

Interview with Al Patton

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Interviewed by John Waldron and Calvin Gower

Waldron: Mr. Patton, we usually start off by asking when you were born, where you were born, and what conception of the United States you held when you were growing up, and what type of educational background you had, etc.

Patton: Like my impression of the area in other words? Well, of course I was raised in Sauk Rapids a few miles from here. Then my Dad moved out in Benton County, and at that point he tried farming out in Granite Ledge, Minnesota, and he wasn't too successful with it, because it was just right after the depression. Then he moved back into the St. Cloud area about 1940, and we have remained here in the St. Cloud area ever since. I have lived now in Sartell since age five, and that will be thirty years and approximately within one block of the same area those thirty years. My impression of the area is that it is basically a conservative area. But it's not conservatively aligned politically. It will more or less fall within its own atoms of thought, and the area will select a representative accordingly. The constituents are probably rather reluctant at the present time to align themselves within a political philosophy rather than just possibly their own thoughts on what life should be. They are a very independent type of people, and of course when it comes to voting now they have to make a selection along party designation, making their selection rather confined.

Waldron: During the primary campaign there was an independent by the name of Palmer, I believe. One of his big issues was the reformatory. Mr. Fogel, Commissioner of Corrections, and Mr. Palmer seemed to draw a lot of constituents from his campaign. I was wondering if this closing down of St. Cloud reformatory was just a reflection of what people were thinking.

Patton: Well, Mr. Palmer did run his campaign from the view point of correctional reform. His idea of correctional reform was maintaining the institution here at St. Cloud pretty much as it is. Then he lost what I felt was the purpose of his campaign. He started more or less to use it as an issue to get people to follow him, rather than something meaningful which we could work with. This was so reflected in the primary, when it was the feeling of most people I talked to during the primary campaign that he would come through the primary. When in reality, he came in fourth with a little over nine hundred votes, and so this was a reflection of what he did not get across to the people what he wanted to get across. He tried to aggravate the people to the point where they should grab hold of this issue, and the people were probably just a little more intelligent and said "No". The idea of prison is something we have to deal with on a rational basis. There are good ideas coming to the surface, and legislators and candidates for the legislation have a responsibility of recognizing rather than isolating their own views and saying, "This is the way it's going to be." You have to be liberal or broadminded about it, and come off with at least a degree of acceptance to listen to people, and see what their ideas are. This is what happens; this is the philosophy the other candidates took in the primary. Then in the general election, of course, this same philosophy came through with both candidates.

Gower: Would you just briefly describe your vocational background, and then also your work in politics before you went into the legislature.

Patton: Cal, my education included elementary school at Sartell and secondary school here in the St. Cloud school system. After high school, I went to Minneapolis to a drafting, engineering school – Northwest Technical Institute. After that, I returned to the St. Regis Paper company with which I had been employed since age sixteen and went into their maintenance department as an electrician. From there, I went to their engineering department and worked on the engineering staff in drafting. Then, after about six years on the drafting board, I was promoted to the position back in the maintenance department of Cost Control. That is the position I have at this time. That is my educational background no formal education at all, and I regret that. But due to finances at that time it was prohibitive. And of course, right after the late fifties, or middle fifties finances started to break loose, but I was already out of the ball game. What got me into politics, I guess interestingly enough is that President Johnson Campaign. We had a great deal of interest at that time, because of course McCarthy was running and started stirring up the movement of the resistance against the war. As I recall, back at that time the nation as a whole was reluctant to accept this resistance against the war effort. This of course would involve the presidential campaign at that time. That was my first step in politics. From there, I worked on some legislative campaigns and they were all successful. I participated in party politics and was elected to a number of party positions. Then in the 6th District, I held the sub-district chairmanship, which I hold at this time. I've been a member of the state of the State Central Committee for a couple of years, and Secretary of the St. Cloud DFL Club. Why did I run for the state legislature? I guess that for about three weeks prior to making the decision, I went out looking for someone in the area to run for the state legislature. What I saw coming up I didn't really feel had the quality or the really true interest of the people looking for an individual to run. Many, many people would like to run, but they refused. This is what disturbed me because

qualified people were refusing to run for the legislature. The reasons were that it was underpaid, which has been improved somewhat since the campaign. It was apathy toward government; they would like to run, possibly for the reason of self-esteem or self-achievement, but they really had that apathy towards serving people. Well, it got down to the wire, the last couple of days of the filing date, and all the candidates of District 17A seemed to have an axe to grind. So I went into politics I would say reluctantly, because I felt the candidates that were there would not serve the people as to what I thought was a good way. I had, prior to that time, six years of experience down in the state legislature as a lobbyist for the DFL. Club in this area, working as a liaison. I had, I felt, a base of experience. Most certainly not, I would say, a complete experience to run for the legislature. But at least I had a base to start from, and I felt that I could at least work from that. I guess this is what got me into politics. It's a wonderful job; I like it and I believe if could stay with it, I'll enjoy it real well. If this is a matter of record of history, politics should just tell his honest truth about what he is and let people think what they want. And let the chips fall where they may.

Waldron: During the primary campaign, you ran against a field of four candidates. How did you plan your campaign around such a number of candidates – being a conservative area, I have heard it called whether it is or not, you said it was very independent, how did you plan your campaign around it? Were you scared at all that you wouldn't make it through?

Patton: I never thought negatively about it. One thing I did have on my side, and I hope I still do, is how the people think in my district – because I grew up among them. I've had close ties with labor, and I've had close ties with small businessmen, and that is basically what the district is made up of – even though they think conservatively. They are basically the middle-income people. So I did grow up with these people, and I thought that I had the good feelings as to how

they thought. I had the assurance from the people I talked to that I was on the right track. Now what type of campaign did I run? I ran a very offensive-type campaign, and I always will run an offensive-type campaign. I will never run a campaign in which I will get negative or will I start a mud-slinging type campaign. Because if you are completely negative towards another candidate, then you're immediately turned off by yourself and the public. So you have to run on a very positive campaign, and let the people decide on what you're going to do. Usually when that happens, you shine just a little bit more above the people that are throwing the mud. This is what was happening in the campaign – you mentioned Palmer. He was the type of individual who was negative. Everything was wrong with the system, or else things were going to go wrong. Mrs. Strommen of course, never really did show what she was for – she stood on any of the issues. My. Kosloske from Sauk Rapids – I have a lot of admiration for him; I know him personally, he's a friend of mine. But I also knew that he was using the old politics in his campaign. That the people weren't going to buy it. The people were looking for something that had an element of honesty. They wanted to put their hands on something, put a handle on a candidate rather than just the job owning.

Gower: Al, there was no mud-slinging in the matter of attack of one candidate attacking another?

Patton: In the primary campaign, there was a little bit of mud-slinging. Not publically, but most certainly in the background there was mud-slinging. In the general election, this did not exist. In my campaign headquarters, I made every effort to not allow it to exist or even start. What happened was that it turned out to be one of the cleanest campaigns. Even my opponent agreed that it was a clean campaign – she run a clean campaign also. If this can happen, then the people get a fair shake at it.

Waldron: During the general campaign, it seemed that both of you – Mrs. Strommen and yourself – ran a very low-tone campaign without very much said in the newspaper. Do you feel in a way that maybe you deprived the public or your constituents from any base of information?

Patton: No, I didn't really believe so, because we did, Kay and I, appear in public quite a few times. So, the public did get a chance to meet us. What happened was that we made the news, but it was a bland type of news. I guess what happened was that Kay and myself basically did know the people, and we knew how they would react. I guess we knew what we were doing. We went out and got them on their terms, rather than on the terms of the press. We went out and got the people on their terms and it worked out real well!

Waldron: Are you going to be concerned at all in 1974 if Kay Strommen runs again?

Patton: If I make the decision to run in 1974 – I'm worried.

Gower: Just exactly what area is in your district, Al?

Patton: My area is possibly one of the smallest legislative districts in "out-state" Minnesota other than possibly the Moorhead area. It consists of North St. Cloud, East St. Cloud, Sauk Rapids, east portion of the village of Sartell, and the remaining portion of Sauk Rapids Township. It is a rather small discussion for an "out-state" district.

Gower: Are there very many farmers in that district?

Patton: The farmer would be in the township, of course, and I would say there are ten to fifteen farms. It is a strictly metropolitan area. But there is something I would like to add to this. I feel like I am representing basically a metropolitan area. This area is very dependent upon farmers for its economy. This is why you will find I will come out and support farm bills with great vigor,

because of economy, the people here actually do depend upon farmers. Because the St. Cloud area is a distribution point for all farm products in Central Minnesota. We range from Wilmar to the south, Brainerd to the north, Milaca to the east, and clear to the Dakota border on the west. This is the area we supply with machinery and services. People come to St. Cloud for staples – food, clothing, and such as this. They spend their money here in the St. Cloud area. I believe that I mentioned this once before. Stearns County alone, being the dairy county that it is, will put into the St. Cloud economy, from dairy products alone, fourteen million dollars a year. That's from one county which we serve, and of course, we serve Benton, Sherburne, Wright, and Morrison counties. They of course put in a substantial amount, but not as much per county as Stearns County does.

Waldron: During your campaign both primary and general, what did you view as the most concerned issue among your constituents or what issue do you consider important – one that pulled voters to your side?

Patton: The people were not really all that concerned about issues; they were not issue-oriented during the campaign. They were looking for something – what type of individual is going to provide basically one thing, an element of honesty in state government. Of course, we had the normal concerns; taxation, education and welfare. There will always be concerns and they will just be a degree among them. They are not necessarily an issue that are going to elect to defeat a candidate. People just want to be able to relate to you. I think that this is what I approached it on. That's what I worked on – just to see if I could relate to the people. We did it. I think the Minnesota legislature can stand up and take a great deal of pride in what they did for the state they opened up state government. Now during the campaign I heard a number of times from leaders here in the community to get off the kick about openness in government, people aren't

going to buy it; it's superfluous, it's meaningless. Now what has happened is that they were wrong. The candidates that did campaign in that area of openness in government were right. We did open the government, it's like we opened the door and let in some fresh air down at the state capital. We have found for the first time that we have come out with some very meaningful legislation. We had a little tussle with the older legislators where they insisted that Conference committees be locked up. No! This was the DFL side as well as the GOP side- that they felt they could not gamble in the openness of conference meetings. What happened was that the freshmen legislators in the DFL Caucus, which was about forty-four insisted that the Conference Committees be opened up. Well, around about mid-march they opened through the insistence of the freshmen legislators. What happened was that we found that the ten men who sat up on the tax conference committee dealt just a rationally with the Caucus. In fact, I think they had a new responsibility. They didn't have the big business or the groups looking over their shoulders or pressuring them or arm-twisting them. There were dealing in the open, and they put together a tax package this state can be proud of. In a time when we have economic pressures in the state, and international economic problems as well, we were able to manage to bring out a tax bill that would benefit just about everybody in the state. So if that is any one single item that I can point to from that day I started campaigning until the time the first session adjourned, it was the idea of openness in government. The people were ready for it and they wanted it. They didn't go out and say you have to open the conference committees – they didn't really know what a conference committee was. But they wanted to go down to the state capital and come down there and rap their knuckles on your desk. This happened in the committee meetings. So, being unsaid, the people still desired it. During the campaign, they talked about it, but it never got to be an issue. But most certainly, when we did it in the state capital it was the best thing that happened to the

state. In fact, I predict, that the federal Congress will finally take some notice and start moving in this direction – Openness in government based on what Minnesota has done. I believe the neighboring states will do it next session. They didn't do it this session, but next session they'll open up. Now, I had an opportunity to be in Nashville, Tennessee, last week. I talked to some of the senators down there, and some of the aides to the governor. When I explained this to them, about openness in government they were very surprised. They said, "How did you get around the lobbying groups?" I said, "Just let the lobbying groups sit out there in the open and they are ineffective." They were so interested that I can expect that maybe Tennessee will be writing some letters to Governor Anderson and to the legislators to get some information. Just like a breath of fresh air down at the state capital. Being that I was in the state capital for six years as a lobbyist for the DFL, I certainly can appreciate the fact that now that I, and even my constituents, can walk in on a Tax Committee meeting where the Rules Committee lays out the entire program for the legislators.

This is one of the most rewarding feelings to be able, if not necessarily a part of it, know what is going on. You don't have these old suspicions of what is going on behind closed doors. This is what really I would say the previous legislators feel down on. Now I wouldn't put this down as Republican or Democratic or Conservative or Liberal, who were responsible. I would say legislators, per se, still had responsibility in prior sessions to try and get the meetings open and they didn't do it. So, I would say they were all to blame because that move wasn't made. Now, I'm so thrilled that we can now see what the government is doing. That is the one item I will single out as being the most important, I would say we will feel its impact for the next thirty-fourty years in the state of Minnesota.

Gower: Just one other thing on the campaign, Al. Both of you carried on a clean campaign as you said earlier – possibly it appears that you were not that different on issues or at least issues were played down. What would be your assessment as to why you were elected over your opponent?

Patton: There are a number of reasons why – no simple reason. First of all, basically, I would say that the district is as its structure not ready for a woman legislator. I have to gulp a little when I say that, because I don't believe in that type of philosophy. But nevertheless, I have to look at it realistically and say that had something to do with it. Secondly, I would say that Mrs. Strommen came out too late in her positions. She played the old game of politics up to about the last two weeks of the campaign, of friends giving her votes and donating to her campaign. A dollar invested in the campaign is a dollar vote – you know that theory. I didn't do this; I didn't go out soliciting money. I went door-to-door campaign. I really can't nail it down to any simple issue other than the fact that there's possibly 1,050 votes which I won by – there has to be a combination of elements.

Gower: Would you think that this district is possibly more of a DFL district than a Republican district?

Patton: If we are going to measure Republicans and Democrats, I would say the Republicans outnumber the DFL. But there is a vast block in between that's independent. They really have no allegiance to one party or the other. So were they to come out and invest in one party because that party has a candidate. It's that vast block in between and as I stated before this vast block consists of possibly a more liberal element than conservative. They are the labor groups and small businessmen. If you take these businessmen and laboring people, you'll go right down the line

and these same individuals belong to sportsman clubs. They belong to the VFW and American legion. This is something you can possibly see in District 17A, the number of Legion and VFW Clubs. Basically these are conservative people, but now as you look at the American Legion these people are possibly a little more Republican, and the VFW basically a little more DFL, but if you put them into a block, they are a little conservative. So there is this vast majority in between, which, of course if you ever got your grips on them – well, then they are yours.

Gower: Now the person that preceded you from this district was Jack Kleinbaum, I believe. Do you think that you somewhat followed in his path in winning an election?

Patton: I would say there are some similarities in how Jack conducts a campaign and how I conduct a campaign. We do go out as individuals and try to associate with the people as friends, rather than a political figure coming out and talking. We go right down and walk the streets with individuals and talk with them, and more or less take up their personal problems. I believe the people like the type of individual that will do it. Jack is unique; we all know Jack is very unique in his ability to counter votes. He just talks to the people on a personal basis and becomes their friend. So there are some similarities as how Jack conducts his campaign and as to how I conduct my campaign. Possibly, the breaking point is where I feel that I have a responsibility to the people that I don't get to - where I would come out publicly and make statements, where Jack possibly wouldn't do that. But then, I don't win elections with the polarity that Jack does. He does pretty good for himself.

Waldron: As a freshman legislator, what were the feelings you had the first couple of days – weeks in the legislature, did you find it hard to fit in or was it easy to find your way in?

Patton: Well, I didn't have difficulty in getting into what I wanted to do, because I had as mentioned, experience in the legislature, I guess the surprise came when I found bills I was handling were going to pass. They weren't going to be pigeon-holed. I guess this is where the shock came in - something was going to happen, it's just not going to be a emotionalism or spinning your wheels if you want to do a bill be prepared because it's going to be acted on. If you introduced a bill it was going to be acted upon. Another real refreshing thing that I've seen that I never experienced before and was really unprepared for was that the policy set down by senior legislators, particularly the individuals that were in the leadership, Marty Sabo of the House, Herb Anderson and the governor made a policy that the senior legislators would not handle all major bills – they passed them down to the freshmen and let the freshmen handle them. When this happened, they backed them up. They brought in the senior legislator to back this individual up and made sure he got his bill through. This was unheard of and what we found out was that it had a different quality – the freshman is fresh and eager to wage his cause, but also brought in an air of freshness for everybody. You didn't feel like you were left out of the game because you were a freshman. In fact, I would say some freshman, 45-50% of them, were busier than the senior legislators, because the (freshmen) were so eager to get to work that they (seniors) just piled the work on them and away they went with it. They dug into problems where the senior legislators drag their feet and worried about their local bills. You would find your freshman legislator tackling a state-wide bill and going with it. This was what legislation was about. Now we could sit here and talk about taking care of people back home; this is nice; this is beautiful. But if your state legislation isn't in proper form to do what it's supposed to do, it's going to affect people back home just as much as a road improvement bill that you feel you've got to pass. If it comes to a toss-up, if I had to take my choice, I would throw the road

improvement bill away and go for a state-wide tax bill to take care of the people back home because, let's face it, that's what state legislation is about. Local legislation should be taking care of local problems. When the state legislature becomes nothing more than a backup for local officials competing their case to drain a couple of bucks off to take care of their problems, that means they're not going to be doing their jobs. And what happens, this may happen two or three times, and then you're going to see your senators and representatives saying, "This is enough of this. Let's pass a state-wide bill and take care of it once and for all." Then we hear them hollering back at home saying the state government is taking over. When, in fact, they just handed it to the state government because they didn't have the initiative or responsibility to take care of their problems. So, this is why I say the freshman legislators grabbed the state-wide bills, and they carried them. They carried them real well and the state came out better for it. They were not all that concerned with getting their pork-barrel bills though. It was important to them, but besides the fact that one pork-barrel bill may be carrying, he possibly worried about five state-wide bills. What you will see possibly in time to come as you have a chance to evaluate 68 sessions is that is what happened – the freshmen were allowed to work at their own speed and in fact they had more work than they could handle. The state benefited from it. There's no monopoly in brains in being a senior legislator. In fact, as I think right now, it's proudly the balance of the freshmen – we just had a superb group to work with.

Waldron: What I get from this is that in some ways inside House and Senate where if you were a freshmen you'd have to worry about this – it isn't the old way. The way I used to understand it was, that you would have to worry about some senior legislator or some well-known legislator to author the bill and you had to work your way to get in on it so you would get the vote. In other words he was the one who authored the bill and if you were nice to him he would let you in on

the authorizing and the bill would get through that way. Are you saying now that this situation has changed?

Patton: Now, you described it real well as to how the old system worked. The senior legislator, preferably the chairman, would weed out bills that he wanted and then he would distribute the other bills down the line, and you would be very fortunate as a freshmen legislator to get a bill. If you did get a hold on one, you probably didn't want it. The freshmen were told, "Take care of your mail, lick your stamps. That's all you have to worry about; that's all your constituents have to worry about. Just worry about answering your mail." When in effect that's not enough. Your public does not send you down there just to return letters to them. They want to see something happen. We recognized this in this session and I have to give Marty Sabo credit for turning this around and making everybody on pretty much an equal basis. I would say this is a start of the breakdown of the seniority system. We are not going to be able to do away with the seniority system in its entirety. It does have some advantages, as it brings some experience to the chairmanships and that is very necessary. But we do see it breaking down from there and spreading out. We see some individuals not getting chairmanships just because they are there. If there are two individuals of the same seniority, the better one is going to get it, and this is working real well. I think you can point to the Minnesota Legislature in the 68th session as being the kick-off for other legislatures to pattern themselves after. They are going to grow just like this one. There's just no stopping it, because of what we did in Minnesota.

Waldron: Do you think these reforms in the legislature are due to an influx of freshmen legislators?

Patton: Definitely. I'm not saying this just because I'm a freshman legislator. I'm comparing it to what I experienced before. The freshmen voted pretty much as a block. They were independent, but voted pretty much as a block. This had to be dealt with; so, therefore, you were able to get things through.

Waldron: Well, were the conservative freshmen legislators essentially concerned with the same programs and willing to vote in this block, or keep a coalition together.

Patton: No! There was no coalition. I would say that they were trying to guide on something and they just rather hung together. Of course, when inexperienced you don't get too hurried and the lobbyist forgot about these forty-four individuals, ignored them in fact. This was beautiful. The lobbyist didn't have any arms on them, and they could really vote on what they thought was right. I say the philosophy is what prevails. What attitudes that individual had. They knew what they wanted and there was no one there to block it – it worked out beautifully. I'm not so sure this will continue the next two or three sessions. I can see it start fragmenting.

Waldron: Did you feel any pressure from old DFL'ers and the governor himself, since you were a majority DFL House and Senate, to push DFL legislation to the fullest?

Patton: No. Quite a few of the bills proposed were amended. So whether they were introduced from the Governor's office, they certainly did not go back in the same form. The legislature to its responsibility as the legislative branch of the government. Hopefully, we left the executive branch to the governor.

Gower: What's your view point about those charges of pressure at the end of the session?

Patton: This is for the record? You guys are boxing me in! I'll tell the truth; I'll give my personal observation and personal feelings. To me, I've seen it coming; I've seen Tom Kelm on the floor of the House. That was very improper for him to be working on the floor of the House such as he had. I expressed my concern to my colleagues and they said, "You shouldn't be concerned about it." I said I am because the philosophy of democracy and the way we've got it set up – the philosophy of our government is the executive branch takes care of their end, the legislative branch takes care of their end, and they are not supposed to be interfering with each other. This definitely is happening. The executive branch was trying to impose their will upon the legislative branch of government. When I just really couldn't take it any longer is when Tom Kelm walked down the center aisle in the House of Representatives, walked up to the Speaker of the House, Marty Sabo, and started talking with him in private. This disturbed me – I felt that this was highly improper that if Tom Kelm wanted to talk to the Speaker while we were in session. He could have sent a note up there and asked the Speaker to come down to his chair and talk to him in private.

It was a demonstration of Tom Kelm's point to everyone in the House that he had every right to run the House anyway he liked. I was very sorry to see it. I did not say anything publically about it; I did not say anything on the floor of the House. I expressed my concern to my colleagues about it, hoping that something would happen – it didn't. We are going into the second half of the 68th session and I hope I don't see this again. If I do I will come out against it. I feel it's highly improper for an aide from the governor's office, which in effect, represents the governor's office lean over and tell me that this was the governor's bill and he wanted a green light on it. I personally told him that if he wanted a green light on this bill he had best go sit down, because I was going to vote the way I wanted to anyway. He just lucked out that I was going to vote for it

anyway. It did happen, it was not a story being made up nor was it political. It was, very honestly, it did happen. Things like this come about. You get a very ambitious individual that does wheel a lot of power in the metropolitan area. I guess from here, I'll let Tom explain his case.

Gower: Are aides to the Governor supposed to be on the floor of the House of Representatives?

Patton: Any individual is allowed on the floor of the House at the approval of the Speaker of the House. Of course, I have no objection to someone being on the floor of the House, none at all, what I have objection to is lobbying on the floor of the House. If they wish to talk to anybody from that body, they can step to the outside and send them a note and have the individual leave the chamber. That's the way it was done in the past – I've seen it done that way in the past. I've just seen a little bit of brass on Mr. Kelm's part, I always related this to the story of a bull running around the pasture, pushed everybody around, and then tried to jump the fence and didn't quite make it. That's where Tom Kelm is hanging right now.

Waldron: What do you consider some of the major bills that you authored in your first session as a legislator?

Patton: I put a great deal of time and effort into the retirement bills that were pending the session. It's my feeling that our senior citizens were not getting a fair shake. And the ones that were about to retire – the 60 year old, the 62, the 64 year old, were going to fall into the same trap that the retirees were now in. They are ill-financed, and we were providing a pension plan for these individuals, but within three years after retirement they were headed for the food stamp roll. They were welfare cases and it's a sad situation to put our senior citizens into. So, the only way I felt it could be rectified was to improve the retirement programs. This way you put dignity

back into the system where the individual has the opportunity to contribute to the pension program, and reap the benefits later and this is what has happened. We increased the time in the program on state bills by approximately fifty percent – increase in benefits later and some people got over a one-hundred percent increase in benefits. When you figure sixty-seven dollars increased by one-hundred percent, it's not really too much yet! This is a very dull subject, by the way, but it's very rewarding. I get, even today, after the first session, up to a dozen letters a week from people going on retirement, and past retirees thanking me for sponsoring legislation that provided a decent program for them. It's not the type of letter saying, "Thank you. We appreciate it." They go into detail and explain what they are going to do with the money. You can just about wipe the tears off the paper. The fact is, you kind of cry a little yourself. There is definitely a sense of achievement on my part that I was able to help to provide this. It's great, and when we really look at this, when we really look into the senior citizen problem, for the next thirty years the scales are going to tip. People over the age thirty-five are going to be in the majority and younger individuals are going to be in the minority again. It's because of the population trends the way they are, it's going to tip. It's going to take a great deal of national legislation to be able to provide for those individuals. We should start thinking now for forty years from now for retirement programs, because in a retirement program you have twenty to thirty years, but you're in it. So, it's very important now that we start with decent programs to provide for people who are going to retire twenty or thirty years from now. When we see the scale tipping from the age thirty-five bracket, then I think we should do something very serious. This includes stepping into the public pension plans which we know in Minnesota as the MSRA, the teacher's retirement, and the public employees' retirement step into the private field. This is really a can of worms. It's been ill-financed, over sold, and they do not provide the benefits that they promised to

provide for individuals that are investing in them. So we are going to see some legislation be enacted on. I am going to propose some legislation this next session I'm drafting it now that will regulate the private sector. There is very little the state can do in the private sector, because the conglomerates cross state boundaries. What we are going to do is set up a trend. I have an idea we can present to Congress and have congress carry the ball. The idea started out in Congress that they were going to do something, but they got so entangled in the politics of it that they were spinning their wheels. So now the states have to come back up and take up their responsibility and push Congress. In other words, mandate Congress, fifty states mandating Congress to do something. Well, it's a sure vote for the congressman, because we got all his constituents behind him. They are out there demanding it. This is where we have to go. We are going to start at Minnesota in January, 1974. We are going to start pushing legislation that will regulate the private sector. So, maybe in thirty years we will have it squared away so we can have that idea called portability- which is, right now, just a good word because it means nothing. We will have vesting rights where individuals don't lose something if they retired, say, four years after they got in the program. Right now, most programs say you have to be in for fifteen years before you can get a nickel out of them. Then you have to be with the same company for fifteen years- no portability from one company to another. If we can get the investing rights down to five years or two years, where this individual can get at least something. Fiduciary responsibilities or trustees will have to have some guidelines laid down so they invest their revenues in the proper securities and don't reinvest them in companies. Right now, we have somewhat of a problem where the company and the employee put into a fund, and the trustee can invest into stocks. If this is the stock of a conglomerate they can sneak it right back around the company and buy their own stocks. Well, you have to stop this. There are allowed ten percent right now by federal statute,

but there is no regulation, it's as loose as a goose. So these are the standards we are going to have to set down. If there is one single thing I took up in legislature is a retirement bill and I took it very seriously, because I can see that it's a very meaningful thing for people in Minnesota. It's not very glamorous.

Walden: Did you find any problems getting this bill through in Minnesota?

Patton: No, I had a lot of people called senior citizens helping me out.

Walden: You'll probably have some slack on that just from industry.

Patton: Industry will get a little up tight but not to a degree, because right now industry is possibly not got the upper hand in Minnesota.

Waldon: Do you think this will be taken to the Supreme Court to judge the constitutionality of it?

Patton: Well, if you set up these fiduciary standards there is nothing unconstitutional about that. If you start regulating the industries where they can't operate from one state to another, then you may run into some problems. That is why I way the federal government is going to have to act. Even if it does go to Supreme Court, then we do establish a need for legislation. Sometimes you have to push people say, "Let social security take care of this." If we can do it I have no objections to that. But what I'm interested in is getting the job done. How it's done, how it's put together we will work that out later. Right now let's start down the road and start getting the job done. Things will fall in line once we get start going.

Waldron: During your campaign you said you were in favor of local units of government. Now that you have been in the legislature, obviously you have changed some of your ideas, saying

that the federal government must be pushed to do something, because the cities aren't acting therefore states should take the ball and do something. Does this mean you changed your position on local units of government?

Patton: Local units of government have responsibility- what scope there is they shouldn't turn that responsibility over to the state. But, nevertheless, they still have to recognize state government to what services they can provide at the state level. States have to recognize what the federal has to do. And we just went through one problem now on retirement programs, definitely you just can't establish portability between pension programs on a state basis. It has to be federal legislation just to make it work. Of course, there is a similar problem on highways and such in Minnesota- they have to be governed by the state. But then there is the immediate problems within the community itself which I would feel they should take care of, all the counties should take care of their problems. I think it's going to work out. I just don't want to see one layer of government suppressing another layer completely. I would like to see them all work together, with each having their own entities. Let them set their own directions, because you will never be able to set on a state-wide basis the pattern of one community to another and say, "This is the formula for the state." Because there are little groups of people who think a little differently and have to be handled a little differently. The Iron Range can't be handled like the agricultural section in Minnesota nor that can that be handled like the agricultural section in Minnesota nor can that be handled like the metropolitan section in St. Paul. Flexibility! The best way is to allow the local government handle those problems that deal directly with them.

Gower: Do you think your work on labor laws was important?

Patton: The work we did in the labor area will benefit the state greatly, because the labor has been getting the wrong shake for quite a few years. They had to fight for everything they got. They got some legislation through. Just enough to keep them going – just the drippings. Finally, they made a break-through where public employees, for the first time, can now stand on equal footing. Not necessarily do they have the upper hand in negotiations- at least I don't think they do. They can come through with some meaningful negotiations, because there's that large block of people in public employment. We can have the private sector sit there and say, "That's bad. We shouldn't have so many people in public employment." But then, what are we going to do if we don't? I think we should be able to provide jobs for people to work and just because they are a public servant doesn't mean they should lead a sub-standard lives. We proved that in this legislation and we passed some meaningful bargain bills. I supported it. I think it's good. Minnesota can say all they want about how it will set the state back, and ruin the state. It isn't going to. The same old arguments they used back in the thirties, and the twenties, when union were formed- they were going to ruin the nation. But if it weren't for the union we wouldn't be sitting here tonight taping this conversation. Because they have definitely raised the standard of living. When everyone gets a few bucks to spend, then the standard of living comes up. When you start pulling all the dollars into one pocket, then the standard of living of the nation will start going down. You've got to spend it, but a little bit and this is the only way you can do it. You've got to have a meaningful legislation in the labor area because that's where the bulk of the people are. I think it's very, very good and of course we passed a little Hatch Act giving a little more flexibility. Why shouldn't they be able to participate in their own destiny? Why shouldn't they go out and determine who's going to govern them? I think that's very important. They shouldn't be isolated just because it's very impractical. You think that a public employee, out there

working on the street repair, isn't going to have any influence politically just because he goes out and gets himself involved in the political caucus. He's just not going to come back around the circle that fast. I still think he should have something to say about what his government does. He should not just be a servant for the government, but yet not be able to participate in the government. I think that's very wrong. This session we will reduce the restrictions in that area and I think it's great. We patterned it after the federal Hatch Act – they reduced their restrictions. I think its one major improvement. Other bills, the little Davis-Bacon Act, I think it was or state-funded projects have a prevailing wage for the jobs, which is good. It reduces discrimination in the area. We upped the compensation for unemployment. We upped the compensation for disability or health. We started putting through some non-profit health and maintenance organizations – there are funds now available to set them up in the state. Right now, St. Cloud is looking very seriously at this – with the St. Cloud hospital administrating health care. Yes, I'll say I'll support labor bills, because they are people oriented. That's what this game is about.

Gower: You said you enjoyed being in the legislature. What did you enjoy about the legislature?

Patton: Well, It certainly wasn't the twelve-fourteen hours a day I put in. But I guess you would have to say the satisfaction of finally being able to do something that you have been chewing on for a number of years and having the opportunity to do it. What's rewarding about it is to have people accept it. People say, "That's alright. That's a good idea." They will follow you on it, and I guess that's where you get your enjoyment. It's nothing that's really all that tangible, but it's the self-satisfaction of being able to achieve a goal that you have been probably wondering about for ten years. These are the areas which I talked about that have been a concern of mine, particularly in the retirement area and the labor area for fifteen years.

Gower: We were talking before to Jim Pehler and Keith Hughes, and both of them, as I recall, said one of the things they felt was very good about the legislature was the feeling of co-operation and good-will among the legislators. How do you feel about that?

Patton: Well, legislators are not the tyrants that people think they are. They are rather basically just common people. You'll find this if you look at the individual legislator. He is probably a laboring man; a bricklayer, a plumber, a teacher, a lawyer, a whole cross-section. There is definitely a co-operation among everybody. This seems not to be important as to where you come from – that's not important. What is important is what you want to do while you're there. The people basically want to do the same thing, they want to do some good for the state of Minnesota, and so they will co-operate. This is why you will find how quickly political boundaries break down at this point. You will have cross-over, because you are dealing issues that have no right to be concerned with political problems, really. Like, let's say equal employment someplace or a discrimination bill, all these have no business in there. The Equal Rights bill, the ERA bill politically have no right in there. You'll find co-operation to get a meaningful bill through very easily. But the political bills of course, that's where politics is politics and you will break apart. There's no way you can get everybody to feel so chummy about a tax bill. This is going to be party lines now until, well, until I'm out of the legislature. There are going to be political lines, boundaries drawn on tax bills, appropriation bills, because it's just the way it is. You will find a great deal of co-operation on human issues – a great deal. They just don't seem to be able to get so hard when you are dealing with people, when the bill deals directly with the welfare of individuals, and that's good. I just don't want to see the people of the state be used as a big chess game – that would be very bad.

Waldron: What is your future in politics? Do you plan on staying in the legislature – running again in '74 or do you plan on going into the Senate or further then that?

Patton: Well, I have this one more year to finish out and of course, a person wouldn't always look forward to another session. I most certainly will be running in '74, barring any catastrophe. I think more importantly, what if I didn't make it? What if I didn't make it the next time around? How would I feel about it? I don't think I would feel that bad, because I believe in this system. I believe that that people will make a good choice. I just never really got married to the idea that I had to win. If you have that element, I feel you got married to the idea that I had to win. If you have that element, I feel you make a bad legislator, because then you're out for yourself. When you're down there you cannot be out for yourself. You will run into trouble on day one. Because there will be a hundred and twenty-three other fellows who are not out for themselves and you will be the only fellow that is and you are going to sit by yourself. So, you have no business there if you're out for just self-achievement and you just don't last very long. So that's why I would say, "Well, gosh, pretty bad I lost that one, but I won't lose much sleep over it."

Waldron: Do you see a problem in the way the House is set up in that you have to run every two years for re-election? Would you propose any changes?

Patton: Oh, yeah, sure! It's hard on the legislator or the candidate he doesn't like it. But it's the best thing that ever happened for the people. This is what's very unique about Minnesota politics. I say from my experience, Minnesota politics, when you take a look at the two Houses, the Senate and the House of Representatives, is that it's not the Senate that's most powerful; it's the people almost immediately. The senators can drag their feet. But this is why the people, when they come down, if you ever go to a committee meeting, you'll not knowingly, but you'll

schedule yourself in on a House hearing rather than a Senate hearing. People will come to a House hearing and you'll find the House continually hitting the news – large groups of people. The Senate is sort of bland, but it's the House that is the most powerful House. Greatly so because the people have direct input into it. The legislator is more responsible, because he knows he is on the firing line in sixteen months. After he finishes his term sixteen months he's on the firing line again. That's what makes it so important – it's good. I don't want to change that at all. Two years, yeah.

Gower: I heard this one the radio. The question came up after the session of the inadequacy of the salary of the legislators. What is your position on that?

Patton: I was never short of funds. I lived off the salary they gave me down there. That's \$700 a month. We'll go through this and analyze it a little bit. That's \$700 a month from that you take your basic deductions for insurance, income taxes, and what other programs you're interested in, and that whittles it down to practically \$510 net gain. For the five months we were in session, each legislator gets approximately \$900 a month for expenses. This is based on \$33 a day per diem pay. You get that \$900. Living in St. Cloud and commuting once in the middle of the week, and once on the weekend. I got one of those trips paid to St. Cloud. That's another \$16 and in addition to that I get \$135 in postage. I get the first two thousand pieces of stationery free. I get free medical insurance for myself and pay for my family. Also I have the opportunity to participate in the pension program. What happens to the \$990? This is the key. The \$990 on approximately 31-day month you have to work pretty hard to spend \$33.00 a day. Some legislators can do it; they probably rent a room for themselves that costs about eighteen dollars a day, and they can spend the rest on food, and things such as this. The thrifty-minded individual will team up with three or four fellow legislators – such as I do – and rent an apartment, and get

the apartment for \$260 per month and split the cost. What happens, you end up spending fifteen or eighteen on that \$33 a day for everything. You really have to work to get that, because that's only costing, at the best, about ten dollars a day or eighteen dollars a day for room, so you get ten dollars a day for meals. You get you gas paid for when you go home. Well, in my case, I was able to spend half my per diem pay. Now, that's \$450 a month. I add that to the \$500 – I come up with \$950 of salary. The rest is expenses. That's roughly \$10,000 a year if that was an annual wage. But I get that for five months at \$900, that's maybe \$4500 or \$4600 I get. The catch is this; we're down there five months getting \$700 salary. We have seven months getting \$700 a month salary. Every meeting we attend down there, we get an additional \$33 per day in addition to the \$700 no matter when the chairman calls it. So when you start analyzing it, you get approximately \$14,000 a year. You get \$8400 plus \$4400 or \$4600 per diem pay, it comes out about \$13,000. Then you have your travel expenses; comes to about \$300 or \$400. There's your postage - \$125 and then you're going to have some committee meetings during the summer, during the interim which gives you three days – another \$100 a month. So you see it's their style of living and how you want to do it. The turning wheel scrape hard. The laboring man isn't going to be hurt too badly. Now, myself, I'm not hurting at all.

Gower: Did your employer make arrangements to go to the legislature real easy for you?

Patton: Before I filed for the state legislature, there were only four candidates running and the likelihood of me getting elected was remote. I asked my employer if I filed and won the election would he allow me to have the time off. He very readily agreed to this. I said on this term, "You terminate my salary while I'm gone for the five months I'm down there. I don't want salary for my employment." He said, "Okay. That's the way it will be." What did happen, I didn't get my salary from my place of employment while I was gone, and when I returned to work, of course, it

resumed. That's basically what happened. They weren't governed by law, of course, after you got elected. The law allows you to return to work. That governed by law, which, by the way, teachers get now, too. We passed that law this session.

Gower: Do you think being an incumbent would help if you run in 1974?

Patton: Incumbency definitely established a good margin for yourself. It's how you use it and how you handle yourself. If you don't abuse the privilege of being an incumbent, be progressive, and don't get a negative reputation, then it's going to be very advantageous. Of course, it can work in reverse. If you get a bad reputation, then everybody knows who to vote against. So, you have to build on it. Being an incumbent and being a progressive individual and work for it – it's going to help. Because just being in the paper once a week and being visible – people call on you. You're just naturally going to get the first nod. It's not how you handle it yourself – you can make it good for yourself or bad.