

Interview with Alcuin “Al” Loehr
July 12 and July 18, 1977
Central Minnesota Historical Oral History Collection
St. Cloud State University Archives
Interviewed by James Robak and Calvin Gower

Robak: Today is July 12, 1977. This interview is being conducted by James Robak and Calvin Gower of the Central Minnesota Historical Center. We are interviewing Mayor Al Loehr of St. Cloud. Mayor Loehr would you start by giving me some information on both your public involvement and background.

Gower: Your family background.

Loehr: First of all let me say that I am very pleased to participate in this interview process. I am a lifelong resident of the city of St. Cloud. I grew up at 29th Avenue North. On the west side of the city, which is known as the third ward. My father was an active member of the granite industry, which St. Cloud was famous for, for many years. Still carries a great deal of credit line for its granite industry. Myself, I was educated at St. Anthony’s elementary School in west St. Cloud. Went on to Cathedral High School, and completed two years at Cathedral High School and went into the military in World War II and received my high school certificate from the United States military. During my stint of two years and nine months in the United States Navy, I was considered for the academy. I missed on algebra credit or I would have been eligible for the military academy. Because of my leadership qualities and other evaluations they had made of me during my duty with the United States Navy in World War II. Upon returning from the service in 1947 I went on there to join the Great Northern Railway Company in Waite Park,

Minnesota, as a Carman apprentice. I completed my apprenticeship out there, and stayed with the company until 1962. In 1962 I was offered the general managership of the local firm here in St. Cloud, but during that time I became politically active. I became politically active with a very famous individual by the name of Walter "Fritz" Mondale, who is now the Vice President of the United States, and asked me one day very candidly if I had any aspirations to get involved in government and I said yes, I was very interested I becoming politically involved. So I got myself somewhat involved at the time in 1965 or '64 I was selected by acclamation by the local District 24 senatorial district to run for state senate. My opponent was Keith Hughes. I lost a very close election, a change of 400 votes out of 21,000 cast and I would have been elected the state senator in lieu of my opponent Senator Hughes, Keith Hughes. Then of course after losing the senatorial election in 1964 I had been contacted by Governor Karl Rolvaag of Minnesota to come aboard and be one of his cabinet officers as they would call it, commissioners. In February 1, 1965, I took over the job as Commissioner of Veterans' Affairs in Minnesota under the Rolvaag administration. I stayed on, I was confirmed by the State senate for a four-year term in 1966, Governor Rolvaag was defeated for re-election. Governor Harold Levander was elected and I very candidly went to the governor and told him I was willing to step aside because I was not of his political party. I was a lame duck commissioner and if he saw it to appoint someone else I would be very willing to step aside. Governor Levander indicated to me through his aide that he wanted me to stay. There was a great deal of interest in my contribution in government. He also said that he did not have any problems with me because of my political background. So I stayed on with Levander for 28 months. And I served out my term. Well, I served my term plus a month and a half of extra time. I was called in to come back to Stearns County, I was given an appointment as Stearns County Civil Defense Director, here in St. Cloud. I served on that

capacity until my election in November 1970 as mayor of St. Cloud. So, I've been mayor of this wonderful community since November 9th, 1970. So that kind of briefly summarizes my political career. I can say that I've been active in various political campaigns. My first involvement in a presidential election was in 1948 when Harry Truman was re-elected as our president, or elected as our president; he was appointed previous to that. Everyone knows that the pollsters said that Harry Truman could not win the re-election, many of us that had a strong commitment to the Democratic principles said that we need to get out and work. And we did. And Harry Truman was subsequently re-elected. Also I've been very active in Senator Hubert Humphrey's campaign. I'd been involved in the campaigns of Attorney General Mondale at the time. All the DFL office holders had some involvement. Basically my political involvement and the request of the people that wanted to utilize my services were directed towards the veteran population because my involvement in and my knowledge in leadership was in the veterans' organization. And I was able to be very helpful in this area. I was able to put together very effective volunteer committees, to assist in the very successful campaigns of the various people I have alluded to. So that rather comprehensively covers my political background.

Robak: Your involvement with the veterans has recently been shown by another appointment to the committee.

Loehr: Yes, I, that appointment has not been officially made. Sometime in the latter part of August, I understand that I will be officially appointed National Chief of Staff of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. A two million member organization in this nation. I will serve as a congressional liaison and assist with the policy decisions of our national commander. He is one Dr. John Wasliek of Sandusky, Ohio. It's a nonpaying position. The only commitment you have from the organization is that when they send you out on assignment they pay your expenses. Whatever

they might be. But there is no salary connected with this job. However, I have served as state commander of this organization. I have served as a national executive committee member of this organization, representing the states of Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa. I've had a great deal of involvement. I have also served as a vice-chairman nationally of the National American Legion Legislative committee. Basically, to provide some assistance and expertise in the area of veterans' needs: hospitals compensation, housing. Many other veteran related issues.

Gower: Can we get a little more about your personal background. What is the date and year of your birth?

Loehr: The date of my birth is October 20, 1927.

Gower: And you were born in St. Cloud?

Loehr: St. Cloud.

Gower: And were both of your parents born in Minnesota?

Loehr: Yes, both of my parents were born in western Stearns County. My mother was born on a farm in a small little hamlet of St. Rosa, Minnesota which is just a little bit south of Freeport. My father was born and raised on a farm in Spring Hill, Minnesota, which is just west of Melrose, a short distance. So both of my parents are Stearns County-ites.

Gower: Are both of your parents of German descent?

Loehr: Both German descent. My father was a German Prussian. Prussian German is the proper term. My mother is a Low German or as they call it out there a Plat Deutsch. There is a difference between a High German and a Low German. My mother is of Low German descent and my father is a High German, Prussian German.

Gower: In reference to the language?

Loehr: In reference to the language, yes. Just to the language, yes.

Gower: And what about their parents, were they born in the United States?

Loehr: My grandfather Gerhardt Van Bocher, my mother's father was born in Austria. My grandfather Peter Loehr, of course, he was born in Iowa. I'm sorry to say that I don't know the name of the community. But he was born in Iowa and he immigrated, migrated, rather, to western Stearns County.

Gower: And what kind of work did your father do?

Loehr: My father was a granite cutter, as I indicated earlier. A granite cutter's job was very difficult one, a very hard job, physically. They basically cut grave markers and gravestones. By hand, and he'd do the lettering and you can go to any of the cemeteries around here and I can show you some of his work. It's really excellent. You have to have a special kind of expertise in that area. But this was all hand done, you know. All with a chisel and a hammer. So that was his profession and he was in it for over 37 years.

Robak: Was he an apprentice in it, or?

Loehr: He went in as an apprentice. My father left the farm a year after he was married and started out at the St. Cloud Veterans Administration Hospital in 1927. And he stayed there a short time. Six or seven months. He felt that was not his niche. So he did some inquiry and found the going industry in St. Cloud was the granite industry. So he applied at the North Star Granite Company which was then owned by Campbell brothers. And started out as an apprentice stone cutter. And he moved right up the ladder. From an apprentice stone cutter to a finished stone

cutter, a finished cutter. In those years when I talk about the difficulty of the granite industry, you know, they had a lot of men, even some of them lived in our neighbors, friends of my father's never lived a very old age. Some of them lived to be 60 and some less than that, because they had contracted this disease, stone dust disease called silicosis. The dust of the granite would fill up the lungs and suddenly they would, you know, it was like tuberculosis and then the lungs would deteriorate and they would die. But my father I guess, I would have to say my father died when he was 71 years of age and he was a very young looking man. However, I think that the granite industry had taken its toll on my father. Because he did have problems with his lungs, because of that. I think it had a lot to do with his passing.

Gower: No was your father active politically at all?

Loehr: No, my father was never active politically but he was a staunch Democrat. He was a Floyd B. Olson Democrat. I used to hear him tell me time and time again. He said, "You know one of the greatest tragedies of political life was that we lost Floyd B. Olson because he could have been the president of the United States, had he lived." Now I have never read the background and history of Floyd B. Olson, but I understand that he was one of the great governors of this state. But my father knew more about him than I did.

Gower: Was anybody in your family active politically?

Loehr: No.

Gower: So are you the only one of your present family that is active politically?

Loehr: Yes. There are eight children and I'm the only active person politically in that whole family of ours.

Gower: Are you the oldest one in your family?

Loehr: I am the oldest, yes, I am.

Gower: How do you think that you got interested in politics?

Loehr: Well, I guess during my high school days and my involvement in the military I had a desire to be involved. I had the desire to want to lead people. I wanted to be in the forefront; I wanted to be able to speak to people on issues and concerns they had. I might be honest with you, I was terribly bashful. And that may seem hard for you to accept because of my outwardness and aggressive nature today. But I can tell you that when I came out of the military in 1947, I was very much of an introvert, I just didn't want to communicate too much with anyone, I just wanted to be a kind of a loner. And things just started happening. I became involved in the local union activities of the Great Northern Railway Company at that time where I was employed and a lot of people there saw my potential and encouraged me to run for an office and I did and I was elected. I became a negotiator for the local Brotherhood of Railway Carmen of America. So when I sit in this position of mayor I can say that I've worn two hats. I've worn the hat of the employee and I've worn the hat of the employer. And it helps me a great deal in my decision-making processes of today. Because I have had experience in those areas. I understand the humanness of people, when they say, "I need more money. I need more fringe benefits." And that kind of thing. But that's basically the reason that I became so politically involved, because I had a commitment to help people. I think that one significant part of that is, I always felt that I wanted to do something for the underdog. I wanted to do something for the downtrodden and disenfranchised. And you can check my record; it isn't just something that I am expressing today, my record is there to look at and I have addressed myself to the concerns of

the poor people. And people who are in need. A lot of that doesn't get to the press. We don't run to the press with all those things. Of course, the press, basically, and I do say with all due respect to them, they don't have any interest in those humanitarian types of things anyways. They just kind of pass those over. So that's just a normal type of thing that happens. But that's something that I've really been interested in. You know when you have people like Walter Mondale and Hubert Humphrey. Let's look at Senator Hubert Humphrey for example. He selected me as one of the mayors of Minnesota to campaign for him during his illness last fall. I appeared at college campuses and spoke on behalf of the distinguished senator. And on election night for Senator Humphrey to speak from his Washington residence, and publicly state that he wanted to thank Mayor Al Loehr for his outstanding efforts in his campaign for his re-election. That moment I shall never forget; that just stunned me. When I was listening to this national network when Vice President Mondale and Governor Anderson were talking to Senator Humphrey and he talked about my service and dedication in his campaign and how grateful he was. So when I look in this whole political picture I feel we made some contribution. Now when we look at the political aspect of this thing we have to also look at some other things. I served as the president of the Minnesota Mayor's Association. I just completed a term as president of the Minnesota League of Cities. I have served on various committees in the National Conference of Mayors. I have served on various committees in the National League of Cities. I presently serve as the chairman of the MJC-ite Committee of Minnesota. The Minnesota Criminal Justice Commission of Minnesota. I served in other capacities; I've served on the Governor's – I'm really stuck on this commission, it deals with the Mississippi River from Itasca Park to New Orleans. And I can't think of the name of the committee. Jim Pehler was my successor. Yes.

Gower: Great River something?

Loehr: No it isn't, it wasn't called Great River. Mississippi Park Way Commission. I just drew a blank on that. But anyways, Jim Pehler is my successor on that commission. And I also served on the Governor's Bicentennial Commission. I was the person selected to represent the Sixth congressional district. And, of course, I had to resign that because of too many duties here, and John Massmann was selected to follow me in that capacity. So I have had a great deal of experience in both appointed and elected offices. I've enjoyed government very much. I guess one of the things I think so extremely important in serving public service as an elected or appointed official is credibility, and integrity. I think that those things are so important. My philosophy is "Government business is the people's business." There is no need for executive sessions, closed door meetings; those meetings should be open to general public. This business that we conduct is their business. Not our individually or collectively. And those are some of the things that I feel very strongly about. I have no problems with the open meeting law. Some people get all frustrated with this thing. Not me. I just like people to be able to come in. You don't see my door closed. Now that's rare because I can go to many cities in this state and if you can find the mayor's door open, I want you to point that one out to me. There aren't too many of them. This door is open at all times. The only time they close it is if they are having a taping interview such as this where the typewriter noise could affect the interview. But other than that unless someone says, "Mayor, I would like to talk to you about a confidential matter," then I close the door. I give the respect to that person, or the request that we talk about something confidential I'll respond by closing the door.

Gower: Now Jim and I have interviewed a lot of legislators and I want to ask you a question I hope it won't offend you. Because I ask every one of them and usually I don't get much of an answer. Was one of the reasons you went into politics the get more of a position of power?

Loehr: No. I think that power for the most part is totally abused. I think that I can say to you and say to anybody very publicly that humility is really one of my highest attributes. If I have any. I don't really believe that I ought to have power. I like to speak out on issues and express my viewpoint but I do not want to be able to say to someone, "You do this or else." That type of power. Their power in authority, power to accomplish things for the benefit of the majority, yes.

Gower: Because that's one of the things that can happen when you get into political office.

Loehr: Sure, sure. But I can tell you that I do not feel that I have to have the authority because I am the elected mayor to be all powerful and lead people up and around and telling them this is what needs to be done, or else. I like to provide direction. I like to be elected with my position, my philosophy, but I don't feel I want to really bring that down on anybody and say, "Accept it or else." That to me sounds like you're power mad or something. And I don't see that at all. I think government or an elected official position is no different than being a man and wife at home. I don't feel I have any power over my wife. My wife is equal. She's equal to me, and I'm equal to her. And so we don't get into the hassle of who is the power base here. "You know when Al speaks that's the gospel and that's the law." No way! My wife and I as a family we sit down, we have dialogue. And many times we will debate. My wife doesn't necessarily believe because I am mayor that she has to agree with my philosophy of government. Or my position on issues. She's an independent thinker. I don't want to come into her and say, "Mother, you have to believe what I tell you because I have the background, the experience and you have no right to challenge my position." That's taboo.

Robak: So in part it's that way of defining power.

Loehr: Yes. And you know power should never ever be abused. We know that our experiences in this country with the highest office in the land that those things can happen.

Robak: One of the issues in the 1970 election it was a matter of a strong mayor. And did you have a problem presenting this to the public? Were they afraid that, “Yeah, now, Loehr, if elected is going to have too much power?”

Loehr: I think that if you recall back in that 1970 election I made that a campaign issue. I said that the city of St. Cloud has now arrived where it does need a full time mayor. A person elected by the people to report on his stewardship and if he doesn't administer the affairs of the city properly the next election he'll be turned out. I felt as I evaluated the city of St. Cloud and I had been at two levels of government, state and county. Looking at St. Cloud's situation, and this is not to be critical of predecessors. But by any means looking at St. Cloud's impact on legislative action on legislative issues, it was rather bad. Let me cite you one example. We had a Cadillac pension plan for police and firemen of this city, and let me make myself absolutely clear that I have a great deal of admiration and support for both public safety departments, police and fire. However, I must also in that same manner consider the fact that the people of this city, pay for both those services through ad valorem taxes. And with the pension plan as it was written, by the legislature many moons ago, we would have by 1980 – would've had to raise the taxes, if a change would not have taken place, raised the taxes by 35 million, to fund two pension plans. And I was not very popular at the time if you recall, I said I took on the entire state's police and fire departments when I said we must change the law so that we protect the interest of the taxpayers of this state. Now, I don't care what they do in the city of Minneapolis or St. Paul, wherever, but it is my duty and my obligation to protect the citizens and all that I represent as mayor. I went to the Twin Cities, St. Paul, that is, and campaigned actively in opposition to the

1969 Guidelines Act. I got some awfully awful snickers and “What kind of guy are you?” and that kind of thing. And I said I would like to take the time if you would listen to me and point out the reasons why we must make a change for the benefit of the people of my city. And that happened. So that was one issue that I felt could have been cleared up many years ago if we would have had a full time mayor, who should’ve had the time to devote to this job so he could go to the Twin Cities, to St. Paul, that is and visit with the legislature. And at least point out some of the needs of the local government. Particularly St. Cloud. Now the full-time mayor issue has been brought up time and time again and I’ve been elected three times as mayor in this city. And I feel proud to be elected by the people of this city. And that issue has surfaced every election. And it just hasn’t had any impact. In terms of trying to revert back to a part time mayor situation. I think the advent of the part-time mayor business has gone by the boards, I think that you’ll find that more cities our size are going to a full time mayor.

Gower: For the smaller town the part time mayor may be okay?

Loehr: For the smaller town, yes. I’ve, if you’re talking about cities like Waite Park, Sauk Centre, Melrose, Sauk Rapids, Worthington, and places like that, part time mayors can then accomplish their goals. But in a city our size where we are dealing with federal funding we are dealing with the federal Congress, dealing with the executive branch of the federal government, dealing with the state legislature, we are dealing with the executive branch of state government and we’re involved in all the new program that are brought to us. We have now a public ownership Transit Authority in our city. I am a member of that. I am a member of the Regional Development Commission that participated in the comprehensive planning of a four-county area. I am a member of the Council of Governments. I am a member of the Sewer Commission. These kinds of things did not exist ten years ago. But now those things have developed. And someone

has got to be there to represent the interest of our city. And that's what I do. And I can tell you that we have been effective, and when I say we I say or mean collectively a team effort, in St. Cloud, in government, has been successful in bringing together a system of government, that's been very responsive and very effective in getting its work done.

Today is July 18, 1977. This is the second session of an interview with Al Loehr of St. Cloud. We will continue asking questions from the first session.

Gower: One of the questions I was going to ask, was in regard to the election of 1964 when you ran for State senate, couple of things there, one, in that year I was working with Jerry Burnett's campaign incidentally, and I was wondering if you felt in a sense as if you were a labor candidate versus a more business candidate than Keith Hughes?

Loehr: No, not necessarily. I believe that at the time I was associated and clearly identified as a field representative for the DFL in Minnesota. I was involved as a Liberal Coordinating Committee's staff person to work with candidates in various legislative districts. And to assist and hopefully to getting them elected. And I'm proud to say that we were pretty successful in getting them selected in many areas. Until just prior to the DFL State convention when then George Farr the State DFL chairman and Congressman Alec Olson came to me and said, "We need a candidate to run against the endorsed candidate for the senate from District 27." And at that time it was rather clear that Keith Hughes was to be that candidate. I was reluctant to accept the nod if you will, because it was short and I didn't have the time to put together a functioning and effective volunteer committee. It was really kind of an emergency situation where I jumped into the race. Late as I said in June. Filings opened up in July. And my predecessor or my

opponent had already made lots of comments to the press and had been involved in organizing his campaign very well locally here, and that was a great advantage to him and a very serious disadvantage to me. Because it looked as though I became an eleventh hour candidate. The things that perhaps had a great bearing on my campaign at that particular time and some subsequent elections – there was no requirement for a party endorsement. Legislators did not run under a party designation label. It was proven time and time again in this area that you were best off not to identify with either party, and just simply say that you were making your decision on caucusing with either the conservative or liberals, when you arrived. That was a good ploy and it worked rather well. So I felt in a sense that I was at some disadvantage. Along with the fact that I was immediately identified as the person who was carrying the banner for the DFL in Minnesota. And that I would not have as one would say an open mind on all the issues. That I would simply support the DFL platform and not be concerned about some of the issues, the more conservative element, that the Republicans were interested in. And so I had some difficulty in putting together a very effective kind of political campaign, I thought we did rather well. Because in a switch of 400 votes I would have been elected. We carried Benton County in the primary. And did very well. We lost the election you might say, right in Keith Hughes' own Fourth Ward up in Centennial or in the armory precinct where I really got bombed. And had that not occurred I think that our chances would have been somewhat better. I think as I look back on 1964 I guess I felt I was more of a candidate that was selected to carry the DFL banner so to speak and not identified necessarily with labor even though I do come from the labor ranks, my running mate for the House seat was Jerry Burnett. As you well know. And he was strongly identified with the labor element because of his involvement with the labor organization and I didn't think it hurt me but it helped me as a matter of fact that I was able to run with Jerry Burnett because Jerry had

a very strong and substantial labor organization behind him and that kind of you know, flowed off if you will, and it helped me also considerably. But be that as it may, I had to overcome some obstacles that we just weren't able to overcome, and one of those at that time was to raise the amount of money that was necessary to carry on an effect PR campaign, that's needed to win. The Democrats in those years were still caucusing in the telephone booths if you recall. We weren't as strong as we are today and then that did do some damage, if you will, as far as my personal campaign is concerned, but I think it helped a great deal as far as the future is concerned as I sought other offices as time went on. So that's about what I would sum up to be the problems that I faced in being a candidate for the state senate.

Gower: Now I've interviewed Keith Hughes and I've got the impression that he is quite a liberal Republican. Is that your impression?

Loehr: Yes.

Gower: So there might have been some difficulty in yours. If he'd been much more conservative, you'd have been able to show the contrast?

Loehr: I think it is well that you brought this up, one of the things that was very difficult dealing with is that there was not any contrast between Keith Hughes and I because Keith Hughes is a liberal moderate Republican and I was of the same, you know, cut, if you will, and we ran a very clean campaign. I think in your interview with Mr. Hughes he probably indicated that to you. It was probably – well, the Newspaper Association in Minnesota noted this to be the cleanest and most above board and issue oriented senatorial campaign that had ever been conducted. We didn't attack one another; there were no personalities involved. We just talked about the issues and both of us being new, the two of us started at the gate together. The only thing is that Keith

did have a stronger base of support than I had because of his association as a professional person in the legal area. And let's face it, his father had been very much involved politically over the period of years – had a lot of people who really immediately responded to him when he asked for help. And that to me was the contrast but I guess I have to say at this time that Senator Keith Hughes did a great job in the years he was in the Senate, in representing this senatorial district. As a matter of fact, I can tell you very honestly in one or two elections I supported him.

Gower: Just one other thing in connection with all that. A matter of interest, you were saying the DFL designation back then might have actually been harmful and now of course, we've got where the DFL is so strong, how do you account for that?

Loehr: In those days I felt in due difference to all the DFL'ers, and I happen to be one of them. We were terribly disorganized, we just, we had out differences within our own ranks and those differences didn't seem to get, seem to resolve themselves where our opponents could differ and still get together at election time and put the X in the right place. I think since that time, of course, we've become very issue oriented, we feel, with some very excellent candidates, we've used the system of election procedure with just a bit more background and knowledge and I think that's helped us a great deal. I think we were at one time, particularly in those years, I think we could characterize our party as something like a herd of sheep. That's just been moved out by one of the wolf hounds and we're split all over the place and we never really got the herd together again you see. That does not exist today, we have our very tough convention fights on issues, but we just decided in order for us to win we have to show some semblance of unanimity and I think that's happened. I guess I could spend another hour telling you about the difference between the endorsement system and the non-endorsement system because I thinking I can tell you with a great deal of experience, about that also, because I was a state-wide candidate in

1974, ran with a very good team of DFL'ers, incumbents, and those who were seeking office. However, my disadvantage was I didn't have and I might tell you honestly, I didn't have a very Scandinavian name and secondly that I didn't have the background like some of the people, Jimmy Lord, who was identified with his father Miles Lord, and Bob Mattson, Jr. who was identified with Bob Mattson the former attorney general; that kind of thing helped a great deal. And Joan Growe, of course, it was a year for the woman. This helped that, but I guess I experienced some real, all kinds of traditional politics. If you don't have the right guns and the right name it does have some problems or presents some problems and I say that as a man who has gone through it and has experienced it again and I want to reiterate it's not expressed with any kind of animosity because I learned a long time ago in my life, animosity and vindictiveness just doesn't help you a great deal in the future, so you kind of accept the fact that you've been defeated and however, that defeat took place the post mortems are always very interesting; you hear all kinds of statements; who supported you and who didn't and so you just accept that as being real and that's the ways it is and that kind of sums up how I feel about the situation of endorsements and non-endorsements. I guess the advent of endorsements as I see it are good in a sense but I can tell you this. As far as I'll be concerned I think you're going to see most endorsed candidates challenged. Because they just don't like the idea of the big party bosses sitting in a smoke-filled room telling them whose going to be the banner bearer. Unless you have a lot of political clout your chances of going anywhere in an endorsed situation are rather remote or nil.

Gower: I know representative Bob McEachern told Jim and me last week that he definitely ran as a DFL'er, a Democrat all his life, and he felt this was the way to go. That represents, as you might put it, quite a change.

Loehr: But do you believe we would have had the successes in the DFL party and legislative success, constitutional officer successes had it not been for Watergate? Absolutely not.

Gower: Well, that's another thing I was wondering about. I think part of it is better organizing of the Democrats but then part of it is the disarray among the Republicans. There were in trouble with Watergate. I think also because of issues; the stand they take on various issues.

Loehr: That to me in my estimation, Cal is one of the real reasons we have been successful and have had a great successes in our reelection in the past several years--is because the Republicans are in such a great state of disarray. Watergate really, truthfully, done them in.

Gower: Most certainly.

Loehr: And I suspect they're going to make a recovery, I would assume that they will make the same kind of recovery that we make in the 1966 insurance scandal of Minnesota. We lost incumbent Governor Karl Rolvaag and a lot of other people. I think as time goes on, history will record--you have your, what you might say, ups and downs, and you get involved in a political scandal and you pay the price. At that time, of course, not only was there problem within the administration, between lieutenant governor governor--they were both of the same party and didn't like each other. Perhaps, depending on who you talk to, one was more effective than the other. Some Democrats made the great and grievous error of meeting in a special little session up at Sugar Hills--that put the whole party in disarray. As a result, we lost. But the Rolvaag/Keith wounds are still there in some quarters--however, we've won some elections since that time and we've done it basically because we haven't made those kind of silly mistakes that we make at that time. I guess history will record that too as time goes on.

Gower: Jim, you've got some questions.

Robak: One that just came up now in talking on endorsements, etc., was the--I was wondering what your views were in regard to the surprise victory in the special Congressional election, this past spring was it? Where Sullivan won?

Gower: Sullivan was defeated.

Robak: Sullivan was defeated, even though, excuse me, he had the endorsement of some of the national figures, Humphrey, Mondale, etc. I think this is something along the lines that you have been talking about. Endorsement necessarily doesn't help all that much.

Loehr: Well, I hate to be one of those that says, "I told you so," but I recall that victory for the Republicans in the Seventh district. First of all, I knew Arlan Stangland. I worked for him when I was in state government--a very effective legislator, a very effective person in communicating with his constituents, low-key, not a self-seeker in any sense, a farmer, a good name--and I say this in all due difference to Mike Sullivan; Mike Sullivan was a very excellent choice for a congressional race. However, a more "thinking" kind of congressional race in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul or somewhere in there where you deal with more of the metropolitanites--in a farm district such as the Seventh congressional district where you're dealing with farmers and laborers and people of that type profession, they don't like the Ivy-League types coming to the area and wanting to tell them that, "I'm your answer to the continuation of the DFL dominance," or DFL programs that were just so beautifully handled by the previous Congressman Bob Bergland. But you know Mike Sullivan was not a Bob Bergland. Bob Bergland won that race by 71 percent of the vote. And Mike Sullivan got knocked out of the box completely. As of matter of fact, it was so bad it was actually embarrassing. And I think one of the things you'll find and you'll find it on this level of government: People resent very much

your bringing in the big guns. I think I can tell you, in my conversations with county commissioners in one, and the county will remain anonymous for obvious reasons, but did tell me and he said “I’ve been a Democrat all my life and my township is 72 percent Democrat, but we resent very much someone coming in, holding a higher political office, and telling us ‘If you elect Mike Sullivan to Congress, this will give you entrée to the power base in Washington.’”

And that was a comment that was really highly resented. Now, I guess, I wasn’t there but I’ve been told by others that did attend, that whenever the office holders appeared, the crowds that they had anticipated did not appear; that in most places, that when a high level figures came to support the candidacy of Mike Sullivan, the turnout was very limited. And I think that should have been a clear indication of what was happening. I know that there were a lot of people who were interested in maintaining that DFL seat in Congress, including myself. I had offered my assistance, and I was told, “We really don’t need it, we’re doing rather well.” And I just said, “Well, fine.” You know, I just thought I’d offer my services and I did run rather well up in the Seventh district in my quest for the state auditor’s seat. I also worked in that district at one time years back, and for various candidates who attempted to defeat Congressman Odin Langen and suddenly Bob Bergland came on the scene and did it after the second try. You know, after the first try, rather--the second try he was elected. But it does to prove the candidates must be able to influence the leadership in a given area, but no one on a higher level, whether a governor, congressman, Vice President or whatever can come in and say to a group of people, “This is the man you gotta vote for,” or “This is the woman you gotta vote for.” Because people in this state are very independent thinkers and they sit on the philosophy that we can best determine who’s going to represent us on whatever level it might be. And they are very independent. I’ve found this out in my experiences of traveling statewide and campaigning for offices and working as a

DFL field person and so on. You'll find that happens very often. So to sum it all up, I guess I'm saying I don't really believe that bringing in a lot of national figures and other people really helps you a great deal in winning any kind of election, because the first people you have to get to are the grass roots voters in that particular district, in that city, in that state and get them oriented so they really believe that you can in fact carry on the duties of that office if you're elected. That's the criteria.

Robak: Had you won in the 1964 senatorial election, serving as state senator, would you have run again in 1968? Would you have pursued a higher office in Minnesota?

Loehr: I think, in time, every person who holds public office has a built-in aspiration to seek higher office. I think if anyone tells you they have not in the past, some of them have come to the forefront, but for the most part everybody that holds public office has an interest in moving up, if that's possible. I suspect that if I would've been elected to the state senate in 1964, and I don't want this to be construed to be somewhat pompous or arrogant in any sense of the word, but I would've spent a great deal of time certainly representing my legislative district, my senatorial district. However, my objective would've been to become part of the leadership within the Senate body and then perhaps if that would've been accomplished, though hard work, I probably then would have attempted to seek statewide office. And I'm just being totally candid about that because I have prided myself over the years in any type of activity I've been involved. I've gone for the top leadership post and for the most part I've been successful. I've already served as president of the Minnesota Mayors' Association. I've served as president and vice-president of the Minnesota League of Cities. And those are goals that I have sought out myself. And the only way I could win those is with the support of the delegates--and to prove to the delegates that I was capable and effective enough to provide the kind of leadership that they wanted to have.

And that's the kind of person that I am. I'm (a) very progressive person and if you will, very ambitious. And I make no qualms about that. I feel that if you want to get somewhere, politically, you have to many times put your reputation on the line. You've got to be able to influence people and if you can do that you might be successful and if you can't, well politics is not your profession.

Gower: On the state auditor race in 1974, I think one of the things you said at the time, as I recall anyway, it that you had to be free from Minneapolis or St. Paul. Do you still feel that way?

Loehr: Yes, I do. As a matter of fact, one of the mistakes I made in that campaign was that I spent too much time in the outstate area where I should've concentrated my time in the metropolitan areas of Minneapolis-St. Paul and their suburbs. I might want to point out to you that I did carry Ramsey County, but I lost Hennepin County by a very substantial margin and that hurt me. And I might also say that one other difficulty that I had at the time and many others didn't, but I did have; I happen to be a very close, intimate friend of Jim Oberstar, and Jim Oberstar was challenging the endorsed candidate for that congressional seat, Tony Perpich. And I was loyal to the endorsed candidate and as a result I took my licking up there. One of the things I think is extremely important in this business of elections or party endorsements, is if you really believe in that philosophy of endorsements, then you must get out there and publicly support the candidates that have been endorsed, because if you don't do that then you have been less than honest with the delegates that gave you the endorsement. So that was something else that didn't help us a great deal because I was asked to come up and speak in many of the legislative races where legislators did win and I had to talk about the State ticket and I had to talk about the endorsement system. What else could I do but say I was four square in support of the endorsed

candidate? Even though I knew in my own mind that it was going to be difficult for the endorsed candidate to win that primary election.

Gower: I don't really know, I just wonder how long it's been since anyone from St. Cloud or this area has been a state constitutional officer?

Loehr: I can't recall the exact time, but I believe it was one of the Sheplands here in St. Cloud that served as lieutenant governor. Oh, that's way back in the history of our state now. I can't tell you the exact year but we did have a constitutional officer from--

Gower: I know way, way back, Miller, I think it was, was the governor of Minnesota. That's way back in the 1860s.

Loehr: Yes, that's right.

Gower: I really do wonder if St. Cloud has had much success--

Loehr: No, they haven't. As you'll recall, my immediate predecessor, Mayor Henry, also had some statewide aspirations and for a short time in 1970 was interested in being the governor of our state and also there was also some consideration, as I understand, for the lieutenant governor's slot, but he decided to decline that. But there have been several of us who have had the office of mayor here in this community that have aspired to the state office. George Byers, who was mayor of this city back in the 50s, ran unsuccessfully several time in the legislative races, so there's been some interest by the elected mayors of St. Cloud over the years in other statewide offices.

Robak: In campaigning for state auditor, what were some of the issues you felt strongly about, or were there any at all?

Loehr: Well, the transition that was made when the entire perspective of the State auditor's office and the authority of the State auditor's office was changed, where the State auditor became more or less the auditing authority for all local units of government: counties, school districts, and municipalities. My concerns at the time, when I ran, one of the issues that I felt was significant was that there ought to be more time spent with local finance directors, controllers, whatever official title they held and assisting them in setting up a fiscal management and control program that was acceptable to state and federal auditing standards. I think that for some time, or at least in earlier parts, there was a great deal of interest in attempting to criticize local governments, whether they be school districts, counties, municipalities with their financial management and financial procedures. They become very upset--and at the time when I was a candidate I said that I was going to, if elected, spend a lot of time with my professional staff people who have the expertise in this area to go out into the field and conduct seminars and assure them that if you make a little mistake, your name isn't going to appear in the local headlines the next day, that you've done some improper kind of thing. A lot of the local officials in Minnesota became terribly angered by some of the bad publicity that they received, so I felt at the time that the proper mechanism to getting to local government was to attend the meetings, like the League of Minnesota Cities set up seminars, touch within the Association of Township Officers, the Association of Minnesota School Boards, the Association of Minnesota County Governments, and through those various organizations establish a rapport and a line of communication that would assist them and not necessarily be very critical at the outset. And you have that authority, of course, we realize that. However, that was one of the areas that I thought I could assist a great deal and of course I didn't get that opportunity, but I think it's just a lot easier to sit down with some people and say, "Listen, your procedures that you have apparently

followed for a number of years aren't just totally within the fiscal guidelines and fiscal procedures and monetary control procedures that are adopted or nationally known and accepted. And I think you can deal with the people on a more one-to-one basis, based on the fact that they trust you. I think one of the things that can cause some real serious problems is that if you have an attitude that you want to be critical before you've had an opportunity to even point out the corrective needs that should've taken place. But that's one of the real issues, and I guess, let's face it, I'm not going to deny that some of the other issues didn't affect me. And I think (they) probably really assisted in my demise at the time. One of my strong points is that I was a strong and still am a very strong pro-life person. The abortion issue didn't help me any, because I took a very strong and forthright position and when you get into some areas, that's not very well accepted. I got into a discussion, as a matter of fact, a debate on same-sex marriage, which I opposed, make no bones about it. There were some other issues that I quite frankly talked about that other politicians did not. It's rather easy to duck the issues, if you will. But I'm not that type of person--and you know, that's the kind of thing that will hurt me in terms of any kind of future considerations that I might have because I am a very candid and open person. I just can't be a hypocrite, is what I'm saying. I can't go out here and look at you and say for political expediency, "Perhaps I could support that, or I just really wouldn't take a position on it." I don't think that's fair. Those are some of the things that caused some difficulty for me, and again, I want to clearly state: I have no animosity, because I've got a clear conscience and I sleep well, because I don't have to be concerned about what I said one day and then contradicted myself the next.

Gower: What are your plans for the future, politically?

Loehr: I guess I'd be less than honest if I said that I did not have an interest in running for higher public office, if that should become possible or available. I guess that my term expires here in April of 1980. I'm not saying at this point I may not be a candidate for re-election. I think that we have made a rather substantial contribution to St. Cloud. However, there's an office opening up in 1980 that I ran for once, and I just missed it. I suppose that and again, I'm being totally candid; and I'm not making any commitment that I would be, but I'd have to say that I have an interest in Senator Kleinbaum's senatorial seat, because he has already indicated that he is not going to be a candidate for re-election.

Robak: That would be in 1978?

Loehr: That would be in 1980.

Robak: Or 1980, excuse me.

Loehr: Yes, they are four-year terms. And you know, the interesting part of it is that I've had a great deal of encouragement from a lot of people to keep that option open. And who knows, what might come? Or what the situation might be? That's somewhat in advance, that's still three years down the road.

Gower: You might be interested in number of possible offices then.

Loehr: Yes, I would. I really believe, gentlemen, that I could make a contribution to government, whether it be federal, state or local. I think we've proven that on several occasions. I guess I enjoy working for people. I enjoy rapping with people in terms of issues. The people I rap with necessarily don't have to say, "I do, I will." For the most part, they know that I like to rap and if they like to do the same thing, many times you can come up with some pretty good

issues that would, in the long-range help someone. And to sum it up, I guess I wouldn't close the door on running for any higher office. I might also tell you that that's pretty hard to come by. But, back in my mind, several times I have said that if I was able to provide the necessary influence, or perhaps interest the right people that would be willing to support me, I'd sure have some interest in hopefully sometime when it becomes available, running for it. Governor on a ticket with a governor. Of course, we know we have our present it. Governor who is supported by me and a longtime friend from his congressional days. You know I don't want to leave the impression that I'm going out challenging anybody—I'm not. But should it ever present itself in the future that that would be made available, I guess I feel that with all the experience I have had I could be an asset to the ticket. And I think that I wouldn't make the same mistakes the next time out that I did the first time. I think that's something that would help us a great deal.

Robak: You do enjoy the job as a mayor?

Loehr: I certainly do.

Robak: Evidently you look back and you see a lot of things that you have accomplished, and some pride exists. For example I'm sure that the All-America City atmosphere and this type of thing matter. Briefly, what were—could you just list some of the accomplishments, some of the things that you feel St. Cloud has progressed through or some things that you have been involved in or worked on.

Loehr: Well, I think that when I came into office, I recall that one of the real tough issues was the urban renewal program and whether or not downtown St. Cloud ought to remain valuable and competitive. For the most part there was a lot of anti-ism in St. Cloud. Anti-ism in doing anything in the urban renewal area. And the people who were supportive of the renewal program

knew that they needed my support at the head end to get it done. And a lot of people that voted for me in 1970 voted for me thinking, I presume, that I would be one of those antigovernment type of people or anti progressive people and that wasn't it at all. I told them at the time that I ran for mayor that if I could not be a progressive mayor and a mayor that provided leadership, I really didn't care for the job. Because you know that's what it needs, that's what it really requires. But anyway, we took on the downtown mall and ring-road project. As you well know that's the first time in the history of our city that we were ever challenged by the opposition, by a referendum vote on a resolution and an ordinance that was passed to proceed with that project. And then we formed Citizens for the Mall committee and we did our job, we did our homework and the referendum election was won by a plurality of 129 votes. However it was won; the majority made the decision and if you recall all the advertising that took place previous to that about the federal bulldozer and all the other kinds of things that the opposition used to influence the thinking of the voter. And then I look at the St. Cloud Sports Center complex which to this day yet some people are not happy with, but I think it's been a great asset to us. The All America City aware came to use based on that type of development. We've been very instrumental in working with the Federal government in the development of the new West Industrial Park so that we can remain competitive in that area in bringing new industry and new business to St. Cloud. We laid around here for a long period of time not getting anything done out here in in the old Whitney Memorial Park area just north of Centennial. When I came into office they hadn't sold lot one out there. Today that place is well developed, it's going to be a very, very exciting concept out there and we want to take a little credit for that because we had the innovative foresight to see that that could develop into a very exceptional kind of commercial, residential apartment complex type of area. And tying it in with the new Whitney Memorial Park it just

really has great potential. As you well know, just check the record, when I came into office, they were fighting. They hadn't gotten together on the routing of the Interstate 94. There were routes all over the place that looked like the blood veins in somebody's body. And we simply told them that the best choice would be to go to the routes that were finally settled on. We also were able to bring together our rural neighbors in support when we considered changing the plan to provide for an interchange north of St. Augusta which was later accepted. And now we're underway and I look forward to an early opening of I-94 which will alleviate some of the pressures of Division Street; not all of them, but some. I think that we can look at some other things that will be coming along: our 10th Street Bridge for the future; I think our total downtown development; of course I supported the public library 100 fold, however I've taken issue with some of the people who have forgotten their commitment to the voters of our city. A bond issue was placed before the voters for \$2.2 million with \$600,000 encumbered in a building fund for the library. And that simply says that we are to build a library within the means that have been provided to us, and that's \$2.8 million, and that will be decided tonight. And I hope they will move expeditiously so the public library can be built and that we can reap the benefits of it.

Robak: This will be the third part of this interview. We'll continue from the July 18th interview. Mayor Loehr, you were discussing some of the accomplishments and you were up to the present issue of the library. Would you care to continue?

Loehr: Yes, the library and of course under our new community development legislation, the funding for community development programs has also brought some new interests, some new concerns to the city. Some two years ago, I made it very clear that one of the high priorities in my administration would be to build, construct if you will, a separate type of facility for handicapped people. It seemed at the time that it was rather difficult for the handicapped and the

elderly to be co-mingled, if you will, because the elderly people have some sensitivities and so did the handicapped and at times they'd cause some difficulty. Handicapped people have asked on a number of occasions that I pursue that for them. So we did an area survey and asked for input. And I might say that I was very disappointed that we did not get the type of response that I thought we should have had to clearly implement the concept of a separate building for the handicapped people—a percentage is required—to make that a reality. I think that as we look at St. Cloud, the city itself, the future urbanization that will take place, that's inevitable, that the city will be required to provide full services to those areas such as police, fire, parks, recreation, sewer and water service particularly; that we may have to redesign the priorities as we look at them today in the capital improvement area and perhaps set aside certain amounts of money for sewer and water services to those new urbanized areas that will be coming to us in time. I think we all will certainly express an affirmative response to the question of the high assessments that are required today. In most areas, assessments are so high that they're just about confiscatory. And that troubles me a great deal because we do have a lot of people in the community that are low income, middle income people if you will, who really can't afford those kinds of services. However, they are entitled to them, but how they'll pay for them, that's another question. So I hope we can work out something in that area. We have within the city itself a need to proceed with a long-awaited separation of storm and sanitary sewer. We have some archaic, old sewer lines that need to be replaced. If we really believe in a clean environment—clean air, clean water—then it is incumbent upon us as public officials to see to it that proper planning takes place; that these things can be addressed. We are presently under a pan interceptor sewer project that the federal government is providing us funds for. I don't know how those increments of funds will come in, however, I hope that they will continue to come in so that we can complete

that projects. We're talking about from \$12-\$14 million and that's a large sum of money. So as we look at cities such as St. Cloud, we have to be concerned about the future. We have to be concerned about what the fiscal impact will be on the taxpayers. No one would argue with you that real estate taxes are terribly regressive, but if you don't collect ad valorem tax, where are you going to find a replacement? You're either going to have to find it through a sales excise tax or perhaps even explore the possibility of paying for all services that you receive, such as parks, swimming pools, and things such as that. We now spend just a few cents on our swimming pools and son on, but it could run into more money. So as we continue on our comments on the future of St. Cloud, we have to be totally cognizant of the growth of our city, whether we can meet that growth with the financial means that's necessary to do that. I think St. Cloud as a city has a tremendously bright future, even though it has some problems and those problems are certainly not unique in any sense of the word. But with the proper kind of leadership and the proper kind of commitment by public officials, I think we can achieve this. However if we determine that we want to be really penny-wise and pound-foolish, then of course, there may be a change in that perspective.

Gower: You don't--there's some people who sort of fear the city getting too large and all the problems that come with it. You don't have that kind of fear--

Loehr: I don't have that kind of fear at the present time, but it could happen--it could happen. I think that when we look at the issue of future growth, we must be prepared to address those questions that I alluded to earlier: Are we prepared to provide the full services to those new areas? Are we prepared to take on an additional large number of population, if you will? Because that requires an expenditure of dollars. And you must remember that when we take in a new are, those taxpayers that have been in the city for a long period of time are going to be called upon

again to assist in providing additional tax dollars for those new areas that we'll be taking in through annexation of and so on. So it becomes kind of a double burden thing for a lot of people. And I have had expressed to me on a number of occasions the question of fear of too much population or too big an area, too big a city. And I guess when we look back at some of the financial problems that some of our core cities are facing today, we have to be careful that that doesn't happen.

Gower: Okay, is there anything else you'd like to add, Mayor?

Loehr: I can't think of anything, Cal.

Gower: Okay. We really appreciate it.

Loehr: I think we've covered the gamut, the ballpark pretty thoroughly. And if there is a need later on that you feel that you want something in addition, just feel free to give us a call. We'd be happy to do that.

Gower: That concludes this interview.