

Interview with Jeanette Hamby
Interviewees: Sophia Tran and Alice Zhang
May 24, 2005

Sophia Tran: So this is our research question: describe and analyze the changes and trends in crime and law enforcement in Hillsboro, Oregon between 1980 and 2005.

Jeanette Hamby: Oh my well, I served as chair in the mid-early 90's of the Judiciary Committee on Juvenile Crime and it was a problem then and so we formed this task force and we revamped the entire juvenile code and made it much tougher with penalties attached. Since I left the legislature, methamphetamines have surfaced and that has become the real problem. Young kids your age are being involved in meth and you cannot begin to believe how it destroys a person in looks, in attitude, in behavior... major problem. It's not just the adults -- it's with juveniles also.

Alice Zhang: So what's your view on how the law enforcers should punish or correct this problem?

JH: Oh they need treatment first before they need punishment.

ST: So like rehabilitation?

JH: Yes, but perhaps you need to imprison them in order to force them to face rehab because most of them do not want any involvement. They don't want to be known.

AZ: So do you think it's because of the media that Meth has become such a big deal or do you think it's always been around?

JH: Well I think it's been around for some time but it has become the most popular drug of choice currently. Oregon is supposed to be one of the worst states and Washington County is one of the worst in Oregon.

ST: So what would you say are the biggest changes in general from 1980 til 2005?

JH: We have to change with the times and that's what's become involved. We didn't address Methamphetamine in the 80's or early 90's. It was a major begin just to address and revamp the entire juvenile code and put in some strict guidelines for punishment time served for both adults and juveniles and we thought we made progress then. But we have a lot of catching up to do today mainly in treatment. For instance, we have never truly funded alcoholism treatment and gambling treatment adequately but the state is short of money so that's our dilemma.

AZ: What do you think would be a good way to get more money for funding like more taxes or...?

JH: Well our only source of taxes, of course, is the income tax we have no sales tax so there is a strong effort to look once again at a sales tax but what have Oregonians done, rejected it like 9 times *laughs* So it's very doubtful. We are a committed state in that respect we don't like sales taxes so we're forced to look at an income tax increase which again people don't like but they'd rather just lock them up, throw away the key, and not give them any treatment but that's not helping our society because they will come out eventually.

ST: What do you think is the impact of measure 11?

JH: What have you heard so far about measure 11?

AZ: Well measure 11 is just about children under a certain age get punished like they get a mandatory sentence of 20 years.

JH: That's the juvenile code I was talking about and I chaired that committee so don't blame me *laughs* and that was exactly what we did mandatory minimums, not only for juvenile crimes but for adult crimes as well.

AZ: What were the laws before you came into office?

JH: We had none -- just a shake of the finger.

ST: Do you think that the measure is keeping kids off the street and out of jail?

JH: I would hope so because we do demand treatment today. It may take longer with Meth, Meth is a confusing mindset and can last for 10 years after you've quit.

AZ: So do you think there's been an increase or decrease in certain types of crimes in the past 25 years?

JH: Oh I think so. I think we had filled one entire prison with Hispanics, unfortunately, and many of them were illegal. I investigated with the governor of Cabo San Lucas (in Mexico) and he wanted desperately to build a new jail and I said might it be possible to bring Oregon prisoners down. At that time it only would have cost us \$10 a day for prisoners. It would have saved money. But then I fell into the federal laws and they said I had to go through Congress to do that, which was impossible. And we have to continue building prisons, which is costly.

ST: Can you compare the gang activity from 1980 until now?

JH: Well, I don't know. We had gang activity in the 80's also. Then there was a change in the belief that kids could get by just by showing their colors, whereas today they're attempting to hide their identity, by hiding their colors and their thoughts. So I think that that's how it has changed. It has become much more of a negative than previously. We attempted to ignore in the old days. Kids are kids.

AZ: So would you say that gangs are more divided racially or what area they live in determines what gang they join?

JH: I think that race has a great deal to do with it; it's a source of identification with others similar to your skin color, your beliefs, etc. And, it has further cemented relationships in gangs. And of course 185th or the 12th street gang, if you talk to the Hillsboro policemen, they are known groups. But again they are mostly similar in race.

AZ: Let's get some background history, how long have you lived in Hillsboro?

(JH talks about history...)

AZ: So what got you interested in wanting to be in the state legislature?

JH: You know, I had really had never thought of it, until a group of friends came to the door asking me, "Hamby, we want you to run for the state legislature." And so I did, and with a great deal of help, I won.

AZ: In what year?

JH: That was '81

AZ: So what were the biggest problems you had to tackle first?

JH: One of my top issues was spanking in schools. It only teaches them to be more aggressive.

(JH talks about a personal story...)

JH: And so that was the first bill I introduced and I abolished corporal punishment in schools.

AZ: So did you pass any bills that would maybe help law enforcers that would give them more money, or possibly decrease crime in Hillsboro?

JH: Yes, and I served for 8 of those last ten years on the Ways and Means committee. It's the top committee of the legislature, both houses, that apportions money and makes up the budget and I made sure that our judiciary system was well funded. Of course you do need adequate defense and prosecutors and everything else to get into the legal system.

ST: So when you had complaints from citizens, what do you usually hear?

JH: I drafted up a bill (laughs)

(JH talks about a noise complaint...)