty nasty stuff that came out of that, a lot of which had nothing to do with Olvera Street, from what I could see.

Molina

Yes.

Vasquez

I would imagine he would. Well, that was a long digression, but I think I want to get it on the historical record. Let's go back to your legislation. We might come back to that. We'll see . . .

Molina

Okay.

Vasquez

A.B. 1407, [Note: A.B. 1407, 1983-1984 Reg. Sess., Cal. Stat., ch. 1149 (1983).] which had to do with. . . . This is '83 now, which had to do with . . .

Molina

Gee, we're going to go through all my legislation? [Laughter]

Vasquez

No, no. Not all of it. Just . . .

Molina

This is one of my favorite bills. Immigration consultants?

Vasquez

Immigration consultants that had to do with-if you want me to remind you-the regulation of people engaged in doing immigration consulting. It became a whole career. It became a whole industry, especially when the amnesty

provisions came about. Overnight there were a million experts on amnesty and immigration law and lawyers that weren't lawyers. Did this have something to do with that? Tell me about that.

Molina

Yes, it did. I had an attorney-a D.A., I guess-come to me from Fresno. I can't remember his name. And he said, "We are seeing an awful lot of abuse of undocumented, of people who are trying to gain their residency cards and so on being taken to the cleaners by notary publics, by unlicensed and professional consultants that are going to get them their "papeles" [immigration documents] but never do. The way they mistreat these people, they take original documents from them and never return them until they pay them all their money, and they never do anything for them." And he said, "We need to find a way that we can prosecute some of these people and get them out of this business." So I said, "Absolutely." And I started working with. . . . Some people up in Sacramento designed the legislation that we would need to deal with this.

Vasquez

So this comes out of Fresno and not out of Los Angeles?

Molina

No. It came out of Fresno.

Vasquez

That's ironic.

Molina

Yes, it came out of Fresno. He was out there visiting and met with me. I thought it was important, because we knew it was happening in L.A. The Estefadores [a bunco division of the Los Angeles Police Department], which were in Boyle Heights at that time, had talked a lot about this rip-off that was going on and certainly knew about it. But I didn't know exactly how to curb it and control it. Anyway, we designed this legislation. He came up with the elements of it all, and we ran it through the process. Everybody was very, very sympathetic to it for the most part, because nobody wanted to see that kind of problem. The only thing is that there was this one aspect of it about

immigration and immigration consultants and attorneys. The lawyers just became totally unhinged when we introduced this legislation. Lawyers do not like to be regulated.

Vasquez

All you were asking for was a written contract?

Molina

Real basic stuff.

Vasquez

Really? What were lawyers . . ? Why did lawyers have problems with this?

Molina

Lawyers had big problems with it. First, the [California] State Bar [Association], then the Los Angeles County Bar [Association], and the Mexican-American Bar [Association].

Vasquez

Oh, really. Tell me. That's interesting.

Molina

So they all thought, "Wait a minute. We are licensed by the state. We would not carry out anything unethical. Why should we have to do it?" I mean, "It's okay for notary publics to do it, but why should lawyers have to do anything like this?" And I thought, "Well, I think it's just a basic consumer right. Particularly these people who. . . . First of all, the contracts have to be written in their language. It outlines very clearly. The process is fairly well known as to what you're going to do for them, and the fact that you're not going to hold any of their original documents. What's the problem?" "Well, I guess. . . . They thought I was an absolute lunatic to be regulating lawyers that have already passed the bar and are above anybody as far as that. . . . So they didn't like it, and they fought me an awful lot initially. I went out and I met with the Mexican-American Bar Association and their committee. I said, "Hey, you tell me the problem doesn't exist, and I'll go away tomorrow. But you know the problem exists. Even with lawyers it exists. So I don't think we're asking for too much." And I finally got some of them over. They helped me lobby the L.A.

County Bar and the State Bar. But they weren't too pleased. One of the other things we wanted to do-this was the beginning of another piece of legislation I had in mind-and that is let's create a certified class of immigration consultants and lawyers.

Vasquez

How far did that get?

Molina

That got nowhere. I mean, that got flushed down real quickly, because not only did lawyers not like it, the state didn't like creating another category of a professional that, very frankly, they weren't going to be able to regulate. You know, what education should they have? It became just so complex that we decided not to do it. But this gave us the capability for the district attorney to go after these people now. In other words, now they have to have the contract. If they don't have the contract, we can close them down immediately. It provides a series of remedies for the victims and protection for them as well. So it was a good piece of legislation. It wasn't that hard. But my initial opponents were the lawyers, and we finally won them over. And we got it signed by the governor. It was a good consumer . . .

Vasquez

What impact do you think it's had?

Molina

Well, it's interesting, because one of the things we never did well enough was to monitor what was going on. But the lawyer in Fresno felt that it was just the law that needed to be put in place to zap a couple of people every so often and to publicize it. That's what they do here in L.A. Every so often, they'll send out enforcers to go check some of these folks. If they can close them down, they publicize, and they do it. So it can be effective.

Vasquez

If there's a commitment to enforce it.

Molina

Right, if there's a commitment to enforce it. Now, I have not checked it as much now. Certainly, after amnesty, this kicked in really big. But we don't see them. . . . They don't hold the documents anymore. We haven't seen any real violation of that. Before, they were taking people's birth certificates and anything they had, and they would keep them until they had paid. I know that we've had incidents-and I had one about six months ago-where someone came to me and said, "Oh, this person said he was going to get me a green card." I asked him a couple of key questions, and I said, "I don't think there's any way you're ever going to get a green card, and this person shouldn't have promised you that. How much money did you pay him?" He told me. I said, "What documents did you give him?" And he said he hadn't given him anything. I said, "How much . . . ?" You know, I went to that whole thing. So we called him. He got his money back right away. All I had to say is, "Where's the contract? Do you know that under state law you must have had a contract with him." He paid him right back all of his money. I wish I could monitor more of those things.

Vasquez

Yes, because there are some real horror stories one hears. At least in my experience, as recently as two or three years ago.

Molina

Yes. What I've told TV stations, like [KMEX-TV Channel] 34 and [KVEA-TV Channel] 52 and the radio stations, is to publicize this as something they should demand. They're entitled to a contract as to what services they're going to get in their own language.

Vasquez

And reflecting their own particular circumstances?

Molina

Yes.

Vasquez

All right. Let's move on to something else.

Molina

Okay.

Vasquez

A.B. 3883, [Note: A.B. 3883, 1983-1984 Reg. Sess., Cal. Stat., ch. 1058 (1984).] which is. . . This is 1984. This had to do with sexual harassment requiring an individual who has left his or her employment with good cause because of sexual harassment. . . Let me read you some of that. You know which one that is. How did that come about? Why and what impact did it have?

Molina

There was a commission [Sexual Harassment in Employment Project of the California Commission on the Status of Women] that was set up, like some group that had been set up either by the governor's office or someone had set up about sexual harassment.

Vasquez

Is it not the Commission on the Status of Women?

Molina

No. It was set up from the Commission on the Status of Women. What they did is they came up with a series of recommendations-of legislation. That group came to me and asked if I would introduce this bill, which I did, because it was a good bill. Basically, what it is, it allowed women who left their jobs because of sexual harassment to be able to collect unemployment insurance. Very simple. Very basic. Now with the provisions under the present law, they could not. If you voluntarily left your job, you cannot collect unemployment. Well, it's not necessarily a voluntary action when you have had sexual harassment. I mean, it is for a reason. But it wasn't a valid reason as far as the state unemployment insurance operated. So that's what I had to create. It was interesting, because carrying that legislation was when I also carried some paternity legislation later on.Right.

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Vasquez

Does that mean your male colleagues?

Molina

My male colleagues didn't seem to understand the issue that clearly. To me, it was such a simple thing. I thought, "Of course. Why not? Why shouldn't this person get unemployment compensation?" They felt, "Well, she left on her own." But I said, "Sexual harassment is a very awful, tragic . . ."

Vasquez

Traumatic?

Molina

Yes. It's a very, very tough thing to deal with. Anyway, one of the other provisions that they put in was you have to-before you could collect-you had to go and confront. . . . Oh, you had to tell your employer, "I'm leaving."

Vasquez

You had to try to work it out.

Molina

Right. "I'm leaving, because I've been sexually harassed. And I think it's been unfair." Because if they didn't provide. . . . Before you left, you had to give some opportunity for the employer to correct it. If you . . .

Vasquez

"An individual would be required to take reasonable steps to preserve the working relationship unless the director of employment development finds it has been futile." That's the objective.

Molina

Right.

Vasquez

All right.

Molina

So, you know, I felt that in many instances, the employer was the one that perpetrated the sexual harassment. So it wasn't as easy to go in and say. . . .

Again, in most instances, it was the top person in charge, or the people in charge were not sensitive to the issue of sexual harassment. So they didn't see that as a valid issue.

Vasquez

Or a good cause?

Molina

Yes. So, very frankly, we had to legislate it, and we got it passed in its first year. There were reservations, and there were people that didn't like it. They felt, here we are regulating the workplace again, and all of that. But sexual harassment is a very, very real problem.

Vasquez

To this date, at the national level, there is a very acrimonious debate about the rights of employers. What some people have called [employee-imposed] "quotas."

Molina

Yes.

Vasquez

Versus nondiscrimination. Do you think this piece of legislation at the state level has contributed to an atmosphere more conducive to forcing employers to "do the right thing"?

Molina

Well, you have to. It's unfortunate. A lot of the legislation that I was involved in were these protective kinds of things that needed to be done, because the employer wasn't doing it on his own. All of my legislation of this type always never got supported by the retail industry. It never got supported by the California manufacturers, the chamber of commerce. They always opposed all of these kinds of things. But we had to put people in a situation where they had to do the right thing. Because they weren't doing it on their own. [Pause]

Vasquez

Talking about this kind of defensive legislation, there was another bill that you authored in 1984, and that was A.B. 3664, [Note: A.B. 3664, 1983-1984 Reg. Sess., Cal Stat., ch. 1163 (1984).] which had to do with domestic harassment, to enjoin the mate or the ex-mate who may be harassing. Can you tell me about that bill? Do you remember that one?

Molina

Uh-uh. [Negative]

Vasquez

Let me read you some language.

Molina

[Inaudible] Did we pass it?

Vasquez

Yes.

Molina

It was a very simple, basic kind of thing that we put in another way. That the defendant can protect themselves. I'm not so sure exactly what it involved.

Vasquez

But it's not something you remember coming out of a particular group or a particular concern of yours?

Molina

No. Not that one.

Vasquez

Okay. Let's get off of this just for a little while. [Pause] How would you summarize then your first legislative session? What did you accomplish? What did you learn? What frustrated you the most?

Molina

Well, what I learned. . . . I learned more about the process and how it really works on the inside. It certainly prepared me for my coming term on the

council-I mean, being on the state legislature. But my first year, I didn't feel I accomplished all that much. There's no doubt that I certainly was involved in carrying legislation. I mean, not anything that I'm not proud of. Good legislation. I was on good sides of lots of bills. I know that I really worked hard at being an informed legislator. As a committee person, I felt I was a contributing member as far as debate, discussion, and legislation, because I spent a lot of time trying to become a contributing member. But I also didn't feel as accomplished, because the big thing, like the budget-the big issues-I and many of us were having no input whatsoever. None. It was decided by certain folks as to how it was going to be carried out-the education legislation, health legislation-all those kinds of things. I did not like the behind-the-scenes aspect of many things and the general acceptance of many members about, "That's the way the system works."

Vasquez

You didn't like that?

Molina

That was frustrating.

Vasquez

You never got used to that?

Molina

I never did. I always found that the most difficult aspect of what I was doing, because I wanted to challenge it. Example: I had . . .

Vasquez

You were still an outsider?

Molina

Well, I was not only an outsider, but I obviously was never going to be an insider because I couldn't fathom what was going on. That was part of the process. For example, in one of the legislative bills that I had, I carried the redlining bill that wasn't a new bill to the legislature. It had been introduced on a regular basis, and it lost on a regular basis. But I felt, "Well, I can go in there, make a presentation, and talk about how insidious this redlining

process is to the low-income wage earner and what it does to minority communities" and so on. I worked hard in building the case for it all, in a sense. Actually, I'm not sure if I did it in my first year or my second term.

Vasquez

I think it was your second term.

Molina

Yes. But again, in that first term, the way that people just sort of accept it. "Well, the insurance companies don't like it, Gloria. I'm going to support the insurance companies." I knew the insurance companies were giving big bucks to these people, lots of money.

Vasquez

In an article that I read, you mentioned. . . . Peter Chacón, specifically, and, I believe, [Assemblyman] Charles [M.] Calderón were two of the people that you addressed on some. . . . That you approached on some of these efforts.

Molina

They were serving on the committee, and I pointed out how devastating it was to have Chicano communities redlined, what it meant, why their insurance was so high, and how unfair. And they're not sympathetic. They felt that the insurance companies had to do this. That they had legitimacy to their argument. I tried to poke holes on it, and they were not that receptive.

Vasquez

Do you think that's what it was? Or were they afraid that they would not get contributions?

Molina

They probably would not get the contributions. You know what's interesting? I used to get insurance contributions.

Vasquez

For what?

Molina

I mean, they knew . . .

Vasquez

For doing what?

Molina

For probably letting them in the door to talk to me occasionally. I have no idea, but. . . I didn't get great. . . I didn't get \$5,000, maybe, like other members got, or \$10,000. But, you know, if I invited them to an event, I got two or three insurance companies to send me money. You know, certainly not to the extent that other members have probably. . . See, I disagreed with them, and I felt very firmly that I should tell them why and so on. So I thought, "They gave me a donation. Granted, it may not have been as much. But. . . ." At least I carried on a dialogue with them. But, anyway, that was disappointing. That aspect of it. That hidden agenda that was always there. That so-called Third House that existed, the lobbyists and their money. You know, I always knew that was part of the process. I just didn't like the way it so sometimes overwhelmed some very significant issues. And I was not impressed with sometimes the lack of leadership by some of these people on these issues. I'm not just talking about Peter Chacón and Chuck Calderón, but as a body, as a group of people who just didn't pursue some of these issues and felt that they didn't want to offend this Third House. That was troublesome, because I knew that's where I was different. I wasn't. . . Maxine is different, too. I mean, she doesn't have any problem with any lobbyist. She'll put them in their place in a moment and say so. But I wasn't allowed as much of that. I was supposed to. . . You know, freshman members, they treat you like children. You know, you're supposed to be seen and not heard kind of attitude. Of course, they didn't like. . . Well, I also had a lot of problems with the colleague kind of stuff.

Vasquez

What do you mean by the colleague? Every group has collegiality. What do you mean by that?

Molina

Well, sometimes because we're colleagues, we're supposed to dismiss certain acts and actions that would not be tolerated by any other . . .

Vasquez

By a noncolleague?

Molina

Right.

Vasquez

Like what, for example?

Molina

Well, sexism, racism, comments that are unethical, unethical actions, with a sort of this expectation of the good old boy network. A ha-ha-ha kind of. . . . I used to find that so repulsive and. . . . While I wasn't going to stand up and be everyone's accuser and try and be Miss Goody Two Shoes, I found that uncomfortable. I did everything I could not to find myself in those kinds of situations where I had to see or be a part of anything that I knew was something that I was not going to like. Because that's the only way I could distance myself from it. But a big part of what goes on is to be part of that ha-ha. And I challenged sexism a lot.

Vasquez

Do you want to tell me about any of the incidents or . . . ?

Molina

My one incident was I was brand new. . . . But it Certain things were very natural for me to challenge, and I didn't see any problem in challenging them. Other people were so offended that I would do so. We had an incident after my first year. It wasn't after. It was during. Right about this time, the budget is a big debate, of course. Of course, we, as usual. . . . I was trimming back on. . . . There's never enough money for all of the programs and so on. Anyway, the budget debate was going on, and I wish I would have been one of those key players that knew the budget that well. But I was a follower. So it was like watching Ping-Pong matches. The Republicans and the Democrats. . . . The Democratic leadership and the Republican leadership debated the issue. And I

certainly knew that I was going to vote with my Democratic colleagues. But it was fascinating listening to the debate. It was very passionate on the other side. I remember Maxine Waters getting up and doing this passionate speech about how deficient the budget was and how it cut back on all of these programs and how this governor was just cutting the soul and heart out of every important, significant program.

Vasquez

It sounds like this year's budget.

Molina

Well, I found out later on that was. . . . I mean, they could replay the tape. It's the same debate all the time. [Laughter] But the thing is she makes this passionate speech. And it was like, "Right on, Maxine," right? Then [Assemblywoman] Marian La Follette, a Republican woman legislator, stood up and made a passionate speech on her side. "If it had not been for overspending by Jerry Brown and overcommitments by Jerry Brown," and, you know, "It's us Republican legislators that are responsive to the taxpayers of this state." And tah-dah-dah. "If we weren't over. . . ." And made a passionate speech on the Republican side. I thought it was interesting. Then one of the members stands up, [Assemblyman Louis J.] Lou Papan, and said he thought it was very funny. Ha-ha-ha. He said, "Mr. Speaker, could we keep the girls from fighting on the floor?" [Laughter] Well, I mean, me? I'm going. . . . I'm just. . . . That's the most disgusting thing that could be said after these two women-I thought-made wonderful, passionate speeches about how they felt about this budget. And I put my mike up. What you do is you put your mike up when you want to speak. I threw my mike up-I didn't even realize I was that dramatic about it-and called for a point of order. I said, you know. . . . I made some speech about how everybody is entitled to a point of view here. We got elected as individuals to come here and. . . . The passionate. . . . You know, "Miss Waters should be admired as well as Miss La Follette. These are legislators. Different points of view. To have Mr. Papan denigrate their speeches. . . . I demand a formal apology not just to Miss Waters and Miss La Follette, but to all of us." And tah-dah-dah-dah-dah. Well, I mean, in a minute, recess was called. Everybody thrown into the conference room. I mean, everybody ran for cover. I mean, every. . . . Some of the members said, "Oh,

Gloria. What are you doing?" [Laughter] I mean, some of the women thought. . . . I mean, everybody felt sorry for me.

Vasquez

You were the only one not reading the cue card. Is that it?

Molina

[Laughter] You got that right. When I walked into the caucus room. . . . I don't know if Lou Papan. . . . We turned out to be very good friends, and I love him dearly. He's kind of a He's a bully is what he is. And he comes up to me with a big chest, and he starts pounding on me about. . . . And I said, "You. . . ." I don't know. I said something to him, and I stood firmly on my ground. He kept pounding on me. Then one of the other legislators came up and said, "That's a sexist thing to do. You were wrong. You owe her an apology." Then he started to continue. Then the rest of the members started coming and saying, "Hey, she's right, and you're wrong." So they defended me. And then we went on to discuss the budget.

Vasquez

Did you get an apology?

Molina

Huh? No. No. I mean, the best I could do was [that] he not beat up on me. [Laughter] But what was interesting about that aspect of it is that he is in charge of distributing the goodies. He decides what car you get. He decides what office you get, whether you get a lamp, whether you get a rug, whether you get a plant. [Laughter] So he's a powerful character. Anyway, he didn't strip me of everything, although they could have.

Vasquez

Did it cost you anything?

Molina

In the end, it didn't cost me anything, because I eventually went to his office. Members had advised me that I should go over and apologize. That's what they advised me.

Vasquez

Tell me who were the members that advised you.

Molina

Oh, I don't remember exactly.

Vasquez

Well, what kind of standing? Your party?

Molina

Yes, my . . .

Vasquez

Seniors?

Molina

Senior colleagues felt that . . .

Vasquez

The speaker?

Molina

The speaker didn't. He stayed out of it. But there were other members that came to me and felt that was inappropriate. "Maybe you should apologize. You know Lou, down deep inside he's a good guy."

Vasquez

A colleague?

Molina

Yes. You know, "He didn't mean it," and tah-dah-dah-dah-dah. But it was sort of like, "Why should I apologize? He did me wrong."

Vasquez

Did you apologize?

Molina

Absolutely not. Absolutely not. I don't know Somewhere down the line, we had another incident, which was a good one. And that kind of broke the ice. But it was. . . . I mean, I said my piece, and he said his. He had to take the consequences of what he said. You don't just blurt out these statements without any responsibility to them.

Vasquez

Was it just a flippant joke?

Molina

Yes. Right.

Vasquez

Is that what he thought, maybe, he was doing?

Molina

Sure, that's all. Like they all do, you know. People say these things, and it's supposed to be automatically forgiven for them. Well, you know, not all the time. Anyway, that was one of the other things.[Interruption]

Vasquez

Now your first term that you were there was a decade after the Fair Political Practices Commission had been in place. Did you have a sense there had been any constraints or a leash put on the Third House? Did you feel that the Fair Political Practices Commission and the Fair Political Practices Act [Note: Proposition 9 (June 1974).] had any real impact on the influence the Third House lobbyists had over legislators?

Molina

I remember when the initiative went through, and there were a lot of people that were very angry about it. But these used to be the old people in politics. Again, people who had been part of the political process for a long time. Very familiar and comfortable with the way politics operated and the way money operated within politics. I must say that I was very unfamiliar with the way it operated at the time. But the. . . .What was interesting to me is that within the framework of the Fair Political Practices Act and Commission and all the authority that it had, I was amazed about how far everybody could get away

with it and what would go on with money and how much influence money had on how things were decided in Sacramento. That was so amazing to me that I used to ask older members who had been there a longer period of time, "What did they do *without* the Fair Political Practices Commission?" Well, one of the things that they used to talk about is the groups and the clubs that they used to have, that the lobbyists used to put together. Every Monday, you know, we had this club. One of them is still existing called Moose Milk.

Vasquez

Moose milk? Clam and chowder?

Molina

Yes. And how they used to carry out. . . . I mean, sometimes there were no rules. I mean, you could have all the members of the committee to dinner the night before, have a fun party and everything else.

Vasquez

Before a vote or before hearings?

Molina

Before a vote. Get them all together. They used to play all kinds of games where they had, like, a \$500 bill under somebody's plate. That was the big winner of the night, you know. Went home with \$500. That was the excitement of going to this dinner. Little things like that. I'm going, "God, I would have really hated being here during that time." So I felt that the system was at least eliminating a lot of those kinds of things. I wasn't around during them. I never saw them, but I've heard about them. And I still felt that the Fair Political Practices Commission and the rules and the laws. . . . I mean, there's still a lot of unethical acts that could still be carried out within the law very easily.

Vasquez

Like?

Molina

Like the way legislation was influenced. The big, big money. Knowing the weaknesses of some of the members. All of those kinds of things. Doing all of

the preparation. I remember in one when. . . . Again, insurance issue. I went in and made my big case about redlining. Took in about eight people to testify. Flew them up. Drew charts, maps of redlining. Made an elaborate case. I think I bored all of those legislators. They weren't all that interested, but they were sort of paying attention. But I made a big case at one of my hearings that I conducted up there. So after I made my case. . . . In fact, the chair was sort of impatient with me. He said, "Are you finished?" "Yes." So they said, "Well, let's call up the opposition." So three-piece suiters went up to the table and sat down, and I was going to listen to them defend their acts as I had just pointed out. So they stood up and they introduced themselves: California independent insurance group opposes this legislation. The next guy, you know, so-and-so representing the California insurance industry. The next. . . . That's all they said. And I said, "Wait a minute, Mr. Chair. They can't do that. They have. . . ." [Laughter] "They can present their opposition in any which way they like, Ms. Molina." Hey, and that's all. . . . [Laughter]

Vasquez

That's all they had to do.

Molina

I couldn't even get a second to my bill. [Laughter] Not even a second. That's how bad it was. And it had. . . . You look at the way this whole group. . . . I mean, these guys gave big money to those members. Big money. And it's still the reason why insurance issues are so stale in this state. Because the people that make the decisions. . . . I mean, there's a lot of money involved. A lot of money involved that's traded back and forth. I used to get angry with it, and I know they used to get angry with me, because, "How dare I would say that would have an influence." Well, I would sit there and say, "My God. These men are. . . ." I mean, just because you are Mexican and you live on this side of town, you've got to pay more for insurance than a drunk driver in Bakersfield has to pay. You've got a good track record, you've never had an accident, you've never had a ticket, and you've got to pay \$800. A drunk driver in Bakersfield pays \$500 for the same coverage. That seems unfair." They didn't get it, though. They didn't think it was. I mean, insurance companies have never had to defend the redlining practices. Others say it doesn't make dollars and cents. It's just not a good thing for us to do. I mean, in those communities

like East L.A., which I was fighting for, they have a lot of accidents. I said, "Who has accidents? The people that come through our community that come to work in L.A. have accidents? Or do the people that live in that community have accidents more than the norm?" They didn't know the difference. And I said, "Isn't that going to be true of any inner city community?"

Vasquez

So you didn't get very far on the insurance legislation?

Molina

No, I didn't. [Laughter]

Vasquez

Your second campaign for your second term?

Molina

Cakewalk.

Vasquez

Why?

Molina

One of the things that, of course, occurs is there's some demographic numbers that very clearly spell out what the situation is going to be. The Fifty-sixth Assembly District is a Democratic district. I don't know how Democratic. Maybe, I guess, 80 percent Democratic district. And the Latino district. . . . It was just like when I won in 1982, my Democratic primary, I basically had won the race. So in 1984, when I was up for reelection, I didn't have any real challenge to worry about, if any challenge at all. I can't remember if I had a challenge that year or not. Again, I guess, unless you really kind of screwed up nobody would challenge you. But I had certainly been a hard worker in that position, and I had raised money. I had done everything so that no one would run against me. I mean, I worked hard at that end of it as well as politically.

Vasquez

When did you start running for the second term? The second day of your first term?

Molina

Right. That's usually what happens. You start running immediately for reelection. In fact, you start raising money right afterwards. You start getting everything prepared so that you're going to have a safe reelection. Yes, you start right away.

Vasquez

Were you successful with raising money?

Molina

I must tell you that one of the things that. . . I was a pretty good fund-raiser up there. In fact, when it comes to Democrats and women and minorities and all that, I did fairly well, because I was fairly aggressive about it. You know, I wasn't shy about asking the insurance industry about giving me money. I mean, why not? They're never going to get a vote from me, that's for sure. They knew it. Certainly, if they wanted . . .

Vasquez

They had to send up two- or three-piece suiters for hearings?

Molina

[Laughter] No. I had none of that. I never promised them any of that. I think that the only thing I ever promised to them was the fact that we could dialogue about some of these issues. That's about it.

Vasquez

Was that something that you let other people know? Did your opposition know that you were always willing to dialogue?

Molina

Oh, absolutely. I always felt that you didn't need to legislate. I really did. I mean, I really come from the concept that, basically, you don't need to legislate. I mean, if you could go to this person and if you have the ability to say, "Here's the problem. You should fix it yourself." That's what I would love. That would be. . . "And if not, I'll legislate against it." I wish I had the power to. . . That would be enough to say, "Oh, my God. I better go back and fix it."

But that wasn't usually the case. I didn't have that kind of capability. But I always wanted to give them the opportunity to correct whatever the problem was. I did that with all legislation. I always talked to the opposition. I always did. I didn't even want to be so totally unfair. I was willing to negotiate what would be real problems. I mean, in the issues of redlining, at one point I was willing to say, "Before you make a blanket statement about who has the accidents, I'm willing to pass legislation that we support a study to look at that. To see if that's true or not true."

Vasquez

They didn't want that? You couldn't get support for that?

Molina

Actually, I could for some of those things. They were willing to do it, but they knew. . . . No matter what that report is, they didn't want any justification. They're going to redline no matter what. They still do today, even though we've voted against it. In a sense, they're redlining all the time. But the point is it's got its influence. The money aspect all the time.

Vasquez

Now what did you perceive to be the difference or the relationship between the lower and the upper house? Between the assembly and the senate then?

Molina

Well, the lower house, or the assembly, was where all the smart, new, creative, intelligent minds entered. The senate was where everyone went to retire and become stale. That's the way we looked at each other. The senate looked at us as a bunch of little smart alecks that weren't good enough to be elected senators. There wasn't this great relationship amongst us. There really is an animosity between the two in their own way. And it happens every time. Like in budget sessions, you know, who's going to take control and take charge. The senate would remind us, particularly us freshman members. It's almost like a little fraternity. I mean, they really pick on you, you know. They're the senior members, and they want to be treated with that kind of respect and they expect you to follow it and so on. And they zap you every so often.

Vasquez

Can you give me an example of this? [Laughter]

Molina

Sure. When we got zapped? One of the. . . One member of the senate, Senator [Alfred E.] Alquist, who is a senior member of the legislature. . . He is in charge of. . . I'm not even sure if it's the appropriate name of the committee, but it's sort of the Ways and Means Committee of the senate. The way they operate, after you get legislation out of the assembly, you've got to run over there and see, particularly, funding, if you can get it out of that committee. The way he does is. . . I mean, it's like he makes the decision by himself whether you're going to get that money or not. Sometimes it can be so cold. I mean, you can't even get a hearing, because he said like, "No. This is not worth funding, so don't bother me with it," kind of thing. Which is a real tough thing to deal with, because you're saying, "Wait a minute. This is entitled to a hearing, and I'm going to protest and all of this." So while many of us as freshman members didn't like it, we were told that that's the way it was. So, you know, don't rock the boat kind of thing. So we were all waiting, and he used to be mean to us. He was so mean to us freshman members. He knew who we were. You had to sign up for legislation that day. It's not like there's an agenda, and you'll get called. I'm not saying he's a mean-spirited person. It's just the way the system operated. But you had to go at seven in the morning and sign up to have your bill heard, right? First come, first served. Supposedly that was the rule. So you figure if you get there at seven o'clock, you might get on by ten o'clock, right? But that's not the way he does it. You just, you know, sign up, and he's going to hear the way he wants to hear it. So you could sit there all day long. And if you're not there when he calls you, then you just lost your bill. Okay, so you have to sit there ready to go. I mean, that's what he did with the freshmen members. He might give a seasoned assembly member. . . Well, he would tell the sergeant, "Go call [Assemblyman John] Vasconcellos. I'm going to be hearing his series of bills next," right? But the rest of us all sit there in the back, the first-year freshman members waiting. . . . I mean, we finally got our bills to the senate side, right? And he's. . . Like I said, we would sign up at seven in the morning, and he would make us sit and wait all day long. He would break for lunch, we'd come back; he'd break for dinner, we'd come back. We're all sitting around waiting. So what happened is

one of the members didn't like the way he did that. I guess he took one of his bills and said, "Forget it. You're not getting the money." He said, "I protest. I challenge you, and I'm challenging the chair," and he did his whole number. And, I mean, Alquist crushed this guy in a minute. You know, [Assemblyman] Steve Peace was the person. So Steve Peace muttered some words at Senator Alquist that probably. . . . I can't remember exactly what they were, but Steve interpreted to me, "You mean old man," which is not exactly the way, I'm sure, Steve said it at the time. [Laughter] Anyway, after that, he killed all of our bills. All of us little freshmen members who were sitting there waiting with bills in hand. . . . He killed them, because of *him*. We were all responsible for his act. And he would not hear any of our bills.

Vasquez

Was it that day or the rest of the session?

Molina

The rest of the session. They were dead. And we couldn't. . . . He can't do that. We all sat there saying, "He can't do that." And he did. He did do it. He doesn't have to hold a hearing. He's the chair. As far as he's concerned, all the rest of the bills are dead coming over from the assembly. And we're all sitting there, right, waiting. We go back and talk to each other and say, "He can't do that." [Laughter] "He can't do that." And it was awful. He could do that.

Vasquez

[Laughter]

Molina

What was frightening for me is I had some wonderful legislation that. . . . "He can't do that." So I had to find a way how can we stop him from doing that. We tried all kinds of things. All of us thought our legislation was important. Anyway, so we really had to work hard and basically go in and understand the rules. That's what he wanted. "You acknowledge me and the way I conduct business here," and all of that. We had to do that. We had to basically beg to have our bills resurrected. The speaker did it on our behalf. But it was unbelievable. I have never been through anything like that and had to take responsibility for what Steve Peace had said. But it happened a lot. But for the

most part, there was also a good working relationship. But as freshman members, it was a different kind of thing. If you were a seasoned assembly member, you had a better relationship. Of course, the assembly members go on to the senate, as Art had gone on from assembly to the senate. So that happens a lot. But even at the same time, when you're a new member, you really. . . . I mean, it's one thing that seasoned assembly members treat you as a little freshman. Well, it's worse when you go over to the senate side. It was. . . . They really felt that you should, I mean, practically not exist. So it was tough.

Vasquez

Didn't you ever make alliances with some of the senior assemblymen so that you would be able to bypass some of that?

Molina

Bypass some of it. I don't know that you could bypass some of it, but there's no doubt. I mean, if you had legislation that was. . . . For example, [Senator] Herschel Rosenthal was a head of the equivalent committee on the senate side that dealt with utilities and commerce. Because I worked closely with [Assemblywoman] Gwen Moore, who was a chair on the assembly side, and I carried a lot of consumer protection stuff for utility for repairs, I always had the ability. . . . Because with Gwen and Herschel's relationship that. . . . When I went over with my legislation, I had that same kind of relationship almost with him. And that was true of certain members. You developed that kind of an automatic relationship with some of the members.

Vasquez

I'll ask you again. Was the Women's Caucus to the degree that it existed in function helpful in trying to get certain legislation through?

Molina

They didn't function that way. They functioned and. . . . In fact, that was one of my frustrations initially, because they functioned more as a social group-of getting together, having dinner. They did. . . . Women legislators getting together with certain lobbyists. . . . They did dinners at each other's homes and things of that sort, but never on issues, because it was both Republican

and Democratic women and feminists and nonfeminists. So we wanted to work with one another and like each other and care about each other, but certainly not to be divided on issues. I felt that we needed to have a stronger Women's Caucus, and that we should take on certain issues. It's interesting, because I felt that as women, even though you may not be a feminist, there are certain issues that are important that, hopefully, Republican and Democratic women come together on. Let's find those opportunities and move forward on them. By the time I left, we were getting closer and closer to it. There were some women that didn't like the issue aspect of the Women's Caucus. They didn't want to be associated with certain issues. And they didn't want, you know. . . . But we did, and toward the end, we became more effective in that regard. We did some legislation on child care, we did some legislation with regard to insurance, and we got together on some legislation. I'm trying to think of the other one that we did. I can't remember what it was, but it was a good one as well. We got together and did some things together, but it wasn't. . . . We could never come out as the Women's Caucus position and all that. They were more social groups. They really are. The Black Caucus, the Hispanic Caucus. They're colleague associations, but you operate under your party caucus-your Democratic or Republican Caucus.

Vasquez

Let's talk a little bit about the leadership in a couple of minutes, but first let's go over your second term. On the second term, the committee draw that you got was chair of Subcommittee on Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities. Is that right?

Molina

Yes.

Vasquez

You were on the Health Committee, the Human Services Committee, Revenue and Taxation, Utilities and Commerce, and, again, the notorious Commission on the Californias.

Molina

[Laughter]

Vasquez

Did that get any better by any chance?

Molina

No.

Vasquez

All right. Tell me about the committees that you felt you were most productive on in your second term.

Molina

Well, on the Health Committee. . . . I wanted to get on the Health Committee because I wanted to get involved in a lot of those issues. Unfortunately, again, in the Health Committee, there wasn't a great discussion or debate on the quality of health care and the issues of health care. Instead it seemed that all the issues were between the professionals. That is, the chiropractors versus the doctors. The podiatrist and the other doctor. I mean, how far are they going to operate? Up to the ankle? Up to the . . . ? That's what we were doing, which was unfortunate. But I was the chair of the Mental Health and Development Disabilities Committee. I felt that, if nothing else, I wanted to really get more of a focus on how detrimental we had been in our inappropriate funding of mental health services and the development disabilities services. So we did a series of hearings on that, encouraged legislation on that. I carried legislation on that to try and get more funding-of course, we were not very successful in that-and try and strengthen the constituency of people to get more funding. These are totally dependent services that we absolutely have to have in the state. There are many people, when they look at cutbacks, who think this is one place they can cut back on. I mean, ever since [Governor] Reagan, they've been cutting back on mental health services. So I try to do more of a leadership thing with that issue and highlighting that, making it an important part of what we were doing: having hearings, trying to negotiate with the governor, and things of that sort. But, again, by that time, I was involved in so many other committees and things like that. I think that is the year that I started what I consider some of my major legislation, which was the high school dropout bill, which was a very,

very important bill for me. Again, there were a lot of committee assignments, a lot of committee work.

Vasquez

You passed that bill on high schools. Tell me about that bill.

Molina

It did pass. I did pass it. What happened is, in trying to focus on the high school dropout dilemma. . . . Certainly when I was in the district and working and I knew about my community, I knew it as a big problem. A big, big problem. What I couldn't understand is why wasn't anyone seeing it and being as alarmed as I was by this big, big problem. So I went back and I pulled a lot of legislation that had passed and not passed on high school dropouts. Very frankly, it was always a funding kind of thing. Always, "We need more money. If we had more money, kids wouldn't drop out."

Vasquez

Counseling?

Molina

Right.

Vasquez

Curriculum?

Molina

I saw it was always minorities who carried the legislation, and it was Democrats who usually voted for it, and it was Republicans that usually killed it. You know, those kinds of things. I was seeing a pattern that instead of, "Hey, let me just introduce it," I thought I had to develop a strategy here. I've got to start focusing on, "How am I going to get this passed?" Not, "Gee, good, you should support it." And it's automatically a good thing. I had to analyze . . .

Vasquez

You were learning to work the system?

Molina

Right. A little bit better. What I had done is I had requested also, the year before that, a study-the high school dropout-in order to do more of a profile, and a demographic profile. Because what I wanted to do was to show the state this was a statewide crisis. That it was. . . . That there's no doubt that there is a special problem in the Chicano community, and that's what I knew. But it was a statewide dilemma. And what it meant . . .

Vasquez

And not just an urban . . .

Molina

Right. What it meant for an impact on the state if all these Chicano children should not get an education. What it will mean for them twenty years from now. They're going to be totally dependent adults.

Vasquez

Much like the case that Raul Yzaguirre made this morning in Washington.

Molina

Is that right?

Vasquez

Before Secretary of Education [Lauro F. Cavazos]. That it's not just a Chicano problem.

Molina

It is not.

Vasquez

Given that by the year 2020, 30 percent of all graduates will be Hispanic. It's going to be a national problem.

Molina

That's right. That's what I wanted to do. Well, what was interesting. . . . So what I started doing is developing the report and the information I needed to arm myself to go and really lobby this-what I wanted to do-comprehensive dropout legislation. Not just the counselor. Not just a pilot program. Not just a

special thing. I wanted to do a whole comprehensive. . . . How do we end this crisis? That's what I wanted to do. I really didn't know exactly all the legislation I was going to introduce. I wanted a package. I also put together from the Assembly Committee on Education Democrats and Republicans, and I started a task force-in which hardly any member came to my task force meetings-on dropouts. But their staffs did. Some of the members came, and they all tapped me on the head and thought it was a fine job that I was doing, and onward, and so on, you know. They were very supportive. So I started pulling together a lot of things. One of the things that I wanted to do as well was to show every member in the assembly that it was their problem. So I asked the state to give me all of the data that they had on high school dropouts, and I wanted it done by . . .

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Molina

That's what was amazing. That even the basic definition of what a dropout was was a difficult one for the state to define. And I thought, "Well, there's my big dilemma here." [Laughter] I said, "Boy, have I got a lot of work ahead of me." So we were able to put together a lot of figures. The best I could get at the time was so-called attrition figures. So I got all of that. I got a lot of members- Democrats and Republicans-to introduce different segments of this comprehensive package. That way there would be many of us who would become a body of people who were going to carry this legislation. It wasn't one member, Gloria Molina, carrying it, but a series of members with different aspects of it. The funding aspect, the counseling aspect. Everything. We were throwing everything in there trying to get it defined for us. So, anyway, in the end-what was amazing-I was very successful with my legislation, even though I really had to moderate it from what I really originally wanted. I got various members to carry other aspects of the legislation. But we defined. . . . Of course, it cost more money, and it was about more counselors and all these special kinds of assessments and needs and things of that sort.

Vasquez

So it wasn't any one particular bill, but a series of legislation that emanates from efforts that you made involving your colleagues?

Molina

That's right.

Vasquez

Do you have a list of all the bills somewhere that . . . ?

Molina

Yes, we have it. We have it in a booklet form. We did the book. . . . The study that we did, "Whatever Happened to the Class of '84?" is a document that outlines all of the demographic data that we needed. [Note: California State Legislature. Assembly. Office of Research. *Dropping Out, Losing Out: The High Cost for California*. 1985-1986 Regular Session. Report prepared at the request of Assembly members Gloria Molina and William Leonard.] Then, with it there is a listing of all the members that carried legislation, which ones passed and were signed into law, and so on. But this was one of the things that I was going to dedicate. . . . Again, this was one of the things that I thought I needed to do. I mean, I always said. . . . When I went up there, I wanted to work on high school dropout legislation. How to prevent it. So I said to myself, "This was only phase one of a whole. . . ." Of what I was going to dedicate myself to becoming a stronger expert in, and moving this legislation to evaluating the impact, and so on. Little did I know that I was going to be defeated very shortly, very soon. So I go through this whole process in the assembly. When I sent out. . . . Right before the day that it was going to come before the entire assembly, I sent out the dropout statistics for every single member in the legislature of the schools in their own area, which they got very angry about. "How could my community . . . ?" Republicans standing up and saying, "This is not true of my high school." And I said, "Granted, it isn't a dropout rate, because that isn't defined. The state of California has yet to define what a dropout is. But it's an attrition rate, and I want you to know what it is. We can say that so much of this attrition rate is actual dropout." They were still offended by those figures, because dropouts existed in the black and the Chicano community, not in their white high schools that were, you know, award-winning and champs and all. But it existed everywhere. It was a statewide dilemma. Well, I'll tell you that out of the members in the assembly of the 80-I think I got 76 votes. I'm not sure exactly, but I got great support for this legislation. And it was big money. It had money attached to it and

everything, but a lot of it was because, I think, the way we showed to every member that it had implications for everybody. It wasn't just a program, a pilot program for the Chicano community, it was for everybody. It was now going to get the Department of Education to start keeping this data, keeping these statistics, and holding schools accountable. That was very important. They liked those kinds of things about it. So then I went over to the senate, and I did my same thing there. You know, I went over and got all the dropout data for all the members on the senate side and ran around lobbying it. I had lots of support from various educational groups. I got widespread support on the senate side as well. So I was just so happy. I mean, I'm on my way, and this is what I'm going to do. So I got my legislation out, and I got it over on its merry way to the governor. Amongst these two years-while all of this was going on-is also the beginning of this huge black cloud over East L.A., better known as the East L.A. prison. There is. . . . We know that they're going to put a prison in L.A. County. My automatic suspiciousness. . . . "Aha. We have to be on guard, because I know what they'll do. They'll put it in our neighborhood, and we got them all. And that's what they're going to try and do." So we were keeping an eye on it all the time when they first came out and started doing some hearings. When they started looking at sites. . . . We were keeping an eye on the Department of Corrections, because we knew that we might be subject to such a thing.

Vasquez

Subject to . . .

Molina

Subject to being one of these candidates for the site of the next state prison. Anyway, that went on and on and on. As it came out, we were. East L.A. was being pointed to as a site, and I was fighting it. And I've been successful in fighting it in the legislature.

Vasquez

How did you fight it?

Molina

Well, they had determined what the site was, and it was going to be East L.A. And I was able to can. . . . To make sure that that legislation never got out of our committee in the assembly. I lobbied, and I . . .

Vasquez

Which committee was this?

Molina

What's called the Criminal . . .

Vasquez

Criminal Justice Committee?

Molina

Criminal Justice Committee. I made sure that it got bottled up there. And I didn't . . .

Vasquez

How?

Molina

Because I lobbied the members, and I worked hard. Everytime I went up there, I fought the state. I brought in people to go up there and testify, and I always got it killed on the assembly side. They knew that they weren't going to get it out of the assembly side. Not while it was in my district.

Vasquez

The conventional wisdom is the speaker was willing to let that happen. In fact, he wanted that prison in your district.

Molina

Not as yet.

Vasquez

Not as yet?

Molina

Not as yet.

Vasquez

What was your relationship with the speaker at this point?

Molina

It was sort of okay, but not great. But if he was going to sacrifice anybody, I was probably the first one that was going to get zapped.

Vasquez

How did he get to where . . . ? Is there anything to the conventional wisdom that, in fact, Speaker of the Assembly Brown was ready to allow that prison be put in your district to teach you a lesson?

Molina

Yes. Yeah, I supported a candidate that. . . . I opposed a candidate that he supported for the assembly.

Vasquez

Tell me about that.

Molina

Richard Polanco. Well, I was going to tell you about the dropout legislation in relationship to the prison real quickly.

Vasquez

Oh, okay. Yes.

Molina

Because what happened is in the end of that session, the senate. . . . The governor . . .

Vasquez

All right. Go ahead.

Molina

It's amazing. All this time we've put in. [Laughter]

Vasquez

A year. Just a year, Gloria. [Laughter]

Molina

Anyway. . . . So then. . . . What happened is the governor was playing real hardball on the prison issue. I wasn't able. . . . He has not been able to get it out of the committee. But it was on the senate side, and they kept on going to sneak it into a bill, and all of this. It was like the last hours of the last day. So the governor's people came to me, and they gave me a yellowtablet and said, "Write what you want." I said, "What are you talking about?" They said, "The governor will give you anything you want, but the prison in East L.A." I said, "There is not a thing I'm going to tell you. There's nothing. You can't buy me on anything. I'm not taking a prison in East L.A." And then the governor started taking away goodies from the other Democratic members. Things that had already been promised were all of a sudden being denied. Funding for a park, this or that, this . . .

Vasquez

The Alquist approach?

Molina

Right. [Laughter] They were coming to me and saying, "Oh, Gloria. The governor is going to do this." Whining, you know. And I said, "Hey, I'm not going to take it. Just hold on strong. I'm not going to take a prison in East L.A.," and so on. So then they got real rough with me. They called me up, and they said. . . . What did he say? He said, "There's one of your bills up there right now, and it's a good bill. I hate to see it killed."

Vasquez

Was it the governor?

Molina

Because . . .

Vasquez

Was it the governor himself?

Molina

This is the governor's person. The governor, of course, never makes such threats.

Vasquez

Right.

Molina

"I hate to see it vetoed."

Vasquez

Which one was he referring to? Do you remember?

Molina

My high school dropout bill.

Vasquez

Aha. Okay.

Molina

And it was one of the most painful situations. We had worked so hard. It had almost unanimous support. My staff. . . . María [Ochoa], who had worked on it. . . . I mean, she was horrified at the thought that this was going to go down the tubes because of a prison. She was sort of, "Take the prison. This is so much more important." And I said, "I'm not going to allow myself to be bullied by the governor in this fashion. This is good legislation. It can stand on its own. It got bipartisan support. I'm not going to allow him to do that. If I do that, then I'm useless around here." Besides, I was saying to my other Democratic members, "Hey, stand strong, and don't let the governor do this to you," right? I'm not going to sit there and wimp out on anybody. So I was very angry. I said, "If you destroy this, you will really hurt yourself in the long run," and all of that. They tried everything. We're talking about midnight. It was now midnight. This was a stall on the budget that goes on almost every year. And he vetoed that legislation. They didn't get the prison bill. I didn't get the high school dropout legislation. That was a long story.

Vasquez

I was a little nervous there that I hadn't found some of the stuff. Now I know why. All right. Good. That's a good story.

Molina

[Laughter]

Vasquez

It's an important one.

Molina

It was an important one. It was a tragic one. But, anyway, that's how. . . . That year we had no prison.

Vasquez

All right. You're still an assemblywoman. What in the world made you decide to run for the Los Angeles City Council?

Molina

Did you want to talk about the prison issue and what happened with the speaker?

Vasquez

Yes. Let's finish that one. I thought we'd pick it up from this end, but let's finish that out.

Molina

All right. Because that's much later, again. What happened is the following year. . . . Again, we're moving through our legislation. The governor is still going to move through his prison legislation.

Vasquez

This was '85 or '86?

Molina

This was '85.

Vasquez

'Eighty-five, all right.

Molina

So here we go at it again. Now, what has happened is that Richard Alatorre. . . . What had happened was Councilman [Arthur K.] Art Snyder was going to resign. Very frankly, I don't believe he's going to resign. But I started talking to people down here and said, "I would like to run for that seat." So I started talking to people and thought, "This will be. . . ." But people started talking to me and felt that I should run. I could win and all of that. Anyway, I started putting out feelers that I might run for that council seat. I talked to Art, I talked to Congressman Roybal, and I talked to various people about it. And then . . .

Vasquez

Art Torres you're talking about, not Art Snyder?

Molina

Right. Art Torres, yes. So then later on, I get a visit from Richard Alatorre, and he tells me that-because I had also talked to him-that he's going to run. I sort of like. . . . That's it. "I want your endorsement," and so on. And I knew that there was just no way I could run now. I mean, Richard, by far, he was in a leadership role and everything else. So that wiped out my opportunity to run.

Vasquez

Did you resent that?

Molina

No, not really. Because he was in a leadership position. I mean, you know. . . . I didn't. . . . I guess if there's anything to resent, it's the fact that he just *told* me.

Vasquez

But you also had a disagreement with his style of politics.

Molina

Yes, but even then. . . . And that was a continuation of that disagreement, because Richard was never going to let me in and discuss things with me. Even though as much as I wanted to, that wasn't going to happen. Richard was still,

"That's the way things are, and you're going to take it, like it or not." And I wasn't going to be foolish enough to fight him on that. I didn't like the fact that that's what he did. He just came over and told me. "This is what I'm going to do. What do you think? Let's discuss it." It was, "It's done."

Vasquez

At least humor me, is that right?

Molina

[Laughter] And it was fine. You know, I accepted. I didn't. . . . I mean, I could continue working in the state legislature, and it was just going to be fine. Of course, then the big focus was about who was going to run for his seat. Again, it was one of those things that I didn't necessarily want to get involved in. I knew a lot of people accused me of being a power builder, power. . . . that I just wanted to be *the* power broker. But I really wasn't all that interested until I found out who their candidate was. And when I found out it was Richard Polanco, it was a real tough one for me to deal with.

Vasquez

Why?

Molina

Again, the basics. The very same reasons that Nineteen eighty-two started all over again. It was, "This was not the person that should be serving in this role." I mean, these seats are so limited. I just. . . . I always felt that Richard Polanco is not the kind of person that should be serving in this kind of a role, because I just don't think that he really will be representative and meet the needs of people. I felt strongly about that in 1982, and I didn't feel any differently in 1985 [and] '86. I really didn't. I know that's an unfair thing to say, but that was my very firm feeling about it. So I was sort of hopeful that somebody else would step up. At that time, Larry González was a school board member. Larry said he was interested, and I said, "Hallelujah!" At least Larry is issue oriented. I think he would be interested, he'd be good, and all of that. It was a real sad situation for me, because I thought Larry was going to run. I found out he was part of the political games. I should have been a little bit smarter. I will never forgive Larry for it, but I always felt Larry was pretty much

the stalking-horse for Polanco in trying to get me off so that I wouldn't come up with a candidate or anyone. So as soon as the filing was going to close, Larry pulled back and said, "No, I'm not going to run." I was sort of put in a box all by myself. It was an interesting kind of situation. It made me very angry. That was a very cruel thing to do when they knew how strongly I felt about him.

Vasquez

They were not going to let you be a player, is that it?

Molina

Well . . .

Vasquez

You wanted to be a player. You were a player, as an assembly person.

Molina

I think that as an elected person, I should have at least been entitled to have a say. Now, granted, I mean. . . . I know that people don't look at it. . . . I just want to say my say, and then if you're going to vote against me, I want to know why. I think if I'm going to vote against you, I'm going to tell you why. But they weren't going to let me even have a voice. And you bet I resented that. When it was done. . . . Sometimes it was done very straightforward, and other times in a very sneaky fashion. The thing with Larry González and Polanco was one of the most deceitful things that I could see happening. It made me angry about lots of people that I felt were part of it. Of course, you know, Larry says, "Oh, no, no, no. That's not. . . . I just changed my mind, Gloria."

Vasquez

Who were some of those people?

Molina

"I just changed my mind." I said, "I find that hard to believe."

Vasquez

Who were some of those people?

Molina

Friends that I had: Leticia Quezada, at that time, was part of that group; Sandy Serrano-Sewell, who had been a longtime supporter; Art Torres had been a part of that group; and Larry. Then all of a sudden, he just backed off. And there was like . . .

Vasquez

Did all the other people automatically go behind Polanco?

Molina

Yes.

Vasquez

That would make you think they all sort of knew about it?

Molina

Yes. Well, I mean, it was interesting that they didn't find any discomfort with the issue. It just. . . . I mean, even though initially they had disagreed with me, "Oh, well, come on, Gloria. Go ahead and let Polanco run. What's wrong with Polanco?" I would say, "Here's the reason that he's wrong. What do you think? You know that's how he's. . . ." "Well, yes, he's not good on that issue."

Vasquez

Let me see if I can summarize it. You don't feel that he really had grasp of issues or had strong positions?

Molina

I feel that he has no integrity to pursue the issues of that community.
[Laughter]

Vasquez

That he's beholden to a group of people that pretty much . . .

Molina

And beholden to wherever the power is.

Vasquez

As you told me, he plays to power. All right. I just want to get it straight.

Molina

[Laughter] They had sort of tried to make somewhat of a case. But I felt so strongly about it. Anyway, I felt a lot of those people were a part of it. I resented that decision. Anyway, I was going to just back off, you know. You lose, you back off, and the whole thing. So I continued on my way. What had happened is that Mike Hernández had filed, because he felt he wanted to run for this seat. He started coming to me. He knew what had happened. He got feedback of what was going on and started coming to me and said, "Gloria, you know, I'm going to run. I think I have a chance of winning." I said, "You don't have a chance. You're going to lose. There's no way you can possibly win. I mean, everybody is going to be behind him. They're devious, so they're going to do everything they can to win. You don't have a chance." "Oh, but if you would endorse me, if you would support me, I can." Back-and-forth. I said, "First of all, you'll never raise the money." And I set up a whole series of reasons why he could never win. "You don't have any endorsements. You don't have any of these things."

Vasquez

Ironic position for you to be in, isn't it?

Molina

Exactly. Telling him all the things that, of course, are always said and had been said to me in 1982. So I started talking and working with him. I certainly felt in getting to know him more and more. . . . Although I had known him, I really had not worked with him that closely in the past. And I said, "Let me see what I can do." I thought he would be a good person to be up in Sacramento. So I started working on it and putting together some ideas, some people, some money, some volunteers. And before you knew it, it was a full-fledged, down and dirty campaign, on which I was spending a heck of a lot of time. And with it . . .

Vasquez

And your own campaign money?

Molina

Uh-huh. [Affirmative] It made a lot of people angry. It made Richard angry, it made Art Torres angry, it made Larry González angry, and it made Willie Brown and the leadership very angry, because their cakewalk candidate was no longer a cakewalk. He was going to have to raise money, he was going to have to work, he was going to have to walk the district, he was going to have to fight for endorsements, and he did. We gave him a run, and we almost beat him. Three hundred votes difference. Almost beat him. So that's what made Willie angry. Because Willie said, "Back off," and I told him no.

Vasquez

He came to you? He talked to you directly?

Molina

Uh-huh. [Affirmative]

Vasquez

What was his rationale? Or was there one?

Molina

His rationale was, "That's who we want." My rationale was, "That's not what the community wants. He's bad news for that community." I said, "I don't think that. . . . I disagree with you on that. I'm not going to back off."

Vasquez

He's been reelected in that community since.

Molina

Oh, I know. There hasn't been any challenge. No, we lost.

Vasquez

Do you think he has turned out as bad as you thought he would?

Molina

Oh, absolutely.

Vasquez

You haven't changed your mind on that one?

Molina

Not at all. There are more facts now than ever. Richard Polanco was elected in a special election, went up, was sworn in, was appointed to the Criminal Justice Committee.

Vasquez

Right.

Molina

After taking a position against the prison in his literature, in the community, after doing everything, two hours after he was sworn into office to uphold the law and to be honest and to tell the truth, he voted for the prison in East L.A. and got it out of the committee.

Vasquez

His argument, as I remember, was that it would get a full hearing.

Molina

That was where he got a full hearing, but he wanted to have it heard before the full assembly. Well, that's a fine excuse. But Willie told him to do it, and he did it. He followed his orders like any other little soldier that Willie has. Against his own community.

Vasquez

So that's where the acrimony begins with Speaker Brown.

Molina

Uh-huh. [Affirmative]

Vasquez

Now, how does that reflect in your race for the . . . ? Let me ask you another question before that.

Molina

[Laughter]

Vasquez

Did that make you think that perhaps staying in the assembly might not be a long venture?

Molina

No. Actually it wasn't that. I knew that what I . . . One thing that I have learned, and maybe it comes from my background with my father and that my father feels very firmly, is that you are responsible for your actions. I felt that, "I'll take a licking. And if I do, I'm responsible for it, and I've got to take it. If I'm going to be a backbencher from now on in the assembly, I'm just going to bite down hard and take it." I had lost. Now that wasn't going to change anything for me as far as my issues and anything else. But I knew . . .

Vasquez

How effective do you think you would have been had you tried to stay in the assembly?

Molina

I think I could have been equally effective. The reason is because the issues weren't going to change all that much. I was never going to be a power player in the assembly ever, because I didn't fit in. No matter what, I wasn't going to do the little things that it took to be a power player in the legislature. There were a lot of people that had been there twenty-two years and are not power players because they just. . . They do their thing, but they're not on the leadership. I was not on my way to a leadership role there.

Vasquez

[Laughter] No. That's obvious.

Molina

But I was able to carve out an area as far as my own district. Let me tell you, there are many people up there, including Republicans, who no matter what. . . I mean, you may disagree with them, but depending on how you play out that game was a matter of respect for them. I don't care what anyone says, no one could deny that I was doing my job in protecting my district as fiercely as I protected it as far as the prison issue or anything else. As for as my involvement with Polanco, I wasn't the first one. I mean, am I going to get blackballed when I oppose the leadership? I mean, as far as when I first went

in in 1982, I mean, Maxine had gotten the speaker [to say] that nobody was going to support Polanco or me in the assembly-that was the idea-except for Richard. He's the only one that got dispensation. Maxine and Richard. Maxine for me, and Richard Alatorre for Polanco. But on a regular basis, members will participate in those. But all of a sudden, I was going to be treated differently. But I knew I was going to be a backbencher, because it wasn't just that. It was going to be a whole series of things, and I was starting to challenge even more. I was starting to challenge the lack of leadership in certain areas. That was a problem beyond just, you know, in East L.A. I was concerned about why we weren't moving forward a stronger health agenda. Why are we following the dictates of the governor? Why aren't we taking a more aggressive leadership role? In caucus, I was starting to raise a lot. . . . And I don't think. . . . You know, I wasn't going to endear myself to that leadership. But I felt the leadership was getting very stale, which is why we had so many initiatives. Why we will continue to have more initiatives. Why the insurance initiative came about. Because you have a stale legislature. But the point is that's not really why I left. When I was. . . . Richard had run for the council seat, and now he was there. It was a situation where I'm up there, and I really loved the education and the health care issues and those things I really wanted to start focusing on. I didn't have any problem with the fact that I wasn't on my way to be big leadership, but I still had a vote. I still had a voice. I still had committee participation. I was going to still be able to participate in legislation. And I wasn't. . . . I didn't feel hindered in any way. I guess other people may have looked at me that way, as sort of the walking wounded up there, but I didn't feel that way at all. So when the seat was coming up in this district-the First [Council] District-because of the MALDEF redistricting suit. . . . When I heard who was going to run . . . [Laughter]

Vasquez

Larry González?

Molina

I said, "Now, that can't be right. That can't" So, I mean. . . . I started talking, because there were a couple of people that I heard were going to run. So I went to them, and I said, "Aren't you going to run for this seat?"

Vasquez

Who were those people?

Molina

One was [Daniel] Dan García, who is a lawyer and, at that time, was part of the [Los Angeles City] Planning Commission. I had heard that he was one of the people that was going to run. And I had liked the things that Dan had done, and I liked his independence and his strength and his intelligence. I thought he would be a perfect person, you know, who. . . . In the city council and was one of our elected officials. I went to him, and he basically said no, he couldn't. He had personal problems, and financially it just wasn't what he wanted to really do at the time.

Vasquez

Who was the other one?

Molina

The other one was [Edward J.] Ed Avila. I went to Ed, and I said, "Are you going to run?" He said, "No, no. That's not what I want to do." And I said, "But Ed, it would be perfect if you do this." Both of them lived in the district. The whole thing. These were people that I thought were going to run. And they didn't. So, again, that's. . . . I started looking at it and looking at it and kept hoping that someone was going to step up to the plate other than Larry, and I really had a problem with Larry. I had a problem because of what he had done before. You know, that "bright, young, great" leadership person that I thought he was became a very different person when he played out that last game for Polanco. So I didn't have any faith in him whatsoever. So little by little, I started looking at it, and I started thinking about it. I was going to get married. We were. . . . I thought about it, and I said, "It might not be bad." The only thing that I really had a lot of reservations with is here I am. I'm going to come down, and I'm going to work on the crime issue, which I'm going to deal with and a lot of services-municipal services-that people should be getting in my district. I no longer work on health care issues . . .

Vasquez

Or education.

Molina

I no longer work on education issues. That was the part that was very hard for me to separate from. So as I started looking at it. . . . Then I just finally decided to run for the seat.

Vasquez

All right. Did you get married? It might not be so bad to come back.

Molina

[Laughter] So I did decide that I finally should run for this seat. It was really one of the best decisions I made. It really was.

Vasquez

Let's get into that the next time. But let me ask you a dirty pool question to end the day's session with. This is from a 1988 interview: "What is your prediction as to Willie Brown's longevity as speaker?" Molina: I don't think he's destined to remain much longer as speaker. I may have been one of the first to say the emperor wears no clothes while all the others were trying to say that was not the case. But little by little, he's being disrobed, and people are seeing him for what he is. Little by little, his power is being eroded, and little by little, people are finding themselves ashamed of what they've been involved with for such a long time." Now, in 1990, halfway through the year, it would not seem that his power has totally eroded.

Molina

That's for sure. [Laughter]

Vasquez

It would seem that he has something of a longevity before him as speaker or at least in the political circles of California. What does that tell you? What does that tell us about either the political process, the man's talent, or your political judgment? [Laughter]

Molina

Well, first of all, obviously, my political judgment is really offbase there. Number one, because that was so erroneous as far as the conclusion, although when and how that will happen, it will happen.

Vasquez

This was about the time of the "gang of five."

Molina

Yes, "gang of five" problem. What it does say is this man is an absolutely brilliant man, which is something I've never ever denied the speaker. He is a very capable person. If there's anyone who understands and knows how to manipulate power, it is Willie Brown. I think that. . . . And that's an admirable trait of anybody and, certainly, an adversary. One of the things that he has been able to do is to manipulate a situation so that he never has any blame placed on him for all the ills of this state in a leadership role. He takes a walk on all of it. It's amazing that as The ethics problems that continue to rise in the assembly, the distance that he has placed on all of them. The lack of leadership issues. I mean, he's a leader, but he's not responsible for the leadership of insurance, of education, of health care, of funding. He's an amazing and very talented person, skirting all of those things. Because he plays the game so very well. He really does. That doesn't make him good, it doesn't make him effective, and it doesn't make him a good leader for the people. It makes him a good leader for Willie Brown. It says a lot about our process, what people can get away with, and how that slickness and that presentation is everything else. I mean, it is He has been able to not allow any of the misery of that state legislature to land on him. To him, he is still powerful. Powerful of what? No budget? Powerful of what? A health care system that is rotting from within? Powerful of what? An educational system that still cannot get the proper funding? Or build enough schools? Or recognize where the priority should be as far as education? A higher [educational] system that is getting more and more expensive every day and more and more exclusive every day? What? That's a leader? Now, again, does he not have the emperor's robes? Absolutely. He can walk through San Francisco and parade all day long, and people will think he's a marvelous man. But it's all glitz, glamour, show, smoke, mirrors, everything. You name it. There's no substance there.

1.14. TAPE NUMBER: VIII, Side One (August 16, 1990)

Vasquez

Councilwoman Molina, last time we were talking about your decision to run for the city council and something about the race for the city council. Is there anything more you would like to elaborate on on the campaign and the race? You attributed-as did others-the significant victory over Larry González to a pinpoint, accurate campaign strategy that you and Pat Bond, I believe, worked out. Can you talk a little bit more about that campaign?

Molina

Sure. What's interesting is that. . . . What's always fascinating about campaigns is that there really. . . . It's a lot of technical work. It's a lot of strategy that has to be involved. We had a very short period of time, and we had to put together how we're going to get to the voter that was going to go out on a special election when nothing else was going on. How we were going to get that person focused to say, "It's important for me to go out and vote. This campaign is important. These people that are candidates are important to make a decision between." So we had to go through an awful lot of work of trying to decide what the so-called sure voter is. We were expecting a 20 percent turnout. At some point, we upped it a little bit, but we were basically saying, "If it's a 20 percent turnout, what is it going to take for us to win this campaign?" And when you have a. . . . It wasn't a large voting base, but it was a voting base. You have to shrink it down to find out who those sure voters are and see how you can target them and how you can get to them and how you can get them in on the process. We did this through. . . . We figured out that list, and then we did what was called an absentee vote by mail. We had a very well designed absentee vote by mail.

Vasquez

Who did you target for that?

Molina

We targeted the sure voter, the elderly (the senior citizen population that proved to be a good voter) and homeowners in the area. We sent out. . . . I can't remember exactly how many it was. It wasn't that many. It was like forty-five hundred, which is a bet. . . . Forty-five hundred of these absentee ballots were sent out, and then we tracked them. We were monitoring every bit of it. When they came back to us, we sent in the application for them. It

was a very well defined plan. In the end, if you remember, I mean, I did very, very well on the absentee ballots. It was a huge margin there. Then after that, it was the same kind of thing. "How do we find those sure voters? How do we keep those voters on our side? How do we make sure that on election day, this is going to be important enough for them to go and vote?" Because, like I said, there was nothing else going on to remind them that it was election day. Other than our mail and things that were going on, it wasn't like there was a big hype on the news or anything else everybody knew, knowing that it was an election day. So that's what we did.

Vasquez

But it was an interesting election, because there was acrimony between yourself and supporters of González. That attracted some attention. It was an interesting race.

Molina

Well, what made it interesting is the press kept, you know, talking about it. Of these two Latinos running against each other. They kept doing. . . . Whether it was Richard Alatorre, who I was really running against, or whether it was Larry González. They kept fanning the fire, in a sense. And we did a lot of that kind of thing. Of course, it was a money situation as well, which has always been a troubling part of politics for me. It was a short campaign in which you needed so much money in order to get it done. Very frankly, probably one of my weaknesses has been. . . . Not that I can't raise money, because I can. But the quick money. . . . I mean, they're. . . . My opposition has always been better to get the quick money. And that is business money. In this instance, developer money and all of that. I mean, I have to get ten people to give me, you know, a \$50 check, which is a lot more work than having one developer write you a \$500 or a \$1,000 check. They've been very good at it. So the money thing . . .

Vasquez

And yet you raised more money than Larry González?

Molina

That's right. In smaller increments. That's what I'm saying. I'm good at it, because I work it very hard. But it is a tough, tough thing for me to do. It's

easier for them to do. For example, we did everything. Larry González hired people to work; I had volunteers. He hired phoners; I had volunteers. So we had our dollars or our money stretching a lot more, even though he had more money coming in. It was interesting. I was able to keep up competitively financially with him. That was also true in 1982 and also in '87. As I look forward to other races, I have to. . . . That's a strength that we have. And we worked hard at making sure that that all works. But I think the most significant part of the '87 campaign is the way we had to plot every part of it. How we were going to focus on the issues, what the issues were going to be, how we weren't going to let them take anything away from us from the standpoint of issues, and how we were going to communicate. And it was tough, because if I would have only had Larry González to look at as an opponent, it would have been one thing. But I had Richard Alatorre to deal with.

Vasquez

In what sense?

Molina

Richard's a tough opponent. I mean, you know, Richard can be. . . . I mean, it's all politics, so I guess it's all fair. But, for example, certain things. . . . Like I had gotten an endorsement from. . . . I couldn't get any of the police organizations to endorse me. I never can. Richard had threatened them. [Laughter] "Touch her, and. . . ." And they were very blunt about it.

Vasquez

Threatened them with what?

Molina

With whatever. He, you know. . . . The police protective league was absolutely intimidated out of talking to me. Very frankly, they finally told me that, "Hey, Richard's a councilman, and you're not."

Vasquez

And he was chairman of the . . .

Molina

"He's told us to stay out of it, and we're out of it. Don't bother sending anymore. You're not going to get this endorsement." So I was able to get this other endorsement of law enforcement, which was a statewide organization, and I succeeded in getting that endorsement.

Vasquez

What was the issue that most determined the outcome of the election, do you think?

Molina

One of the most important was certainly the leadership role that I played in the prison. That was significant to this community and to the district, but only because of my involvement already with many of them in that regard. But I also think that one of the things that we were trying to very clearly state-or the message that we were trying to deliver-was the issue of leadership. And our mail was on that. Our message was based on, "How do we communicate to these voters that they're going to have. . . . That there are differences here? That you don't have leadership on one hand, and you really have leadership on another?" I know that sounds self-serving, but that's a campaign. That's what we needed to communicate. We needed to point that out. And we talked about . . .

Vasquez

[The difference] between an assemblywoman and a member of the board of education?

Molina

Yes. And, well. . . . Or a record.

Vasquez

A record. I see.

Molina

A record. I mean, I talked about the leadership role that I played on the prison issue. The leadership role, for example, in malathion, when Boyle Heights was being sprayed and what happened. The leadership issue on crime and the things that we had done in that regard. And, certainly, the independence of

that leadership. So those were what we were telling voters. We also know that it was an appealing message, because I knew the community and I knew what people were looking for. It wasn't as though. . . . It wasn't like we were making up things. That was the real me. But we did have to, every so often, point out that as compared to my opponent, that independent leadership is not there. And so . . .

Vasquez

So he got painted with the Alatorre brush? What assets were you able to bring into that campaign from your years of experience and your connections in the assembly?

Molina

Well, I was able to. . . . Certainly, the relationship with a lot of the assembly members. That I was able to use endorsements as such. But for the most part, it was basically assisting me in fund-raising or things of that sort. The endorsements were not as critical in this kind of a race. But if they had contacts with anyone that could assist me in those endorsements of people. . . . And I would do that. I would-I mean, you know-ask various assembly members who could help me with fund-raising or endorsements here locally. So I did do that. It wasn't. . . . I mean, there wasn't anything great that I was able to offer as an assembly person to the campaign. It was more of my grass-roots direct involvement in the community from before as an assemblywoman that I was able to bring in the volunteers and the issues that I had been involved in. All of those kinds of things were part of the campaign.

Vasquez

What was the reception that you got? Well, let me preface that by saying when Councilman Alatorre was elected, there was what some people called almost a coronation reception and activity. What was the reception that you got, being the first Latina to get on the council? Was there as much attention to you in the press and that sort of thing? What was the reception you got from the other members?

Molina

Oh, I think that I got. . . . In fact, I thought it was sort of overstaged, if you ask me. I got a wonderful reception when I got here. I think that we sort of. . . . What we were looking at in our campaign. . . . We felt that we had a very good chance of overcoming Larry González in the primary. That is, we would not be in a runoff. But a lot of it would be how well we were able to implement each aspect of that strategy. So when we won, I think what happened besides, you know, being the first Latina, I think there was that element that was important to a lot of people. But I think to political observers here in city hall and to the council members and to the bureaucrats and everything, that was very surprising to them. So I think they were in awe of how effective we were in winning in the primary, because everyone who had political wisdom had said, "This is a runoff." So we had that kind of reception, with people just being very impressed with the campaign we put together and all of that. I had an awful lot of good relationships on the council to begin with.

Vasquez

With whom?

Molina

With people. Joy Picus is someone who had been a friend and a supporter for many years as well as [Councilwoman] Pat Russell. I had had, in an indirect sense, sort of support from [Councilman] [Gilbert] Gil Lindsay from before, but [Councilman] Mike Woo had endorsed me, [Councilman] Zev Yaroslavsky had endorsed me, and [Councilman] Marvin Braude had endorsed me. [Councilman Ernani] Bernardi did not endorse me, but was very supportive in his own way. So I already had good ties into many of the council members. [Councilman] John Ferraro did not endorse me, but he is someone who endorsed me in 1982. So we had, really, kind of a good relationship, in a sense.

Vasquez

Councilman Joel Wachs was ecstatic when you got elected. Why was that?

Molina

[Laughter]

Vasquez

His statement to the press was that this would stop a lot of power plays that he saw were being [played] in the council since Alatorre had gotten on there. < [Note: Clayton, Janet. *Molina Victory May Give Council More of Tilt Toward Slow-growth*. *Los Angeles Times* (February 5, 1987): II, 1 .]

Molina

Well, you have to keep it in the context of what he was angry about at that time.

Vasquez

Tell me about that.

Molina

He was angry that Richard Alatorre had gotten on council to control the reapportionment plan and . . .

Vasquez

Created a Latino district?

Molina

Well, by a fuerzitas [with a little bit of force].

Vasquez

Yes, but a Latino district?

Molina

Right. And that had to be created. The fallout of that was going to be Joel Wachs just getting to be really axed out of where he was and being placed somewhere else. That really made him angry, forcing him into a kind of runoff situation. So he was very angry by Richard and by Richard's style. That, I guess, has cooled somewhat now. I mean, it's not the same situation at all. But he. . . . And it was very clear. I mean, Richard. . . . A lot of council members knew that it wasn't. . . . If it was really Larry González, the independent candidate out there. . . . A lot of people saw the connection from Richard Alatorre to Larry, and they were concerned about that. I think that a lot of people enjoy being supporters of other candidates, and that happens every so often. But what we don't see on council even today is that you don't have people who

are connected like they are in the state legislature, that they're like in teams. Here, you have fifteen council members and fifteen very different opinions for the most part, even though a Marvin Braude supported [Councilwoman] Ruth Galanter. She's not 100 percent with him all the time. I think what they were seeing is that many of these council members were worried about that style coming onto the council. That was troublesome for them. So some of them were very elated about that. Like I said, a good many of them were endorsing me and supporting me. I think they were concerned about Richard's style. I mean, I didn't dialogue with a lot of them about it. I know that Zev endorsed me, and he wasn't very happy with Richard at the moment or at the time. But I don't know what their battle might have been about. But I think there was a fear of what Richard was doing and that this was kind of increasing his power play on the council. Maybe they were sort of relieved that didn't happen. I don't know.

Vasquez

Did you see this as a mandate to come onto the council and oppose Richard on most things?

Molina

On what?

Vasquez

On any number of things?

Molina

You know, it's interesting again. It goes back to this whole thing. Richard and I will continue to always battle when it comes to campaigns, but we don't battle as far as issues. For the most part, our issues have been in sync and they continue to be. More recently, of course, we. . . . I've always had a problem with Richard's style as he legislates. We have very different styles as we legislate.

Vasquez

Flesh those out for me, will you?

Molina

Well . . .

Vasquez

In a concise . . .

Molina

In a concise way. Richard operates behind the scenes, and he knows what the outcome is going to be on certain issues even before they're presented in the public setting. He's not going to upset that outcome since he knows what it's going to be, and he's not going to challenge it. He operates very tightly that way. I don't appreciate it, because I don't believe that necessarily to be the way to operate. It's almost like sweetheart deals. You know, it's like going with the opposition and running things by them. If they don't like it, "Okay, I won't bring it up." I know that when I was in the state legislature and had tremendous problems with liquor stores and bars in Boyle Heights, and I had had it. I went in there, and I said, "From now on, you know, three strikes and you're out. You get three violations in a bar, then we close you up. You get three violations in a liquor store, then it's. . . ." You know, in one year. . . . They don't do that now. And I said, "Three violations in one year, I think, is pretty bad." So I introduced legislation toward that. [Note: A.B. 2980, 1983-1984 Reg. Session.] And I remember going to a committee and Richard just calling me back and saying, "It's not going to go." I said, "What do you mean it's not going to go? I want to present my bill. I want a hearing on this bill, and I have every intention of trying to get the votes." And he said, "It's not going to go." He wouldn't let me have a hearing. And I got angry by that. So he wanted. . . . "Here's what we're going to do. We're going to take this out. We're going to put this in. We're going to take this out. We're going to do this. We're going to do that, so you can save face. You can go to Boyle Heights and say, 'I tried. I did much.'" I didn't like that at all. That was very distressing to me. I mean, not that I had not been introduced to it. But I said, "This is a very real problem. I'm not going to allow the beer industry to knock me out on this one. I'd rather go with it straightforward, take my chances. If I lose, I lose. What's going back? Something that's watered down that's meaningless out there." So that's what. . . . I went up there, and I lost my bill. I continued to fight it and all of that, but I just would rather have had a situation where I would have had a fairer shot on this bill.

Vasquez

Does this come from your background as an activist and advocate? This approach of preferring a confrontation-preferring a public hearing-than what some people would call a more pragmatic negotiation?

Molina

It must be, because I really have a big problem I don't mind compromises and negotiations, but I don't like skirting the issues. They were very real. Some people-because they feel that whatever the outcome is going to be-would rather suppress those kinds of problems or issues, because that way nobody. . . . You know, everybody's happy and we can meet each other's needs even though we're not really addressing the very real problem. I have a tendency to be much more aggressive and say, "You've got to." Besides. . . . I guess it comes from my activism. I think "bottom line." I'm not sure where it comes from, but it's something that I'm very adamant about. And that happens here in council as well. I don't mind negotiating things, but don't try and take away from what these issues are really about. I think it's a mistake to do that, and in politics it's done every single day, and it's troubling for me. It's really troubling for me. I look at what's going on in the city. In fact, I'm very concerned with my own district right now, because people tell me, "It's a no-win situation."

Vasquez

Which is that?

Molina

I'm having gang warfare problems in my district, and I am just at my wit's end as to what I'm going to do about it. I mean, kids are dying in the streets on weekends. These gangs are retaliating against each other. So I talked to a couple of people, and they say, "You know, Gloria, let the police deal with it." I said, "No, no, no. I've got to stand up. We've got to take some leadership here. This is intolerable." I don't know what to do. It's not like I know exactly. . . . I don't know what to do, but I want to know what to do. I've got to do something, and everybody is saying, "It's a loser issue, because there is nothing you can do." And I'm sitting there saying, "I don't believe that. I've got to find something." But it's interesting just how many people will just tell you politically what is expedient and what is not, and to step back from it. I have a

tendency. . . . I would rather, you know, work at it. I mean, I'm not going to say that it's going to be anything magical. I mean, gang warfare has been going on for the last forty-five or fifty years in our neighborhoods, but when you see kids dying like this. . . . Even right now, it's gang kids killing gang kids, and other people say, "So what?" I'm worried about when those stray bullets are going to hit children and kids, like in New York or South Central. . . . You just can't sit around and watch this. I feel that you've got to jump in, in a lot of those issues.

Vasquez

Do you get as much accomplished by being a vociferous advocate?

Molina

In the state legislature, I did not. At least not in the state body. In my district I did.

Vasquez

And on the council?

Molina

On the council I do, because it's a smaller body and I have more direct involvement in implementation. And I have been much more successful at getting things done here and confronted and addressed and dealt with, because you can really operate within your own district. I will. I mean, I have been able to overcome a lot of things that people told me cannot be done.

Vasquez

Examples?

Molina

For example, the parks. I was disgusted when I first came here and saw the state of our parks in our community. They were dreadful. And the use is huge.

Vasquez

Yes.

Molina

I mean, Lincoln Park is packed with families every Saturday and Sunday, and yet it's filthy and there's nothing there. There are no amenities. The bathrooms were filthy. Everything was bad. And I'm saying, "Why?" When I started talking about Lincoln Park-and I talked to other council members-everybody was saying, "Oh, it's tough, you know. You can't do this, and you can't do that. Here's how it hasn't happened." We have been able to turn that around, I mean, inside out. There's no doubt that the director of Rec and Parks hates me, and even the commissioners are annoyed with me. But I have confronted. . . . I took in. . . . I threw dirty parks right in their face, and I said, "You can't tolerate this." I made them walk through McArthur Park, and I said, "This is intolerable." I said, "Now, tell me what the problems are here," and I made them make work out a lot of things. I said, "You need more money? I'm not fighting before the council and saying, 'We need more money.' What is it that you need?" And we have worked it out. You look at the parks now. They're not the greatest, but you look at the parks now, and they're much, much better.

Vasquez

What was the problem?

Molina

The problem was a disinterest as far as I was concerned. A disinterest, like, "Nobody had complained about it before. Why were you complaining?" People accepted things. "Well, they get used an awful lot. That's why there's no lawn." [Laughter] "There will be a lawn. We need an irrigation system. We need trees in this park. We need. . . ." I mean, we needed it to be pleasant. What's wrong with little flowers? If you look at a lot of our parks now, they have gone out and have replanted. We upped the security system. I did more of a focus. They designed special programs. You have to confront it, and you have to. . . . And people don't like it. They don't like being walked through McArthur Park and saying, "It's your job." They don't like me for it. But the point is that you have to confront these kinds of. . . . And I can do it here now. In the state legislature, it was impossible, because the process there is so very different and you're not involved in implementation. I mean, I wanted to bring the governor and Senator [Robert B.] Presley down to East L.A. I invited them over and over again. I said, "I just want you to walk from

the prison site to my community. That's all I want. I just want you to see how close it is and what it means. I think that if you walk it, you'll understand what we're complaining about." Of course, they always refuse. You couldn't do that, you know. So here, as a council person, I can sort of make it happen. They don't like it. So I can get a lot more done here, and that's one of the wonderful things about being here. Everything is so much more tangible. Now, I don't know that I can do any great thing with the gang warfare, but later on today, I'm meeting with both captains of the police department. We're going to sit down, and we're going to figure out what we're going to do and how we're going to do it. And they can't sit there and thumb their nose at me.

Vasquez

Getting back to the prison issue, how did you feel about the federal metropolitan facility that was put into this area not too long ago?

Molina

[Laughter]

Vasquez

Did you have any exchanges, since it's a federal facility, with Congressman Roybal?

Molina

When I found out about it, it was . . .

Vasquez

It has happened very quietly.

Molina

That's right. Very quietly. When I found out about it, it was, in fact, a done deal. When I talked to the congressman about it, he felt that he had extracted all kinds of various concessions in trade for that federal facility. In trying not to be disrespectful of his role and his responsibility, I left it alone. But I always I pointed to it. "Look, they're also building another federal facility here." But I was concerned. . . . Like I said, by the time that we stepped in in an active way in '85, it was already done. Legislation had passed. The congressman had felt very good about the Veterans Affairs Building and the clinic that he was

getting, and other kinds of things that were attached to this federal facility. But I was annoyed. I felt that it was another dumping program.

Vasquez

Another issue that you've been identified with has to do with slow growth versus development. Some people argue, "Well, that's fine for areas of the city that have all kinds of development, but it's probably self-destructive and self-defeating in an area that needs a certain amount of development." How do you respond to that?

Molina

Well, exactly that. You do need. . . . I consider myself a planned growth advocate. In other words, I don't think that we should just have growth going on without any checks and balances in the process. But I do believe that there are some parts of my district that absolutely need commercial growth, or growth, and there are certain areas that should have none. We should limit it. I have a part of my district now in the city council that's called Central City West, which is all of those barren acres over there across from the Harbor Freeway, between the Hollywood Freeway and Olympic [Boulevard]. Actually, it looks barren to about Fourth [Street] or Fifth [Street], and then after that, you see a lot of the commercial buildings. We put a plan in to create a planned growth community there, because the trade-off was that if we could get housing for a lot of those people that are in poor substandard housing, we could trade off the commercial development and all of that. We've created a whole package now where not only do they get housing, they get amenities like parks. They're also part of building a school. We're also going to create an employment program, so that many of these young people will get under their apprenticeship programs. So we're doing a whole trade thing. How does it . . . ? How can we have development really help a community? In other areas when I look at my district, like Highland Park-I don't know if you know it-it's more of a I guess it's a bedroom community. It's more single-family housing, and the commercial is just basically there to serve the residential. But there is a lot of interest in going in there because of the zoning and doing the multifamily housing, which is okay in certain aspects of it. But it's very, very destructive to neighborhoods and single-family housing. So we've limited there. We stopped it, in fact, and we put in an interim control ordinance. We said, "Stop. From

now on, if we're going to do that, we're going to watch project by project. It's not going to be a buy right project, and we have to understand the implications of what kind of multifamily housing you're going to put in here and what that does to the mix and to the neighborhood." So we're slowing it down, and that makes a lot of the developers angry. That looks like no growth. But you also have to be careful that if you leave it unchecked, we're going to have cement buildings going up with 34 to 340 units, each one with just families on top of each other. What does that mean for the schools? What does that mean for the parks? So you can't do that. So we have it more planned in those areas. So I consider myself a planned-growth advocate. I am not a no-growth advocate. But I believe there is a tolerance level. At what point do you stop building commercial towers? Until the sewer system just busts? Or do you all just park yourselves on the freeway? I mean, there's got to be a tolerance level. And I think you have to bring your infrastructure up to meet the needs of the commercial development that you're putting in. That's all the words that developers hate. They don't like that kind of thing. They're there. They've got their money, they've got their financing, and they've got their piece of land. They're going to build their tower. They aren't responsible for those other kinds of things. That's what we are. Those aren't exactly the kinds of words they like to hear from me. They really believe in unrestricted growth and the whole capitalism, free enterprise kind of thing, and it will all take care of itself somehow in the process. But it doesn't. So that's how I operate at least here on the council on those issues.

Vasquez

On that issue as in other issues, you've also often taken a stand that you call a citywide issue that interests you and affects you, which has been seen as an interest in becoming mayor of the city someday. The question is, has that caused tension or resentment from some members of the council?

Molina

Yes. There is like an unwritten rule, although it's played out all the time. That is, you just don't mess in other council members' districts, and you let council members do what they want to do in their own district. I would say that about 90 percent of the council members adhere to that rule. They find it very offensive for anyone to disrupt that kind of situation. I am probably one of the

biggest violators of that rule, and I think that many council members don't appreciate it. There are certain issues that, to me, I just have to do. One of them is housing. So I have interfered, in a sense, in plans that Gil Lindsay had on housing issues that I was able to turn around. It made him very angry, but I just think it was. . . . I couldn't let the council do that. I had to raise it, and I was eventually successful because I couldn't get Councilman Lindsay to really address the issue to the extent that I wanted. I've approached issues with other council members, which I've lost-Joan Flores, [Councilwoman] Ruth Galanter-that didn't appreciate my involvement on that. And on certain issues that I've gotten involved in that other council members get angry about. School buildings-school site building-is something that I side with the school board on. Many council members get angry, because, you know, it's a school in their district, and they're opposed to it. But I really think we need to have the. . . . So that happens. I understand the consequences every time I step into one. I mean, I understand it, and I tell the council member as I told Joan Flores, "I have to do it. I wish I could just tell you that I could just stand back. It's important to me. I have to raise it, and I would like to do everything I can to get you to do what I think needs to be done there." Because I just sensed it was part of my job and my responsibility. [Laughter]

Vasquez

In the assembly, there are affinity groups or alliances that one creates or can count on. Is there such a thing on the city council like the one here in Los Angeles?

Molina

You mean on issues or as a personality?

Vasquez

Both. Probably more around issues, but also personalities.

Molina

Probably amongst the other fourteen on this. . . . [Laughter] Certainly on issues. Certainly issues. If, in fact, you've got an issue that you're trying to preserve a certain environmental issue, there's going to be some natural allies that are going to be there. You know, a Marvin Braude and probably a Ruth

Galanter. Or if you're against a big developer, there are certain people that will stick by you. Others, you know, may not. That's usually on a citywide issue that we address every so often. But I can count on certain people on certain issues. But I try not to do it that way.

Vasquez

There are no permanent alliances?

Molina

Right. I don't expect anybody to do it with me. So I don't expect it of them. I mean, I'm a good friend of Joy Picus, but I can't sit there and say, "Joy, you know, I want you to turn your back on how you feel about this and vote with me on it." I would hate for her to do that to me. Now, if it's an issue that's totally insignificant to her and I would really need a vote, I might, you know. . . . She would probably line up with me if it were totally unimportant to her, because we have a good relationship.

Vasquez

Is there as much horse-trading on the council as there is reputedly on the assembly?

Molina

Oh, yes, there is. Oh, absolutely. Of course there is. You know. . . . All of us have major projects that involve various controversies. So, consequently, it sort of like, "I won't say anything if you won't say anything about this." Oh, that goes on all the time. All the time.

Vasquez

Have you violated some of that?

Molina

No, I'm honest about it. Well, how do I say honest? I confront it, okay, because. . . . For example, there was a project going on. [Councilman] Hal Bernson says, "This is my project. Here's what I want. Here's how I'm going to do it." I said, "Oh, God. I have problems with this project." So I went to him, and I told him. And his attitude was, "Don't mess with me." "And I just got to tell you. I cannot support this the way it's written out right now. I'm going to

have to address this issue, and I know it's going to make you angry. I would rather not do it, but I have to." So, you know . . .

Vasquez

What was the outcome of that?

Molina

Well, what happened was-I guess, with plenty of warning-he just didn't want it raised. So he was able to address it, and that was the issue of low-income housing that he was doing in Porter Ranch. But it's. . . . I try and. . . . It's not like I'm out there to say, "This is just my style. I'm going to vote against you on a regular basis." I just have to go over there and say, "I just can't agree with this project, and just vote with me. I just find that. . . . It's not that. . . . I'm not trying to attack you. I'm not trying to personally get after you. It's just the issue." But they, many times, will say, "Oh, no. It's Molina, and Molina. . . ." [It] will get back to me every so often.

Vasquez

When you came on the council. . . . Since you've been on the council, you've been identified. . . . In fact, in many interviews you've admitted as much, that you were very much interested in becoming the first Latina mayor of the city Los Angeles. But, recently, with the opening up of the possibility of a predominantly Latino district for the [Los Angeles County] Board of Supervisors, you seemed to indicate that you prefer to be on the board of supervisors than mayor. Have you changed your mind?

Molina

Well, let me tell you, I would love. . . . One of the things that I've enjoyed. . . . I've enjoyed the city council, because it is so tangible. I mean, you can really do things. I look at a lot of the citywide issues, and I get frustrated as to why we can't do more. Basically, I'm not in charge. I mean, all I can do is present. I can do a lot in my district, and I value that, but I'd love to be able to do more. I'm able to push certain things on a city level. I've introduced the words "housing" and "low-income housing" to this city, which they had not used before. And I'm doing a lot with it. I mean, we're going to get linkage. We're going to do a lot of things that had not been done before. I guess if I were in

charge, then I could really set the agenda, which I'm sure each of us in our own arrogance as council members would like to do for this city. So I'm very interested in having an opportunity to do that. I think that this is the kind of city that could get a lot of things accomplished. It really can. It's just like somebody who looked at parks four years ago and said, "Oh, that's impossible. You'll never turn this park around." You can do it. I mean, it's just like people saying, "You can't end gang warfare." Well, while I may not be able to end it, but I've got to curb this kind of violence. I mean, we can do those things. So I'm very interested in doing the job, and I wish I could go out and apply for it. I really do, but that isn't the reality. I've got to go out and campaign for it and get elected. One of my realities-also that I know-is that. . . . The money that it would take is something that I don't know is within my reach. The way I operate politically and the way I deal with issues, it seems like every decision I make starts eroding my financial capability to raise money.

Vasquez

For mayor?

Molina

Yes. Because, you know, it's. . . . They're important decisions to me, and I'm not going to change them. I'm not going to change them for the purposes of getting these people to, you know, love me, so that they could. . . . But it takes a lot of money. It takes a lot of coalition building. I am willing to work with the various groups and networks out there, but I'm not going to buy into being an absolute on anything. I'm not going to be an absolute on the growth issue. You know, saying, "Oh, yeah, I'm going to be a no-growth person." That's really. . . . The next mayor of this city is going to be the person who can say, "I'm really no-growth." A lot of people have told me that. And I said. . . . I just couldn't do that. So, anyway, I'm still very interested in doing it, by the way, and I'd love it. But I look at that reality, and I say, "You know, come 1993, I'm not going to be able to put together \$3 or \$5 million."

Vasquez

If not more.

Molina

Yes. If not . . .

1.15. TAPE NUMBER: VIII, Side Two (August 16, 1990)

Vasquez

We were talking about your decision, or your consideration, of running for supervisor in what will be a predominantly Latino district-we hope or that we feel-that the courts may produce. There are at least four other Latinos that are also interested in the race, not the least of which is Sarah Flores, who was Supervisor Pete [F.] Schabarum's administrative assistant for a number of years and who ran in the old Schabarum district and, in fact, is in a runoff, as I understand. But there are others. Isn't there a possibility that all of these Latino candidates would get in and dilute the vote? Is there anything being done? Isn't there that possibility?

Molina

Well, of course, there's that possibility, where if, in fact, five of us got in there-and five elected officials are Democrats-we would dilute our strength, and it's a very strong possibility that someone like Sarah might be able to win. Or someone else if Schabarum ran again. He might be able to win. But I don't think that's going to happen this time.

Vasquez

What have you done, or is anything being done, that you can talk about to circumvent that possibility?

Molina

Well, I can't say that there's anything organizationally being done. There are just discussions that there should be some kind of a forum-that there should be a body established-to select who should do it. But there isn't anything formally being done. Instead, I can only tell you about what I've done. For me, I felt that I needed to talk to all of the candidates that were running and evaluate my situation or my decision to run based on what they were going to be doing, and so on. So I decided to start setting up meetings very quickly with every single one of those candidates. I guess, first of all, with Congressman Roybal, in talking to him. . . . He has expressed his interest in running for the

seat. I very quickly determined in my dialogue with him that I certainly would not run if he ran.

Vasquez

Why is that?

Molina

Well, it's. . . . A sense of. . . . First of all, I think he has the capability of winning because of. . . . He's sort of the top person, the most respected and senior leader of Chicano elected officials. That he would have the capability of winning that race. I also thought that there would be a lot of. . . . A lot of them would step back if he ran, because they would acknowledge that as well. He would have a very good chance with all of us backing him, that he would have a successful race. But the other was, of course, that if you look at it historically, he was denied this seat in the mid-fifties and denied in a kind of political, very possibly, backroom kind of deal.

Vasquez

You're talking about his race against Ernest [E.] Debs when, the following day, 12,000 or so absentee ballots were found.

Molina

That's right. There was a declaration of victory. He had won this race, but all of a sudden, they found all of these absentee ballots, which were all for Supervisor Debs. And he lost the seat. Most of us look at that as having been denied that seat that he had rightfully won. So, very frankly, I think it would be very fitting for him to now, after this long struggle of getting a seat designed, he would have the capability of winning or the opportunity of winning. That he might want to come back to it. So if he did decide to run, I'm certainly one that would step back immediately and be his supporter.

Vasquez

But recently, you were talking about the importance of this race for the community. This is about a community's interest, not about an individual's belated payoff for political efforts, isn't it?

Molina

Well, there's no doubt about it, but I think that's all in sync as well. You know, we're not talking about somebody who deserved it then and doesn't deserve it now. In other words, that he has represented people in Congress very, very well-their interest and exactly their desires in him as a congressman on the issues that are important to this community. He has taken strong positions, and he's been very adamant about it all.

Vasquez

Will he be the best candidate out of all of you? Will he make the best supervisor of all of the . . . ?

Molina

It's hard to tell. I think all of us think that we have special attributes that we can bring to this particular position. But I think the criticism that people have said is that, "Here we've fought so long for this opportunity. The best thing to do would be to have a younger leadership and an aggressive leadership style presented as compared to someone who has been there a long time." There's no doubt he's done well by us, but, very frankly, people see it as an opportunity to really make some significant changes. "And that will, of course, only happen because of young leadership." I don't know if that's necessarily true. I mean, I've worked with Congressman Roybal before. I've seen him be assertive and aggressive on many things and to hold his own, and, certainly, to step up to issues that. . . . There's nothing that intimidates him at all. So I'm not so sure that I agree with those people that say, "He's not going to be an aggressive leader." I think he could do very, very well in that role and serve the interests of the community well.

Vasquez

There are other people that have, at least in the press, expressed interest. People like Congressman Estebán Torres and . . .

Molina

Yes. I met with all of them. I met with Estebán Torres.

Vasquez

Tell me about those.

Molina

Well, in Estebán's style and dialogue. . . . Our discussions really centered around what we wanted and how we would approach and what our interests would be in serving on this seat. What we both concluded, very frankly, is we probably would not run against each other. We didn't . . .

Vasquez

Was this a firm commitment not to run against one another?

Molina

From a standpoint of a commitment to each other, we both decided that we would dialogue with one another before we made our final decision and that we would more than likely not run against each other. That it just didn't seem like a good idea. That we felt that if each other ran, we could represent each other's interest and hopes for that particular position. So I feel sort of confident with that. Again, it's not an absolute commitment, "I won't run if you run" kind of a thing, but it's a commitment of saying, "I would really rather not run against you, and I'd like the opportunity to talk to you." Not that I wouldn't want to convince him that I would want to be that candidate, and I don't know what the outcome would be. But it was a dialogue that was respectful of each other, and it wasn't one being adamant one way or the other. We were also talking about the realities of if we ran against each other, what would be the situation there? What would that mean to people? So we discussed a lot of those things.

Vasquez

Is it because you have a greater political affinity with him, perhaps, than you might with some of the others that we're going to discuss?

Molina

Well, the thing is that it's based on, "This is very significant. This really represents a lot for us as an opportunity." So, consequently, it has to be an opportunity that we're going to win. I mean, we have to make sure that we're going to get behind somebody that's going to win it. We don't want to just let our egos get so caught up in this thing that we really lose the war on it. Estebán presents the kind of candidacy that, I think, a lot of people could get

behind. He could. . . . And because he represents a good deal of that area now, he would have the capability of getting a lot of support out there. He's a winning candidate. I mean, he has the potential of winning it straight out. So that's good, because if, in fact, we really [want] somebody there who is going to succeed. . . . Then the other, of course, is that he has done fairly well. I mean, from what I read and from what I know of people who have worked with him, he's been good on lots of issues. I think, certainly, we have different styles as well. He is not a confrontational kind of aggressive leader, but he's an effective leader, and I think he has a leadership style that people have enjoyed and liked. So he would be a very formidable candidate, has a good chance of winning. But, like I said, if he decides to run. . . . And he would have all those opportunities. Plus, I also think he is also more inclusive of people. He isn't so caught up in dictating to and creating operations that are going to run over certain folks. He doesn't seem to be caught up with that kind of nonsense that goes on in politics. He seems to be genuinely concerned about doing a good job and enjoys the role that he has in doing a good job. I think he enjoys people, which is an important part of it. Not that he expects everybody to love him, but he enjoys that people respect him and they feel that he is a man of integrity. That seems to be very important to him. I think that's an important quality to have in a politician.

Vasquez

Who else have you met with?

Molina

I met with Sarah Flores. I met with Sarah Flores. Certainly, none of the meetings had been to discourage the other from running. But I felt that I needed to meet with Sarah Flores, because she's definitely going to be a candidate no matter what. I mean, this is no one you negotiate with. This is somebody that hopefully you just say, "I'm expecting to be a candidate as well. I know it's important to you, and it's important to me. Hopefully, we're going to have a campaign, and we're going to run out there and discuss the issues," and so on. But, instead, it became the kind of discussion that, I guess, I should have known, but I didn't expect. Because I was sort of hoping that Sarah's candidacy and Sarah as a candidate would be respectful of this entire issue of gerrymandering, of reapportionment, of Latinos being denied. But,

very frankly, she didn't feel that at all. She felt that she was being outright denied a seat. That she . . .

Vasquez

By the courts?

Molina

Yes. That she was the people's favorite. That she had broken that myth about the fact that a Latina or a Latino couldn't win that district. That she felt her own victory was an example of that.

Vasquez

To what do you attribute her victory?

Molina

To having \$400,000 that has been donated mostly by [Los Angeles County Supervisor] Deane Dana and [Los Angeles County Supervisor Mike] Antonovich contributors. At least 65 percent of it as I've seen. She had the most money, and I think she had a lot of sympathy with her. I mean, she, you know. . . . The incumbent did not treat her well. She had served him all those years . . .

Vasquez

Pete Schabarum.

Molina

Then he just turned around and told her things like she was undereducated, that she didn't have the capability or the people skills to be elected to office, which I think was just unbelievable that he said those things to her. So I think she had a lot of people that were sympathetic and didn't like her being treated that way and were very supportive of her. I think there were many Latinos at that time who also felt we weren't sure if we were going to win this lawsuit. So this was the only game in town. So it looks like, "Go for it." She's okay. But I was very disappointed, because she stepped in and she was-not hostile-but she felt very angered by the fact that there's a judge trying to deny her this opportunity to run for . . .

Vasquez

Did she ask you not to run?

Molina

No. We never had that kind of a dialogue. We discussed mostly the redistricting effort. And, like I said, I said. . . . Now that we were going to be running in this new district, I thought it was a good idea that she had an opportunity to run. I felt that the judge had done a good job at trying to find a way to compromise it all. And that, you know. . . . I was hoping, basically, to wish her a lot of luck and so on. But, like I said, instead she took this tact that the way it should operate is that she should be allowed to run and, hopefully, win. That people like myself should support her in the other district. That she would come on the board. That she would commit to getting a seven-member initiative on the ballot in '92. That once that was put in place-that as soon as that was voted on-she would be part of creating a growth district, meaning that there would be a second district. She would say, of course, now the first district would be a so-called Latino district only because she was heading it up. That she would create this other district, and what she would do is. . . . It would be a growth district, and that by the year 2000-because of our population growth-we would have an opportunity to have two Latino supervisors on the board. That was just. . . . It was very insulting. It was insulting to me-this tenural effort-it was insulting to everything that we were talking about. The outright, bold barrier that people have placed and discrimination that goes on. I was very offended by it and by her as to how she devalued all of this effort. Anyway, I got angry and felt that. . . . Like I told her, "I'll either see you in court or I'll see you at the polls, but I'll see you." Anyway, so she's going to be a candidate. But I. . . . She's not anyone to sneeze at either. I mean, she has all the capability of mounting a very, very strong campaign. As I look at it as another woman, I have to size up myself as to whether I have the capability of really waging an effective campaign against her and what she represents.

Vasquez

Because she is a woman-a female candidate-would she cut into your women's movement and women's group support that you need to count on?

Molina

Not from the standpoint of women activists, women feminists, women money. I think I would be able to get 90 or 95 percent of all of that. I think that she would be able to cut into certain voters that probably I would have normally gotten, having in the past always been the only woman that was running in those seats. So I think she'll make a dent in that. There's no doubt about it. But I do think that I have to work very, very hard to protect myself from that and will do so.

Vasquez

Have you met with any other potential candidates?

Molina

Yes. I first met with Richard Alatorre.

Vasquez

Tell me about that.

Molina

Well, Richard, when we had a discussion, came in and said that he really wanted to run for this seat. That was very important to him, and he was hoping that I might, instead, want to focus for the mayor's race, and felt that I probably had a real opportunity to run for the mayor's seat, and he may not. So, consequently, that would be a good place for me to be. I told him that I really felt that the mayor's race was no doubt something that I would love to have, and I would love to have an opportunity to run for it. I just didn't think it was a very tangible kind of thing at this point in time, it was too far away, there would be so much money that would need to be involved, and that I needed to continue to have the kind of freedom that I've always felt about a lot of issues. The fact that now I would be making decisions based on my possibility on running citywide, that that was troublesome for me. So I didn't see it as anything that was an immediate possibility. So I told him that I was very interested, but that, of course, if . . . I told him the parameters of Congressman Roybal. If he ran, I would step back immediately. But I felt that if he [Alatorre] ran, and if it were a race with him and Sarah, that more than likely I would run. I said, "Because I just feel. . . ." First of all, Richard and I have different styles about politics and campaigning. I think that comes into play as

well, which is important. But it was more so that I felt like Richard might have a real tough time beating Sarah Flores, and I talked to him about that. He didn't feel that would be the case at all.

Vasquez

What would be his deficits or his liabilities against Sarah Flores?

Molina

Well, his liabilities, of course, would be his very own history, his very own style, his very own—you know—political traditions as he sees them. I think that would all. . . . I mean, they all play fine behind the scenes, but they don't play well, you know, before the press, or the camera, or before voters. I think if you look at . . .

Vasquez

Or in the present climate?

Molina

That's right, or the present climate. When you look back at the problems that he had with the campaign finance laws. Getting the biggest penalty assessed against him is probably something that would be used. The fact that he's having trouble in his own district, people wanting to recall him, and things like that. Then, of course, the whole Eastside kind of situation.

Vasquez

Tell me about that.

Molina

Well, I think that what we're looking at is a district of a lot of cities that are. . . . I'm sure they don't enjoy being called the "Greater Eastside," but it's the San Gabriel Valley and a lot of that area. Very frankly, I think that because they've been left out politically for a long, long time, they don't like that East L.A. mentality of politics. They really don't. I think they would find it resentful, and they certainly would find it resentful that anybody would want to come in and sort of bring stale East L.A. politics into, you know, their area.

Vasquez

Is there anything to the notion that a lot of areas out there-El Monte and La Puente-were places that people run away from East L.A. to?

Molina

Well, yes. They got the opportunity, because of some of the struggles in East L.A. to get away from. . . . I mean, those struggles. . . . Talked about getting an education, about getting more jobs, about doing those kinds of things. I think that created that opportunity to buy your house in La Puente. That created the opportunity to buy the house in Pico Rivera. So you're talking about a whole different group of people. Not that they don't have ties into East L.A. and they may not appreciate what's in East L.A., but if you're talking about a different set of priorities. . . . It isn't something that. . . . I don't know if they want to distance themselves from it, but they think themselves different. Not that they don't appreciate it, but they do consider themselves different. They're caught up in different needs. In East L.A. the struggle may be different than it is out there. Out there they're concerned about issues like taxes. It's a very important one to them. Somebody who is going to be out there toting more social programs-more this, more that-is something that's going to be intimidating to them, because they're trying to make it. They don't need a bigger tax bill, or somebody doing. . . . They're not the ones that are very sympathetic to the issues in the inner city and things that many of us have worked on-issues on homelessness, on creating more low-income housing. Things of that sort are not important to them. There are real basic issues to them. The crime issue is significant to them. But they may not necessarily see that East L.A. politician would necessarily would be the person that would operate in their best interest. And it's a transition that needs to be made. Any of us that don't deal with it and don't realize that it's there is making a tremendous mistake. I know a lot of people there. My family lives there. I know how they think and what they believe. While I think they appreciate me and others that have gotten into these roles, at the same time I think that they don't necessarily want that to be occurring in their community. They would want the same opportunity as anybody else. "Let me elect my own. Let me have my own opportunity." So I think we have to be careful about it, and it can be wrapped around me as much as well. So I have to be cognizant of that, and I have to look at it. As I develop the theme of the campaign if I run, I'm going to have to be careful, because I have to [deal] with that.

Vasquez

So to what end did your meeting with Alatorre come?

Molina

Well, unfortunately-or fortunately-I certainly wasn't trying to say, "It's either me or you." He feels that he's going to run no matter what. He has made that decision, and he's moving forward on it. He's going to raise all the money he needs, and he's going to go out there and do it. He does not see any liability whatsoever. He thinks he can win it, and he wants to go out there and do it. But he's not going to submit to any kind of process. I mean, you could tell. He's very adamant about running. So that was a situation with him. In my discussion with Marty Martínez-we just had a telephone conversation-and, basically, he had the same feeling. That if Congressman Roybal ran, he would not. But he was very interested in running if Estebán or Richard, he said, would run. But he would consider talking to me in the end. I don't know exactly what that means, but he is an important person also to get those kinds of endorsements from. If you could step into that seat with a lot of those key endorsements, you could be very, very effective in convincing a lot of voters out there that you're other than just East L.A.

Vasquez

Are there any other potential candidates that you see out there?

Molina

No. I'm sure there will be other candidates.

Vasquez

On the Democratic side?

Molina

Even on the Democratic side. I mean, there may be another council member or another mayor from the cities out there. There are other Latinos that are elected. There are school board members. I just had not heard a lot of dialogue about other people running.

Vasquez

There was another candidacy that didn't do so well in the last race that may be resuscitated, and that's Nell Soto's. She's a city councilwoman in Pomona. How do you assess her candidacy, her possibilities?

Molina

Well, I think that Nell. . . . You know, Nell has been around a long, long time. Nell in that race or in this race. . . . It's hard to tell. In that race, she was just. . . . She was the kind of candidate that could never win in that other district. She's a Democrat, she's Latina, she's just not. . . . I mean, it just wasn't there. The numbers weren't there. In this race here, I don't know that she would necessarily have the capability of mounting a very credible campaign. The reason I say that is the money end of it. That's a tough one. Now, there's no doubt that I know that money is going to be tough. But I do know that I can raise competitive money. I don't know that necessarily Nell can. She has done well in getting elected to local office, and she has certainly been involved in. . . . She's probably instrumental in getting her husband elected many years ago, but we're talking about the money thing. I think that Nell would probably come up short on the fund-raising end. I don't know that she would necessarily come up short in endorsements or other people who would support her, because she is San Gabriel in a sense. I mean, she's been out there. I mean, lived there. Her husband represented part of it, now she's an elected official out in Pomona, and she's been an active person. So she would have a lot of other things going for her. The money thing would not. Depending on when this race is held, the money is a big, big factor. I know that sounds awful, but that's the reality of the situation. The money is a big, important factor of it.

Vasquez

Tell me the difference that you see money plays, whether it's held in November or December or next spring. What's the soonest it can be held? In November?

Molina

If it's held in November, it plays right into the money issue. Whoever has the most money—who uses it the most effectively—probably has the best chance. It's the way it plays out. It plays into the money, because it's a general

election. It is going to be how you're going to be able to get your message out to as many voters as possible.

Vasquez

Quickly?

Molina

Yes, very quickly and efficiently. It's going to take money to get on the slates to do all those kinds of things. If it is held next year-let's say in the first quarter or the first part of next year-it has a different opportunity, because then it plays into having the most effective political strategy. That doesn't necessarily mean having the most money. You have to have money. I'm not going to say that money is not important. But if you could build a good portfolio of who the voters are-because, again, it plays into that whole special thing-30 percent of them are going to turn out. When you're talking about 350,000, that's a very small number. Then you're going to figure out how you're going to get your message to those people, who they are, how you're going to get there. And it can play into other kinds of strengths. Grass roots strengths, endorsement strengths, other kinds of things that don't necessarily work in this November election. So there are different campaigns. More than likely, probably next year, we'll play it stronger. We'll play it more effectively for me, because it plays to my strongside. That is, grass-roots involvement, volunteers walking door-to-door kind of thing. It would have the possibility of doing that. Right now, it just becomes a money campaign in November.

Vasquez

Is Art Torres a player in any of this? Is he a possibility?

Molina

I have not heard from him with regard to this seat at all. He has not expressed any interest whatsoever. My last discussion with him is that he was interested in running for mayor, and then he had his own personal complications. I haven't heard any more on that. But he does not seem or has not [announced] himself up as a player in this issue, or even someone who is going to get involved.

Vasquez

How about [Assemblywoman] Lucille Roybal-Allard?

Molina

Lucille is, of course. . . . Her interest is that her father, if he runs, of course, she is going to be there 150 percent. But if not, I'm hoping to get her support and her endorsement. She represents a good part of the district which I used to represent. So her endorsement would be important. I would hope that I would be able to get that. But she's not interested in running.

Vasquez

Well, in 1987, Frank del Olmo of the *Los Angeles Times* wrote a column the day after your victory party celebrating your election to the city council, which is called "Two Eastside Machines? Let's Hope Not," < [Note: Frank del Olmo, *Two Eastside Machines? Let's Hope Not*, *Los Angeles Times* (February 6, 1987): II, 5 .] in which he feared that perhaps you saw yourself in a position to create a counterweight to what was considered a very strong political organization headed by Senator Art Torres and Councilman Richard Alatorre? Is that what you see your supporters being? Another political machine?

Molina

No.

Vasquez

Or is there a political machine on the other side?

Molina

There isn't anymore. I think there used to be, and I think there was a tremendous interest in continuing to fuel that. But I think that after 1987, that sort of broke it down quite a bit. I think that Richard's style played against him and the machine politics played against him. I think there were a lot of people that really resented the fact that that was in place. But I think also because we beat them in '87 that, I guess, that kind of took the wind out of their sails quite a bit. But the very real possibility of now a new machine, or a bigger machine, or a different machine that was either going to compete or overcome the other one, was a very real situation. I was very concerned about it, because everybody made that assumption. While I did not want to have a machine per se that was going to dictate, that was going to go out there and steamroller

over everybody, I did want to have a coalition that was important. The people The volunteers, the people who endorsed me and all of that, they deserved to be a part of something that was going to continue to work and function for other people. I wanted to keep that alive.

Vasquez

Is this what groups like the Mothers of East L.A. had become?

Molina

The Mothers of East L.A., a lot of the businesspeople that joined with me, a lot of the community leadership that were part of what I was doing and so on. Yet at the same time, I didn't want it to become kind of a dictatorial kind of machine. Everybody assumed that when I won and then when I went out and endorsed Lucille. . . . And I was very adamant about Lucille. I was adamant about her getting elected to the state legislature, because the Latina, the Chicana part of me was still there. I still wanted a Chicana to be there. So when she decided to run, I thought it was a natural. I was very adamant about it. Being so adamant, everybody said, "Aha, Gloria. You're not letting other people in those seats. You're doing the same thing." And I was always. . . . I was very wary of that kind of concern, because that's not really what I was trying to do. I wasn't trying to overrun anything. I just felt that, "I'm going to get behind a Latina for that seat. That's very important to me. She's the one that's running, so I'm going to get behind her." But I was always very careful to stay away from that machine concept.

Vasquez

What do you understand by a political machine?

Molina

Well as. . . . Traditionally, the East L.A. political machine has been a mechanism by which a few people get together, make determinations about who is going to do what in various races, how they're going to affect that kind of situation and outcome, and how they're going to make sure that nobody disrupts that program. And they bully. That's part of what they do.

Vasquez

How do they bully?

Molina

How do they bully? They bully other people out of the races. They bully people by making sure that money doesn't go there. They bully so that certain endorsements don't get there. Everything that it takes to be a candidate-to develop the campaign, to develop the credibility of a campaign-they go out and bully away. They don't go out and say, "Here are the merits of him versus her." They go out and they bully it. They steamroll it, and that's a machine. They don't. . . . There's no room for negotiation, discussion, or anything. They're very adamant. That's different. We wanted to keep a coalition together so that there would be dialogues, there would be input, so that we could introduce new leaderships. So we could, hopefully, get together on candidates; hopefully, get together on issues; hopefully, get together on agendas, but not absolutely. And that's the difference. So it's like an open-ended kind of a coalition. We come together quite often on a lot of things, but we don't live or die by having it our way. It's worked for us, or at least it has worked for the things we do. A lot of people are a part of it.

Vasquez

Name some of the people who were part of this group that were around you.

Molina

That were around me?

Vasquez

Uh-huh. [Affirmative] That were part of your coalition, if you will.

Molina

Okay. Well, for example, as far as elected officials, our coalition existed: myself, Congressman Roybal, and Lucille Roybal-Allard, and now-more recently-hopefully, [Assemblyman] Xavier Becerra will be part of that kind of a coalition. But it also includes people like Mike Hernández, who was a candidate for the assembly; Ed Avila; Henry Lozano; Evelyn Martínez-a whole bunch of people that get together. I don't know if you know Antonio Villaraigosa. I don't know a lot of these people that you may or may not know that are a part of these kinds of dialogues. We're involved in different kinds of things. It isn't just exclusively running for office. We're also involved in a lot of

empowerment things together. The NALEO [National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials] citizenship program we've worked on and tried to keep going. Southwest Voter Registration [Education Project], we're a big part of that group in raising money and doing things for it. We are out trying to encourage and support people to run for school boards and city councils in various smaller cities and trying to lend support and expertise, if we can, to it. So we do that.

Vasquez

How is that different from a political machine?

Molina

Well, I think what's different about it is it's open-ended. It isn't absolute. We don't. . . . For example, one person [Elizabeth Díaz] that came to us and wanted us to support her for the school district. . . . What we did is we said, "This is what you need to do. This is the kind of campaign, and here is and so on." We, you know, got people in touch with her as to how to run that campaign and everything. But we didn't go out there and say to the other candidates, "You shouldn't run. This is the candidate." We didn't take anything away from that person. We tried to present and tried to help her out there to become the best candidate possible and give her credibility and support. I did by trying to get women to support her and get women's money to her that I knew, that I had contacts with. Some of the others of us put together other kinds of. . . . I mean, you know, Congressman Roybal through Henry put some kind of money for her. Mike Hernández went out there and helped her with her campaign and almost did day-to-day kind of work.

Vasquez

Who was this candidate?

Molina

Liz Díaz. She ran for the Garvey School District, lost the first time, and just won the second time around. She is, in a sense, part of that same group now. But we didn't go in there and do this thing in the area, you know, "Congressman Roybal, Gloria Molina, Lucille Roybal-Allard say. . . ." What we did is we tried to give her all the support, the financial assistance, and, hopefully, some of the

expertise to really kind of help her along. Plus, she was one of our volunteers. She was a big volunteer in my campaign, she's a very good person, and she really was very sincere about why she wanted to serve on that school board, and so on. But we're very different from the old style of what Richard and what those guys used to do. Theirs was a very absolute kind of bully tactic. I know I came up against it on a regular basis. There were others, others that were bullied out.

Vasquez

You seem to indicate that it "was," saying that has changed. Is it because it has declined? Has it become weaker? Or does that represent political maturity?

Molina

Well, I have to believe-or I want to believe-that it represents political maturity. I think they've recognized that that's not a style that complements what's going on today, what people want, what they want to see. That maybe at that time, when they began that kind of a process, they really needed to have that kind of a unity, that kind of brutal force in order to overcome some of the barriers when they initially started. But, I think, maybe now they see that there is a real strong possibility of getting people behind you and to allow for flexibility, and it isn't an either-or, you know, "You're either with us or against us," kind of a thing. That they. . . . Maybe they are going to give a little bit more room. But for a while, they were . . .

Vasquez

Do you think the political system has opened up more for Latinos? That kind of machine is not needed any longer?

Molina

Well, I would want to wish that that's the case, but I don't know that that is necessarily the case. I think that what has happened is now Chicano politics isn't controlled by one small segment. That is, they don't hold all the financial resources. They don't hold all the endorsement resources. They don't hold all the technical resources. I think that those resources now are shared more. It's much broader who gets to be a part of it. So that not necessarily do you have to be sanctioned by this small group in order to go forward. Now there are

more people who are willing to donate dollars, and there are more people that are out there that can put together grass-roots efforts and campaigns and do all of those kinds of things. So that little. . . . What they controlled is no longer totally controlled by them, and that's good. So that creates better opportunities and more opportunities, because you have more people who have resources and skills and capabilities of running instead of it all being controlled by one group. So, in a sense, we have more opportunity that way, but I always have to remind everybody that there still is a lack of opportunity. It isn't because we don't have our act together, but because in the political system, as it is set up, there are very few opportunities to run-the way the lines are drawn, the way the money comes in, the way certain people. . . . I mean, many times, we might say, "Oh, we're so happy. We don't have a machine." But many times, we run against other machines. We run against Democratic party machines. We run against other kinds of interest machines. So we have to be very careful. So, hopefully, what we have eliminated is not so much that we may not need that unity and that combining resources and bringing that talent together. We may need that again and, hopefully, we can put it together. But it does not operate in this community in such an absolute, because I think it was corrupting. Hopefully, we've stepped back from that, and we don't need that aspect of it.

Vasquez

Now, in your career, you've been a first in many areas as a Latina politician who has had to break ground in many senses. What have you learned . . . ? Well, before I ask you what you've learned about the political system, how much do you think the timing of your candidacy-of your political career-was helped by the women's movement or feminism or a greater consciousness of women's rights?

Molina

I think it was a very important part of it. [Interruption]I gained. . . . It was a It was a significant part of my campaign. It was a very important part of it. The women's movement was at a height at the time I ran the first time in 1982 and was developing the capability. I was able to take advantage of a lot of the women's movement from the standpoint of many things. Not only because of the first Latina, and I did. . . . I mean, I went and let the women's movement

know that was an important milestone for them and they should take advantage of it. I mean, I am not shy that I didn't do that. I did do that. Then, of course, within my own community, there was a real opportunity for us to be included, and that we should be. So I took advantage of that as well. I pursued it. So I took advantage of all of those. That doesn't mean there were disadvantages being a woman. I exploited every single advantage there was, and I made use of it in my campaign. It's in there in '82 and '87. It will always be there. I'm not going to say I didn't, but I was very fortunate that there were those situations there. That there was a women's movement that was interested in making that statement, "Yes, Latinas should also get elected. And, yes, we're going to put money behind it." That was there. So I was able to raise a lot of money from the women's movement and women leaders. There were other women who were in key roles at that time who agreed with me and assisted me all the way through. So that played a very important role, and I took advantage of it and did not exploit it in a negative sense. I exploited it in a positive sense. I was part of it. It's not like I just became a feminist the day I decided to run for office. I had been involved in the women's movement and probably not the very early stages of it, but the early stages of us being involved as feminists. So it was very helpful to me. First of all. . . . I guess the first thing I learned about politics-and probably the thing that is important to convey to the rest of my community-we've always been . . .

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Molina

Traditionally, it's always been somebody else's game. But what I have found getting involved in in the political process is that it's very much our game, except we have been led to believe we are to be excluded. Unfortunately, we've bought into it. I remember-and again, I guess I've said it throughout the tape-that every time I stepped up to one of these opportunities, the first thing that ran through me was fear, absolute fear. And with that fear was the intimidation. "They're smarter than I am. They know more. They're more experienced. I don't know this," kind of thing. All of those insecurities came out. But, anyway, now that I look at it, I think that sort of. . . . Somebody conditioned me to think that way. Somebody conditioned me to exclude me from the process. I think one of our biggest challenges is to convince a lot of

Latinos out there who are citizens and noncitizens that it is definitely a place and game that we need to be a part of. What I've also learned is that it is a Everybody talks about it being, "Oh, you can't. . . . You can't beat city hall. It's a closed-door, behind-the-scenes kind of a game." I don't believe that as much anymore. There's no doubt about it that I get frustrated by so many of those actions. But for the most part, I do believe that you can still. . . . You can beat city hall. That you can overcome a lot of those obstacles and become successful. So that, consequently, you should never think that politics is not important or that you can't make a change in it. I know I haven't made all the changes that I wanted to make. All the expectations that I've always had for other politicians and myself that are not fulfilled. But I do think that I've made quite an impact, and I've made an awful lot of changes, and I only wish that there were many, many more of us in the process so that we could bring about more and more of those changes. There's just too many people in politics that don't take it seriously, that treat it as a game, that enjoy the comforts that many times politics can bring you, and that don't truly. . . . They aren't sincere, and that hurts all of us.

Vasquez

To effectively. . . . To be effective, what have you learned works? To be effective in making changes that you wanted to make, what is it that you found works?

Molina

Well, I think like anything else, you have to have a movement behind you. I think that's the most effective way to bring about changes. I think that you have to be direct and you have to confront the problem. I think you have to lay it out there, and then I think you have to convince a lot of people that it's the right thing to do. I think that you need to make sure that you lobby your point of view. I don't think it's as simple as saying simple political horse-trading. I really do think that you have to get a lot of people to really believe that it's an important change that needs to be made, and then putting in place a strategy to bring it about. And most of the. . . . The best things involve creating that kind of movement. The most significant changes involve bringing in a lot of people to the process-getting them informed about the concerns and the problems, and then getting them on a strategy and an agenda.I've

done that, for example, with housing. I think I've been more effective by going out there and sort of beating the bushes and saying, "This is something that we need to work on: bringing a lot of people together; getting them to, you know, start thinking almost as a movement. We really have to get the city to start changing their policies about housing or enacting some policies about housing." That's the way I think you can be most effective, because it can be more lasting. It isn't just a rah-rah: "Here I am! Here's the policy." It's a real movement, and, I think, that way that keeps the consistency going. That sort of creates. . . . When you're going to make that change, somebody's going to be checking on it and keeping up the momentum. So I think it requires almost like winning a campaign. Every single significant change has to really involve a long-range strategy, and it has to be implemented all the way through. I've approached things that way. I mean, my high school dropout legislation and trying to get the city to work on housing issues. Things that are really important involve, you know, putting together a long-term strategy and continuously working it.

Vasquez

You seem to be saying that for politics-the future of politics-is for more grass-roots organizing, more accountability, more accessibility, which seems to fly in the face of all the trends of what politics has become. Do you feel that we're going to return to that kind of politics to . . . ?

Molina

We have to. We have to. I think the biggest mistake that we make is being smug once we get here, you know, and saying, "Oh, well. I'm here, and you're not" kind of thing. That happens.

Vasquez

Incumbentitis?

Molina

Yes. I think the best thing that we can do is to go out and revitalize and reenergize the people out there and get them to hold us accountable. Why not? It's good for us, and it's good for them. That doesn't seem to happen. Politicians get here, and they want to maintain the status quo, and that's an

unfortunate kind of situation. They're intimidated by anyone who wants to bring in anything different. And that's really unfortunate, because I think that, you know, if our political system is really going to grow-if we're really going to continue to have a strong democracy-you have to have a lot of people involved. It has to be an inclusive process, and it can't be run by a few as it seems to. Because I think that is going to. . . . It will eventually deteriorate. We have that possibility going on. So in the Chicano community, we should seize the opportunity of. . . . While other people may not find it as exciting, as interesting, aren't willing to go out there and vote, that we should go out there and say, "Here's a real opportunity to go out there and be part of that group of people that are going to hold politicians accountable and really start being really a significant part of it." There's real opportunities for it, for that involvement. I'm one of those that believes that we need to keep it open and accessible. That we need to go out there and encourage more people to participate in the process. Then, understand the consequences of that. The consequences are that the more people get involved in the process, the more effective they are at organizing and so on. Eventually, they'll come and organize you right out of office, but that might be a very, very good thing.

Vasquez

Is there anything else that you would like to say for the record in this interview?

Molina

[Laughter] Well, it's an interesting time in my life to be going through this interview. I never thought I would do it. I think that our history is an important one. I don't mean our history as just Latinos, but our political. . . . Each of us as elected officials and our political history is all very, very important. I think that most people will always want to figure out what makes us tick, how we operate, how we make decisions. I think that all of these collective interviews and this history will, hopefully, lead many of those people or give some guidance to many of these people about what made things tick as they did or how things happened at the time. So I think they're valuable. In addition, I also think that for myself and for others like myself, I think that is going to be interesting to go back and to read this interview. To see where we were at the time and where I'm going to be, let's say, in ten years. Because we all become

so very different people. I hope that I'm still going to be that kind of person that. . . . I don't know if I represented that in this interview, but I hope I will continue to be aggressive. I think that my style of confronting the issues is something that needs to be done, because others aren't doing it. Hopefully, there's still going to be an interest in pursuing that fight. That's important. I always wondered as to when we're going to get tired of that fight and back off. I hope I never will, because I think it's an ongoing pleito or an ongoing fight that we have to wage in order to really achieve our equality.

Vasquez

Thank you very much, councilwoman, for this interview.

Notes

1. Morales, Alejandro. *The Brick People*. Houston: Arte Público Press, 1987.
1. In the spring of 1968, over fifteen thousand students in East Los Angeles walked out of their classes to protest the quality of education.
1. Proposition 14 (November 1976).
4. Mills, Kay. *Gloria Molina*. *Ms.* (January 1985): 80, 114 . Molina was featured on the cover of *Ms.* magazine's Woman of the Year issue.
1. A.B. 861, 1983-1984 Reg. Sess., Cal. Stat., ch. 522 (1984).
6. Matthews, Jay. *Los Angeles' New Councilwoman Reflects Changing Ethnic Politics*. *Washington Post* (April 14, 1987): A4 .
1. A.B. 1745, 1983-1984 Reg. Sess., Cal. Stat., ch. 890 (1983).
1. A. B. 1405, 1983-1984 Reg. Sess., Cal Stat., ch. 897 (1983).
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16. Frank del Olmo, *Two Eastside Machines? Let's Hope Not*, *Los Angeles Times* (February 6, 1987): II, 5 .

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