

**KAREN
FRASER**

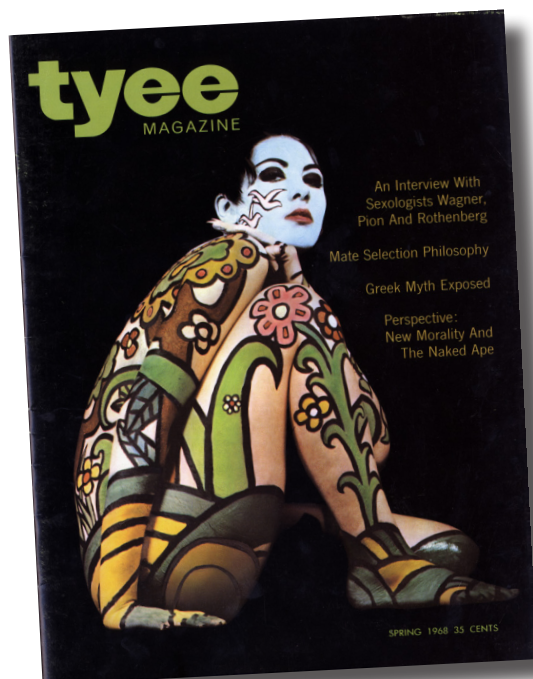


WINNING THEM OVER

For a sociology major, being at the University of Washington in 1968 with 30,000 other human beings under 30 was like watching the seeds of change sprout in a petri dish. Karen Fraser taped a McCarthy for President poster in her apartment window. At 24, it was her first overt political statement. She was in grad school, pursuing a master's degree in public administration as the campus roiled with debate and dissent during one of the most tumultuous years in American history. It played out in demonstrations on the quadrangle; around the black-and-white TV sets in the Husky Union Building where students gathered to watch Walter Cronkite's reports on the war in Vietnam; in classrooms



Fraser at the University of Washington in 1966.



and residence halls and in the pages of the *UW Daily* and

tyee magazine. So much had changed since 1962, her freshman year, especially for women. Most "coeds" had grown weary of fraternity-sweetheart objectification. They were intent on "leading lives worthy of emulation," as *tyee* put it.

Fraser, a soft-spoken yet persuasive feminist, would become the first female mayor of Lacey, a progressive county commissioner and for 28 years an influential state legislator—a Democrat admired on both sides of the aisle for her common sense and civility.

Given her contemplative personality, it's unsurprising that Eugene McCarthy, the professorial anti-war senator

from Minnesota, was Fraser's pick for president in 1968. "He seemed so genuine," she remembers. Thousands of other college students across America agreed. The boys cut their hair to get "clean for Gene," and the girls donned their best dresses. The young volunteers descended on New Hampshire for the year's first presidential primary. On March 12, McCarthy turned the political world upside down. His strong runner-up showing to a sitting president underscored Lyndon Johnson's vulnerability. Two weeks



McCarthy volunteers greet their candidate. *Christine Howells Reed photo*

later, LBJ announced he would not seek re-election. The making of the president 1968 became a free-for-all punctuated by assassinations and rioting. For McCarthy, genuineness wasn't enough. Come November, the "new" Nixon defeated Vice President Hubert Humphrey, who was perceived as old news, irreparably damaged by the Johnson administration's conduct of the Vietnam War. "Looking back, it's hard to believe it all happened in one year," Fraser says.

Ever since grade school, Karen Fraser had been studying society and wondering why things were the way they were. Her undergraduate degree is in sociology, with departmental honors.

SHE WAS BORN just before the end of World War II. Her 1950s Eisenhower-era childhood in northeast Seattle was a life-skills class in the sociology of changing times. Fraser lived in the same house from first grade through her graduation from Roosevelt High School. But there were a few twists—and an underlying conflict—she believes helped her become successful in public life. Her father was an Irish immigrant, which gave her an awareness of other countries and some of the challenges immigrants face. Her mother, born on a farm in Duvall in rural King County, was an artist, which contributed to Fraser's life-long appreciation of the arts. Karen also remembers her mother's stories about the workplace discrimination women faced.

There was one more thing "of nearly overwhelming" significance: Her parents divorced when Karen and her brother Bill were in grade school. "Divorce was exception-

ally unusual in those days,” she remembers. “There was quite a stigma associated with it, including toward children of divorced families, so I always kept this fact to myself. The divorce had a major influence on my sense of wondering about things: ‘Why did this happen to my family?’ It didn’t happen to anybody else’s family that I knew. In the summer, my brother and I would go down to California and stay with our dad. So we kind of grew up with two lives—one here, one there.”

The divorce was not amicable. Karen learned to navigate the tension, here and there.

“Although we lived with him only part of the year, our dad taught us many things. He enjoyed engaging in ‘argumentation and debate.’ It was his favorite class at the University of Washington. I grew up becoming accustomed to discussing differences of opinion and being comfortable engaging in discussions with men.

“After the divorce, our family finances plunged. Bill and I were frustrated when our mother said we couldn’t afford either a car or a TV. I began developing personal scheduling skills by arranging to see my favorite TV shows at various neighbors’ homes. My brother and I were so intent about the car issue that by the time we each turned 16, we owned our own ‘junkers.’ We experienced vastly more personal freedom and independence during our childhood and teen years than nearly all our friends.”

In fourth grade, Karen learned something that to her didn’t make sense. A teacher explained how pronouns worked. Sometimes “he” could mean both male and female but “she” was always female. “I remember wondering, ‘What’s that about?’

“I loved to listen to the news on the radio. One day I realized there were no women newscasters. So I asked my mother why, and she said, ‘Well, it’s because they don’t have authoritative voices.’ It struck me as strange, but I just took it in. That’s kind of been my style all my life: I take it in, think about it and incorporate it later into my perspectives.”

When she was 13, Elvis topped the hit parade with “All Shook Up,” a perfect metaphor for the year’s biggest banner headline: The Russians had launched *Sputnik*, a satellite that ushered in the space race and raised the specter of a world dominated by communism. “I had a nightmare that Russian soldiers were coming over our back fence,” Fraser remembers with a little shiver and a smile. By her senior year at Roosevelt, things were more ominous. After a tense summit with Nikita Khrushchev, a belligerent bowling ball of a man, President Kennedy told *Time* magazine he had never met a more frightening person. “I talked about how a nuclear exchange would kill 70 million people in 10 minutes,” Kennedy said, “and he just looked at me as if to say, ‘So what?’ ”

As a high school senior, Fraser researched and wrote a report weighing whether every house should have a bomb shelter. She concluded it would be a good idea. That class, Contemporary Problems, taught by a highly regarded teacher, Earl V. Prebezac, triggered her interest in politics. “Every day we had to read the front page and editorial page of *The Seattle Times* to be ready for a pop quiz. Another major assignment was to pick an advoca-



Dr. Hugh A. Bone, standing at right, boss of the state's legislative-intern program, conferred with five interns about their summer schedules. From left, seated, were Thomas A. Brumm, J. N. Fricke and William Daley; standing, Charles Blumenfeld, Karen R. Fraser and Bone.

Legislative-Intern Program In Need of Funds to Survive

the specific purpose of being close to the university. During my six years at the UW, the world changed dramatically. When I look back on those years and put my life in the context of the times it seems even more remarkable.”

FRASER ARRIVED in Olympia as a Ford Foundation legislative intern on a snowy day in January of 1967, driving an old car with an inoperative heater. Long stretches of Interstate-5 were incomplete, especially along the Nisqually Delta, shimmering in refracted sunlight.

“I had just graduated from the UW. All my worldly goods were in my car,” she remembers wistfully. “And my legislative internship turned out to be totally life-changing”—simultaneously daunting and exciting. She was the only woman among the five UW political science students selected for the program by Dr. Hugh A. Bone, a revered longtime professor and dean of the UW Political Science Department. Launched by Bone in 1956, the internship program soon became a national model. Fraser was doubly lucky that the legislator leading the program was the redoubtable Representative Mary Ellen McCaffree, R-Seattle, a former president of the Seattle League of Women Voters and a master of what she called “politics of the possible.”

cy organization to study.” She selected the American Civil Liberties Union and rode the bus downtown in the middle of the World’s Fair excitement to interview an ACLU staff member. “I was totally fascinated by everything I was reading about national and world affairs and the importance of politics in serving the public interest. It was all new for me, as my family was non-political.” She never planned to go to college anywhere other than the University of Washington. “Our parents deliberately moved to northeast Seattle for

With the Legislature set to convene three days later, Fraser went looking for a place to stay. “I went to the YWCA on Union Street because motels seemed awfully expensive for someone on a student budget. All the rooms they had were occupied. However, the woman who answered the door must have taken pity on me. There I was—young and cold, standing there in the dark with my little suitcase. She said I could spend a few nights on the overstuffed couch in the building’s cavernous unfinished basement for \$1.50 a night. I could never have conceived then that 50 years later, to the day, I would end up retiring as a senior member of the Senate.”

The Ford Foundation’s goal was to encourage state legislatures to become more co-equal with the executive branch. “Their major strategy was to improve staffing,” Fraser says. “The Washington Legislature back then had very little permanent staff and only a few interim committees. That meant interns were put in actual line positions.” At 22, Fraser became the sole staff person for the House Health and Welfare committee. “Standing committees during the legislative sessions back then had no analysts or attorneys. There was no staff training either. So, you’d just show up on the first day of session and start figuring it out! My job called for maintaining all records of the committee, including typing up amendments on a typewriter using carbon paper. And they had to be perfect. No erasures. Otherwise the Chief Clerk’s Office wouldn’t accept them. I also kept records of the committee’s votes, which occurred behind closed doors.

“The Legislature, back then, did not print or disseminate committee schedules. My job was to type up the committee hearing announcements on a small orange form. Then I’d walk around the Legislative Building and tape the notices on various marble pillars. That was it for notices of public hearings! The Washington State Association of Counties assigned its session intern the job of contacting committee clerks daily about the next day’s hearings. He would daily mimeograph the list he compiled and place stacks of them in strategic locations around the Legislative Building. Everyone relied on them.

“Something similar occurred with status-of-bills report. The Legislature didn’t prepare those either. As a public service, the Association of Washington Industries (precursor to the Association of Washington Business) assigned a staff member to try and prepare daily listings of the ever-changing status of bills and place them around the Legislative Building.”

Fraser did a double take the first time she saw the legislators’ desks. They were piled high with bill books. No computers, no cellphones, no fax machines, no TVW, no Internet. Every day each legislator received a complete set of bill books. Amendments on varying sizes of paper were pasted onto the bills, and the increasingly unwieldy mound was laced together with long shoe strings.

The late 1960s saw a major transformation in the legislative process and the growth of state government. Fraser had a front row seat. Thurston County’s population was growing at a 39 percent clip, with escalating diversity. Sleepy towns like Yelm were



Fraser as a young economist with the Washington State Department of Highways. *Lacey Museum, Ken Balsley Collection*

sprouting subdivisions. Olympia was to have a new four-year school, The Evergreen State College, authorized by the Legislature in 1967. “Everything was changing,” Fraser remembers. “More issues. More *complex* issues—growth management, the environment, social services, transportation. All of this increased the size and complexity of state government, including the legislative branch.” Yet the help-wanted ads in the newspapers still listed men’s jobs and women’s jobs separately.

“I was the only female intern. The interim committee I was assigned to after the session adjourned had never had a woman be anything other than a secretary. I still didn’t grasp the full import of my presence. Professor Bone came down in the middle of the summer to check on how we

interns were doing. He came into my office, closed the door, pulled up a chair and leaned forward. ‘You know what?’ he said with a smile in a slightly conspiratorial tone. ‘You won them over!’ I thought, ‘Huh? What’s this about?’ I’ve always been kind of a straight-arrow, nose-to-the grindstone, try-to-do-a really-good-job type of person. Totally surprised, I said, ‘Won them over?’ And he said, ‘Well, you know because you’re a woman. They thought it would create trouble. But they found that you worked out fine.’ ”

Fraser alternated attending graduate school full-time and part-time while working for the Washington State Department of Highways. First, she was hired as an administrative intern by another former Ford Foundation Intern, Roger Polzin, to assist with departmental monitoring of bills. (Polzin was just beginning what became an outstanding career in state government as an administrator for several state agencies.) Later, she was hired as assistant legislative liaison, a new type of position in state government, reflecting the growth in the Legislative Branch.

“I was surprised about many aspects of the workplace as it pertained to women. For example, I remember that they routinely referred to ‘man hours’ for employees. I’d never heard of that. It seemed to me that it should be ‘staff hours.’ I felt strongly that women deserved equal rights, equal opportunities and equal respect in society.”

AS A MEMBER of the Washington State Women’s Political Caucus, Fraser took a leadership role in the painstaking process of identifying, interviewing and endorsing candidates

for local and state offices. "Having worked for the Legislature, I understood that it really matters who's there. We needed to elect more women. And when I became a state agency employee I thought I ought to join the Washington Federation of State Employees and do my part with my dues and my participation to support their efforts to promote salary increases and improved benefits. Membership was voluntary back then."

A regular delegate to State Labor Council conventions, Fraser was part of a coalition of women from several unions. They pushed through a resolution to create a women's committee. "It was controversial," she remembers. "A lot of the old guard was nervous about it. *Everything* about women was controversial. In many respects it's still so. A lot of employment situations for the average woman are different than those for the average man."

When Fraser joined the rapidly growing National Organization for Women, her "first big campaign" was a landmark event in Washington State history—a ballot issue to add an equal rights amendment to the State Constitution. It passed by 3,300 votes out nearly 1.3 million cast. In Thurston County, the margin was 11 votes, "so, our strong campaign in Thurston County did count," Fraser says. That campaign also triggered a change in state law to mandate election recounts for ballot measures. An automatic recount is now required if a ballot measure or a candidate wins by less than one half of one percent.

In 1973, Fraser made her own history as the first female member of the Lacey City Council. Two and a half years later, her fellow council members elevated her to mayor—another first for a woman. That she was young—31—and a women's rights activist was highlighted in every headline. **Lacey Takes A Ms. Mayor**, *The Daily Olympian* declared. The capital city daily noted that she was a legislative analyst for the State Office of Community Development.

During 1973-74, Fraser was the State Legislative Coordinator for NOW, over-

IT'S KAREN FRASER

Lacey Takes A Ms. Mayor

Karen Fraser, a 31-year-old employee of the State Office of Community Development, last night was elected mayor of Lacey by fellow members of Lacey City Council.

Miss Fraser, who has served on the Lacey council for 2 1/2 years, received five of seven votes cast in the election. Stepping down from the mayoral post was Bill

Bush, who served in that position for two years. He was elected mayor pro tem. Bush and councilman Dick Johnson each received one vote during the election.

Mayor Fraser, who began her term at the end of the meeting last night, is the sixth Lacey mayor, but the first woman to win the post and the youngest.

During Mayor Fraser's term as

council member, she chaired the budget and general government committees as well as served on several permanent and temporary committees.

She said she plans no major policy changes in the Lacey government and plans to work with the council as a coordinated team. Nor has placed any projects or policies on

"I think the next two years are

very important for Lacey and we should look forward to them," she said last night shortly after the election.

Mayor Fraser is a native of Seattle and attended the University of Washington where she earned a bachelor's degree in sociology and a master's in public administration. She has lived in Lacey since 1968.

In other council action last

night, the planning commission's recommendations on the primary plat of Homann Industrial Park was approved. Ordinances were passed authorizing City Attorney Ken Ahlf, to begin condemnation litigation for right-of-way acquisition along Pacific Avenue for street widening purposes.

Oren Hebert was reappointed to Lacey Planning Commission.



KAREN FRASER
First & Youngest

(Olympian Photo)

The Daily Olympian

The Voice Of The Capital

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Twenty Cents

seeing the legislative lobbying activities of chapters around the state. In her spare time, she loved being outdoors—skiing, backpacking and mountain climbing, sailboat racing and cruising. She owned and raced her own sailboat, usually with an all-woman crew, in races sponsored by the South Sound Sailing Society. She won the first race series she entered and ultimately collected a shelf full of trophies.

BY 1977, “the state had established a State Women’s Council, legalized abortion, liberalized divorce, enacted a law giving women equal access to credit, added an Equal Rights Amendment to the state constitution, ratified the proposed ERA to the federal constitution, and elected its first female governor, Dixy Lee Ray,” Cassandra Tate notes in a HistoryLink.org essay. “Even so, inequities persisted. In Washington, as elsewhere, women typically earned less than men for doing the same kind of work. Restrictions on how much women could lift and how many hours they could work limited the kinds of jobs they could hold. Few women held leadership positions, from student body president to corporate executive. The Seattle Police Department employed only three female officers; there were no female firefighters in the fire department. The state’s public colleges required female students to be in their dormitory rooms by a certain hour, usually 10 p.m.; male students could stay out as long as they liked.”



Mayor Fraser with Governor Dixy Lee Ray. *Lacey Museum*

The summer of '77 found Fraser making plans for two big events: a wedding and the federally-sponsored International Women’s Year Conference in Ellensburg. She was engaged to Tim Malone, a senior assistant attorney general, with the nuptials set for August. Meantime, she was a member of the conference planning committee. “Little did I know what I was getting into—with the conference, that is, especially when someone said, ‘Well, Karen, since you are the only general-purpose government elected official on the committee why don’t you be in charge of elections for state delegates to the national convention set for Houston in November?’ I agreed because I assumed that being in charge of elections would fit well with getting married six weeks later. How wrong I was!”

An ad hoc coalition of conservative women—including Mormons, Catholics and Evangelicals—set out to storm the ramparts and prevent “radical women’s libbers” from dominating the delegation to the national convention.

Fraser dislikes labels. “I’m a mixture of conservative and liberal myself. Put it this way: Some women sincerely believed NOW and the ERA endangered ‘traditional values.’

Their clear intention was to overwhelm the conference.”

Based on advance registrations, organizers expected around 1,300 attendees. A couple of days before the conference was set to open, Fraser got a call from the chairwoman. “Fifteen-hundred more people were headed for Ellensburg. My absolute focus was on running a fair election. Now I had double the turnout. The federal rules for voting at



ERA demonstrators march through Seattle in 1978. MOHAI

the state conference mandated that only people from the State of Washington could vote. And now there were a lot of out-of-state license plates in the parking lot.” Each faction—pro-ERA and anti-ERA—placed observers at the election check-in points to double-check IDs. About a hundred ballots were challenged.

At 4:15 a.m. Sunday, the Election Committee announced that the pro-ERA forces had won all but one of the 24 delegates to Houston. Fraser remembers the cacophony of cheering and anguished outcries. “The conservatives were in disbelief, because they had ‘won’ most of the policy resolution votes in the plenary sessions. What they didn’t know was that when pro-ERA forces learned that the anti-ERA forces were going to try to dominate the conference they accessed every pay phone available to call their friends back home. They urged them to drive to Ellensburg immediately and register and vote. Most of

them drove right back home after voting since there were no hotel rooms available for miles around.” That strategic move increased the total number voting for delegates, but it did not affect the number of votes on resolutions since the reinforcements arrived too late to participate in the plenary sessions.

Fraser and the other conference leaders were careful to maintain a secure chain of custody of the ballot boxes they borrowed from county auditors. Fraser loaded the locked boxes in her old Volvo and drove directly to Seattle. Conference leaders, two attorneys in tow, met her on



Washington State Historical Society

a downtown corner with an armored Brinks truck.

A recount that included 80 contested ballots changed the outcome by only one delegate, and a district court judge dismissed an attempt by the Concerned Women's Coalition to block the contested slate of delegates. Opponents of the ERA alleged "all kinds of things, including the notion that ballots were dumped in a cardboard box," Fraser remembers. "This was absolutely false. There was zero evidence of any ballot tampering.

"I had never heard of a 'deposition' before, and now I was doing one, in the company of my three on-edge attorneys. The pro bono attorney for the plaintiffs was a member of a Seattle law firm whose managing attorney was my uncle. And I'm getting married in the middle of all that!" Fraser chuckles at the memory. "Fortunately I married an attorney (a Harvard Law School graduate no less) so when we went to the Houston conference, Tim found it all very interesting. I was still emotionally exhausted."

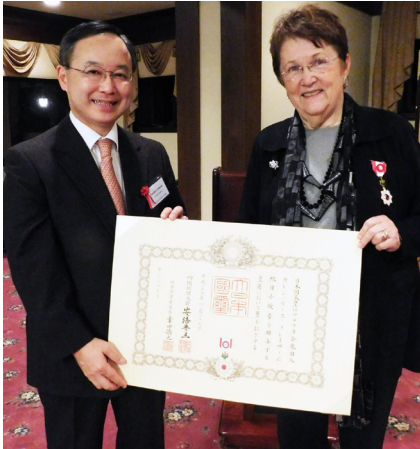
Fraser is gratified that equal rights for women—in America at least—are now viewed as "normal." But that's a danger, too, "because a lot of young women don't realize how new this is, and maybe that it's still a little bit fragile. And you look at countries around the world where women live in horrible legal, political, social, economic, financial, family situations, and you go, 'Oh, my.' So, you shouldn't take anything for granted. . . . I guess the main thing is you have to stay politically active and politically tuned in."

ELECTED TO the Thurston County Commission in 1980, Fraser was one of the few Democrats to survive the Reagan Revolution. As a county commissioner, her work on land-use policies helped pave the way for the Growth Management Act adopted by the Legislature in 1990. Her environmental achievements at the county level are also extraordinary, including heading the task force that developed the landmark watershed plan for the Nisqually River Basin.

In 1981, Fraser and Malone were founding members of the Sister City Association between Olympia and Yashiro (now Kato), Japan. The following year, after a quick course in introductory Japanese, they were enthusiastic members of the first Olympia delegation to visit Yashiro. The warmth of their hosts and the rich culture they discovered led to a commitment to promote friendship between Washington and Japan. Karen was moved by "the exceptionally warm reception" they received at the welcoming ceremony in Yashiro. "When I was born, our two countries were horribly at war. This experience demonstrated clearly to me that international relationships can change things. Tim and I decided we wanted to do our part to grow these friendships."

Fraser and Malone's adopted daughter was born in Japan.

The Olympia-Yashiro association became one of the most active Japanese sister-city associations in the state, with regular adult and student exchanges. Fraser and Malone welcomed hundreds of Japanese visitors to Olympia over the years. Malone served on the sister city association board and as its president for two years. As a state senator,



Consul General Yamada awards Fraser the Order of the Rising Sun. *Consul General of Japan photo*

Fraser took on a leadership role to promote the Washington State-Hyogo Prefecture Sister State relationship. She was the prime sponsor of a legislative resolution establishing governmental, educational, cultural and business links between Washington State and Hyogo Prefecture. She also headed the Washington State Planning Committees for the 50th and 55th Anniversary celebrations of the sister state relationship. In 1989, Fraser was one of four Washington State Legislators invited to visit Asia University in Tokyo in connection with its student program at Western Washington University in Bellingham. She explored potential contractual relationships between Washington community colleges and educational institutions in Hyogo Prefecture.

In 2017, Fraser received a high honor in recognition of her role in advancing Washington-Japan friendships. The Emperor of Japan conferred upon her the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Rosette.

Fraser was the first female president of the Washington State Association of Counties. The statewide credibility she achieved for her work with local governments, the Women's Political Caucus and NOW gave her the standing to promote progressive legislation. She championed equitable pay for public employees, open government, public safety, environmental quality and outdoor recreation. She also co-chaired the host committee for the historic first ever U.S. Women's Olympic Marathon Trials, held in Olympia in 1984.

FRASER WAS elected to the Washington House of Representatives in 1988 and to the State Senate in 1992. On her first day in the Senate, her colleagues selected her to head the Ecology and Parks Committee. She played an influential role in environmental policy throughout her Senate career, championing Puget Sound water quality control, oil spill prevention, salmon recovery, waste management and parks and recreation

Fraser ascended quickly to the Ways and Means Committee, serving there for more than two decades. For six of those years, she was either vice chair or chair of the Senate's capital budget process. She wielded major influence on spending for higher education facilities throughout the state; K-12 school buildings; environment and natural resources projects; outdoor recreation; economic development; the state's Capitol Campus; community social and health services facilities and local arts, historic and cultural facilities.

Notably, her Senate Democratic colleagues elected her to serve as caucus chair. She also served for many years on the Senate Rules Committee, the powerful gate-keeping body that determines which bills go to the floor for a vote.

In 1994, Fraser was tapped by The Asia Foundation to serve as an Environmental Fellow with the Thai Parliament's House Environmental Committee in Bangkok. Her major role was to assist with the second annual meeting of the Asia and Pacific Parliamentarians' Conference on Environment and Development. For about a decade, she attended subsequent conferences of this organization as a voting delegate, paying her own way.

FRASER IS particularly proud of having been the prime sponsor of legislation to promote the Enhanced 911 technology that eliminates the need for a caller with an emergency to provide an address. After her bill passed the House, she was disappointed that the Senate was dragging its feet because the legislation contained a small telephone tax to fund the life-saving service statewide. "Small rural counties could never afford this service on their own," she remembers. The Senate's condition was that the issue be referred to voters as a referendum. Fraser and a team of supporters reluctantly agreed. They put together a robust statewide campaign. The plan was embraced by the voters. "Today, everyone takes this 'enhanced' service for granted," Fraser says, "but it was not always so."

Fraser gives a lot of credit for her ability to achieve so much in the Legislature to Brenda Fitzsimmons, her key assistant for 28 years. "Brenda was so competent at organizing and managing our office and exercising excellent judgment as high-pressure situations would come along. She was totally dedicated to public service. I could not have done it without her, and I am forever appreciative."

While serving in the Senate, Fraser also joined the adjunct faculty in the Master of Public Administration Program at The Evergreen State College. She teaches courses on state government, legislative process and environmental policy.

The late Ray Moore, a legislator whose political career spanned five decades of Washington history—as both a Republican and Democrat—created a stir around the Capitol in 1999 when his legislative oral history was published. Possessed of a



Fraser receives the "Lifetime Citizenship Award" from the League of Women Voters of Thurston County in 2016. *Washington State Senate*

caustic wit, Moore pulled no punches in his thumbnail sketches of lawmakers he regarded as over-rated, including Gary Locke and Maria Cantwell. This is what Moore had to say about Fraser nearly 20 years ago:

When we get this population increase by 50 percent, which may happen in the next 30, 40 years, what happens then? Not only to water, but also to sewage? Nobody thinks ahead. We do have somebody in the Legislature who is thinking ahead right now—Senator Karen Fraser from Olympia. She's someone in the Senate who truly puts societal long-term solutions first. ... Except for Fraser, no one takes the water shortage as an omen of the future seriously. Pollution of air, water, and land is now at the turning point. We either put in place an orderly process using a 100-year plan for water, air, sewer and other public needs or continue as we are, doing little or nothing. ...

Fraser is one of the heavies in the Senate. If you want to know about a piece of legislation that is in her committee, or another committee on which she sits, she knows, and can discuss it in depth. ...

She started out as a city council person in Lacey, then mayor, then county commissioner, then House member, now in the Senate. Not only did she hold these positions, but she left a legacy of efficiency as a model for those who follow.

"I think she's arguably the most successful political figure in the history of Thurston County," said Mark Brown, who served on the Lacey City Council with Fraser and later succeeded her as mayor. "She really has pretty much covered all the bases in terms of state and local government. You can look almost anywhere and find something she's contributed to."

THE UNEXPECTED death of Fraser's husband in 2013 was a huge loss and terrible shock. They had been married for 36 years. "We had a wonderful, very happy marriage," Karen says. "We were amazingly compatible and shared so many interests and values. Tim had a high-level career with the state Attorney General's Office—litigating the laws. And he had a great appreciation for the importance of my legislative work—making the laws. He loved the profession of law and being part of the Attorney General's Office. For many years, he was the coordinator of appellate litigation. He was very intellectually oriented, a fabulous writer and widely appreciated for his sense of humor and hospitality."

They had hiked and backpacked throughout the Cascades and Olympics, trekked in the Himalayas and Alaska. There were many 10K runs and two marathons each. "We even survived building a new house together!" Karen says, laughing at the memory. "Be-



An avid outdoorswoman, Fraser played a key role on the Nisqually River Basin Task Force. *Barb Lally Photo*

cause of his steady, enthusiastic support, I was able to serve so long in public office.”

Karen’s resolve was to continue to remain active as a legislator and in community and civic affairs.

When she retired from the Legislature in 2017, the Thurston County League of Women Voters presented her its Lifetime Citizenship Award. The Olympia and Lacey city councils re-named a five-mile trail in her honor. She was, after all, a trail blazer. The other awards, before and after retirement, fill two pages.

She’s justifiably proud of her role in founding the Washington Women’s History Consortium because it sprang from her initial experience a half century ago as a history-making woman who “won them over”—followed by decades of working with “so many talented, dedicated people” in the Women’s Movement. “This major chapter of Washington history must not be lost,” she says emphatically.

Fraser will be long remembered, one reporter observed, for her intelligence, civility and “efficiency over flash.” With her trademark quiet humor, she quips that with a little more flash she might have been among the top two primary election finalists for lieutenant governor, instead of finishing third in an 11-person race in 2016. (In Washington, the top two vote-getters in the Primary Election go on to the General Election, regardless of party affiliation.)

In what’s supposed to be “retirement,” she remains one of the state’s most en-

ergetic voices for civic activism. Senator Jeannie Darneille, the Pierce County Democrat whose career is steeped in volunteerism and gender equality, says Fraser's presence at the Capitol was important to securing legislative funding for the 2020 centennial commemoration of national women's suffrage. "No one has been more dedicated to the women of Washington than Karen Fraser," Darneille says.

At the conclusion of a recent presentation on her 50 years in Thurston County, Karen invited questions from the audience. A man in the back row piped up, "*Does anyone know anyone who does not like Karen Fraser?*" The room erupted in laughter and applause. She blushed.

"That's nice to hear," she said with a modest smile.

John C. Hughes
Legacy Washington
Office of the Secretary of State

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“a lot of young women don’t realize,” Andrews interview

“Nobody thinks ahead,” *Ray Moore: An Oral History*, Office of the Secretary of State, 1999, p. 12

“Fraser is one of the heavies,” *Moore*, p. 79

“she left a legacy,” *Moore*, p. 146

“arguably the most successful,” quoted in “After internship that lasted 50 years,” Walker Orenstein, *The Olympian*, 12-29-2016

“efficiency over flash,” “Fraser chooses efficiency over flash,” Patrick Condon, *The Olympian*, 2-15-2003

“No one has been more dedicated,” Darneille remarks, Washington State Historical Society Trustees’ meeting, 6-14-2018