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**U.16 Long Civil Rights Movement:  
The Women's Movement in the South**

Interview U-0491  
Neil G. McBride  
27 May 2010

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## ABSTRACT – NEIL G. MCBRIDE

Neil McBride received his J.D. from the University of Virginia in 1970. After graduating, he worked for a year as the Southern Director of the Law Students Civil Rights Research Council in Atlanta, GA. He then worked for a year as a staff attorney on Aviation Consumer Action Project, established by Ralph Nader. From 1973 to 1978, he worked as a staff attorney for the East Tennessee Research Corporation, a rural public interest law firm funded largely by the Ford Foundation that provided legal and technical assistance to community organizations in East Tennessee. From 1978 to 2001, he served as director of Rural Legal Services of Tennessee. He is currently General Counsel to the Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberland. In 2009, President Barack Obama appointed McBride to the Tennessee Valley Authority Board of Directors. Neil McBride discussed his work with Ralph Nader; involvement in setting up the East Tennessee Research Corporation; describes the work of the East Tennessee Research Corporation; the Tennessee Valley Authority Public Participation Project; starting the Coal Employment Project; the relationship between the East Tennessee Research Corporation and community-based activism in Appalachia; Vanderbilt Student Health Coalition; Save Our Cumberland Mountains; gender and women's issues in Appalachia; economic justice campaigns in East Tennessee; race relations and civil rights in East Tennessee. This interview is part of the Southern Oral History Program's project to document the women's movement in the American South.

FIELD NOTES – NEIL G. MCBRIDE  
(compiled May 28, 2010)

Interviewee: Neil G. McBride

Interviewer: Jessie Wilkerson

Interview Date: May 27, 2010

Location: Oak Ridge, TN

THE INTERVIEWEE. Neil McBride was born in Dallas, Texas, in 1945. He received his J.D. from the University of Virginia in 1970. After graduating, he worked for a year as the Southern Director of the Law Students Civil Rights Research Council in Atlanta, GA. He then worked for a year as a staff attorney on the Aviation Consumer Action project, founded by Ralph Nader. From 1973 to 1978, he worked as a staff attorney for the East Tennessee Research Corporation, a rural public interest law firm funded largely by the Ford Foundation that provided legal and technical assistance to community organizations in East Tennessee. From 1978 to 2001, he served as director of Rural Legal Services of Tennessee and the Cumberland Region. In 2009, President Barack Obama appointed McBride to the Tennessee Valley Authority Board of Directors.

THE INTERVIEWER. Jessie Wilkerson is a graduate student in the Department of History at UNC-Chapel Hill, currently conducting research for her dissertation which will explore social justice activism in southern Appalachia, with special attention to women's activism, from the late 1960s through the 1990s.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW. I met Neil McBride at his office in Oak Ridge, TN. The first couple of sentences of the recording were cut from the audio, but nothing of significance was lost besides the introduction. Mr. McBride willingly shared his history as a public-interest advocate in East Tennessee and gave a good overview of the types of community activism that he has helped to support in the region. There were no interruptions during the interview.

CONTENT OF THE INTERVIEW. Neil McBride discussed his work with Ralph Nader; involvement in setting up the East Tennessee Research Corporation; work of the East Tennessee Research Corporation; the Tennessee Valley Authority Public Participation Project; starting the Coal Employment Project; the relationship between the East Tennessee Research Corporation and community-based activism in Appalachia; the Vanderbilt Student Health Coalition; Save Our Cumberland Mountains; gender and women's issues in Appalachia; economic justice campaigns in East Tennessee; race relations and civil rights in East Tennessee.

## TRANSCRIPT – Neil McBride

Interviewee: Neil McBride

Interviewer: Jessica Wilkerson

Interview date: May 27, 2010

Location: Knoxville, Tennessee

Length: 1 disc, approximately 59 minutes

Neil McBride: ...was right out of law school. I worked for a [Ralph] Nader project that did a study of power and environmental politics in Savannah, Georgia. And one of the members of the study was a Vanderbilt student who had worked with the Student Health Coalition and other people in the mountains and east Tennessee. And he and some other people that I knew got a grant from the Ford Foundation to set up a community-controlled public interest law firm. And when they were moving forward in that, I had left my Nader project in Savannah; I'd done work organizing law students around the South for about a year, and then moved to Washington to work full-time with Ralph Nader. And this was when Ralph had really captured the imagination of almost all law graduates and other college students who were interested in consumer rights, public participation, better government issues. Sort of not the Ralph Nader of recent years. And I tell people that I'm decreasingly proud of the time I spent with Ralph because of his more recent activities, but that's another conversation.

So I was in Washington working for Ralph. I had become somewhat familiar with nonprofit law, because I had to organize the group that I worked with. And they asked me to incorporate and get tax-exempt status for the group they were setting up in

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Jacksboro, Tennessee. I agreed to do that, and looked at what they were doing, and liked what they were doing. And applied to work there. My work with Ralph in Washington was fascinating and challenging. In the public interest world, it was probably the best place you could be in the country. But it was very abstract, and I really liked the connection that this group was proposing between their work and community organizations and people. They were setting themselves up under a board that represented environmentalists, particularly Save Our Cumberland Mountains [SOCM] and rural health clinics. The east Tennessee region was really a pioneer laboratory for community-controlled health clinics for the whole country. Here and in eastern Kentucky, we were really pushing the boundaries of community-controlled health delivery. [In addition to] the health clinics, they also were working with economic development groups and housing groups and things like that.

So at any rate, that was a very attractive way to work. And as far as I knew, it was going to be the only community-based public interest law firm in the country. At that time, the public interest work was in San Francisco and New York and Washington, and it all involved litigation. They had membership groups, but it was all very abstract. And they formed a group which we called the East Tennessee Research Corporation [ETRC]. You've probably already forgotten that name, and it was chosen because it was forgettable, and because we didn't intend for ourselves to be the object of attention. We wanted the clients we were working with--SOCM, health clinics, land trusts, groups like that--to be the focus of attention rather than the lawyers.

So at any rate, they set up the East Tennessee Research Corporation. I got a job of coming down here to work, and my wife and I moved here from Washington at the end

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of 1972. Expecting to stay two, maybe three years, and go back to a traditional job in Washington that might involve other public interest work or committee work on the Hill, or whatever people did then. And it turned out to be one of the best places in the country that I could imagine working, and I soon decided that I would stay as long as somebody would pay me to do it. [Laughter] And I've been here since 1973. Working with different organizations, but doing fundamentally the same work. So that's how I got here.

Jessica Wilkerson: Can you describe some of that work? What you saw as the major goals?

NM: Well, there were several different streams that involved ETRC's work. We took the lead in a lot of environmental litigation and litigation over the regulation of the coal industry. We would do things like go out and count trucks and write down their license plate numbers to make sure they were on the rolls as personal property. The Vanderbilt students did a massive study of the way coal land was taxed in the region. We handled some individual cases that helped shape the way the water quality division and the strip mine enforcement division were enforcing environmental standards in the coal industry. And then along the way, we focused on some other issues, and reached out into more economic development. Worked on the legal barriers that the rural health clinics were facing in trying to serve their populations. They had to fight every step of the way against state regulations that just weren't written for a freestanding clinic without a doctor on staff, all day long. So we had to deal with what nurse practitioners could do, what nurse midwives could do, what kind of pharmacy the clinics could have, and we did

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constant negotiation and litigation sometimes over issues that were in the way of this amazing network of community-controlled health clinics in the area.

And then we started a special project called the Tennessee Valley Authority Public Participation Project. Which was designed to improve the way people could participate in decisions by TVA. And TVA was deeply involved in the quality of life in our area, by the way they enforced the environmental standards in their coal contracts, by the way they charged for electric power, by the way they did economic development, things like that. So we were the leading public voice on the Tennessee Valley Authority for about five years, from about [19]73 to 1980.

Also during that time, we started the Coal Employment Project. We saw that the inability of women to get jobs in the coal industry, which were the best-paying jobs in the region, essentially put a ceiling on what they could get paid in any other job. Of course, most marginally educated women all over the country are low-paid. But in Appalachia, the people that were hiring women for blue-collar service jobs didn't have to compete with the coal industry. Because those jobs just weren't available. So the scale of pay for women in Appalachia was even lower than it should've been. Then there was the more direct issue of they're not getting the coal mining jobs. And we looked at that, and helped set up some other groups that got deeply engaged in the role of women in the coal industry.

So those are a few of the things. Some of them were pretty technical; some were very direct, but we always tried to keep ourselves in the background. And focus attention on the environmental groups, on the health clinics, on the development counsels that we were assisting.

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JW: So you were talking before how there were some really abstract--I mean you came from these projects in D.C. that were really abstract. I'm wondering how you took some of the theories and things that you learned there, and applied them here. What did that look like?

NM: Sure. Well, I would say two things. When I was working for Ralph Nader in Washington, my field was air safety, and the regulation of the airline industry. We would read about something they did in the Federal Register, and then we'd sue them. And we'd either win or lose and read about the result in the Federal Register. Sometimes, my clients would be airline pilots or flight attendants or passengers, but generally they would lend their names to what we did. They believed in what we did. But there wasn't real active engagement by the people we were representing; we were representing the public, generally.

But even with that, the issues were the same. I would sue the Federal Aviation Administration for failure to comply with the Freedom of Information Act. Or the government in the Sunshine Act. And the same laws applied to the Tennessee Valley Authority, and so the issues were very similar. The other thing I brought to the work here was a real strong awareness of the relation between the media and the work that we were doing. You rarely can really make a difference through a lawsuit unless you have some base of popular understanding and support behind what you're doing. So just getting a decision, even if it's a favorable one, doesn't really make a difference unless the world understands that's how it should be. And then, sometimes using the media would be more effective, cheaper, and quicker than filing something in court.



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So with TVA, one of the things that we did that made a fairly large impact fairly quickly was a study of decision-making practices by the board. And we looked at all the votes that the board took; we found that a huge number of them were done through what they called Informal Action, and not in public meetings, not with any real advanced discussion, and so we put out a report on that. And it quit doing it. Except for some real minor things that didn't need to be done in a public board meeting. So the use of the media was something that I think translated very well into what we were doing here.

JW: I've noticed that in the Coal Employment Project records. In the grants, there's all these sections on the media. It seems really important for women, especially trying to get jobs, or even knowing that they can apply for a certain job.

NM: Right, right.

JW: I have another question that goes back to how you ended up here. So you told me the career reasons, but I'm wondering if you can say anything about how the social movements of the time and even the way movements were occurring in this area with Appalachian Volunteers and War on Poverty, and anti-strip mining, if you could say anything about that.

NM: The research corporation, ETRC, that I work with, was an outgrowth of an amazing array of community-based activism. And I've thought about where that came from, and my sense is it was a good combination of the history of union work in this region. Families knew what it meant to work together; men and women both knew what you could do with the union, and not just in terms of wage and hour, but a whole range of things. Then on top of that history was this continuous infusion of outside assistance from students at what was the Vanderbilt Student Health Coalition. They were helping to

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set up health clinics; they were holding health fairs to teach people about not just health but public benefits, environmental issues, things like that. And then you had the students, you had the local history of unionization, you had a few really key local leaders that saw a bigger picture for the region. And then some people who just kind of came and stayed. Religious orders. The fact that Highlander was not very far away and it could be supporting the health movement, the environmental movement, economic development issues.

So there were things coming from several different directions at once that made this one of the most energetic and creative centers for community activity that I think existed in the whole country. And I think the record would show that SOCM is probably the longest-surviving, genuinely community-based, organization in the country in many ways. I'm sure there are people who would argue with that. But it's still a real model for locally based action on a variety of issues. It wasn't just this group that I came to work with; it was this group in the middle of this amazing array of leadership and activity and different types of organizations.

JW: I've been thinking about what does the women's movement look like in the South? It looks very different than elsewhere, in urban areas or the Northeast. And how things are more intertwined, the way people address gender and class issues especially, but also race. It seems like the ETRC is one of those places where there were several different movements, or issues, converging. I was wondering if you could say anything about how that happened here. Did SOCM see itself in relation to other economic issues, or any other of the organizations?

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NM: I think a lot of the people that started being engaged in a single issue--housing, land trusts, strip mine control--were always looking over their shoulder at other things, because they would see what the lives were like of the people they were working with.

For example, with the Coal Employment Project, that started--and the public history really focuses more on the interest of the women in doing something for themselves. And that's the most important part of the history. But in terms of organization, the Coal Employment Project started when people at ETRC made a plan to visit a deep mine. So a real well respected lawyer, judge in the county owned a deep mine. We wanted to go see it. So he said "Ok, come on a Saturday morning, give me a list of people who are going to be there." So we give them the list. And it's me, and John Williams, and Bill Allen, Maureen O'Connell, a paralegal with our group, a guy named Bill Core, all on our list, give it to the judge. He says "Well, this is fine, but women aren't allowed in the mine. And the men will be unhappy and they think it's bad luck if a woman goes under, so they can't come."

So this is a company that was selling its coal at that time to TVA, and the contracts between TVA and their suppliers, among other things, had them certify that they were equal opportunity employers, and didn't discriminate in their practices on the basis of race, gender, national origin, et cetera. And not only were they not hiring women, but they wouldn't even let them come in. This was a real flash of insight that we got after that. So the summer after that, we created a little advisory group, and we brought in a law student from NYU to do research on employment practices in the industry. Her name was Glenda Leatherman; she was from NYU. And she got all the

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information that she could. She got records of what they call contract compliance efforts, by federal purchasers of coal. And she worked with a little advisory group of women, to see what to do with that. The end result was, a few months after that study was done, we got a grant from the Ms. Foundation I think, and we brought Betty Jean Hall in. Then Betty Jean just took it over and ran with it, and made it one of the most effective components of the public interest movement in Appalachia. But the model that we used-- good research, good investigation, being done in conjunction with people that really knew the issue--was a model that we applied to a number of different problems in the area. Betty Jean started with us in our office in Jacksboro, and then we moved here and she was in the room next door with a staff of five or six. June [Rostan], Joyce Dukes, and some other people were here in this office in their early days.

JW: Since we're talking about the Coal Employment Project, a question I would have about it after I've looked at records, and I know June Rostan--. The most fascinating thing for me is how much that organization, by publicizing that women could get these jobs and then women starting to get them, were really subverting some gender roles. I wonder what the major challenges were to doing something like that, or was there pushback from the community? I try not to assume that people were willing to subvert gender roles that dramatically.

NM: No, no. I would say that it's fair to say that a huge percentage of the local population, the miners, the wives of miners, thought that Betty Jean and everybody associated with the project were going to go to hell for what they were doing!

JW: [Laughter]

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NM: I'm not exaggerating. It was just an evil thing that really disrupted life as they knew it, and as they thought it ought to be. And the companies were vicious in their opposition to it. Partly because they don't like to be told what to do, and partly because they didn't want to upset their own cultural vision, and the expectations of their male workforces. But that was certainly not the--. It wasn't everybody, and Betty Jean would be the first to say that there were some real heroes among the men in the mines that made a difficult job easier than it would've been.

JW: Another thing about that project, and it seems like the others, since as you were saying TVA is such a strong presence in this region, is that there's a way you were able to do community, local work, and address federal funding and issues that were coming out of federal projects. That seems like something that's probably unique to ETRC.

NM: At that time, I think it was. I think there are groups that do that now, with lawyers and research all over the country, but if there was a group like that in the mid-[19]70s, late '70s, we didn't know about it. And we knew about most environmental activists and people like that, because we were in touch with them all over the country.

With TVA, for example, two of the things we did that we were especially proud of, was we helped lead national campaigns that defeated two of President Ford's nominees to the then three-member TVA Board. On my wall over there is a picture of me and Bill Brock, and a woman from Jacksboro who had just testified in the Senate about a bankrupt dog food manufacturer from Mississippi that Ford had nominated to the board. So we got the national environmental groups, utility consumer groups, some other people, to recognize that TVA was a national issue. This was the first time in history that

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a nominee to the board had been rejected by the Senate. And we did that twice, with the second guy that he appointed. So we were used to using the local experience to convince agencies, national interests, people like that, to collaborate with us.

JW: It seems almost obvious, but can you say why that was an important connection to make, and how it had been lacking in the past?

NM: Well, it just gave you more power. When we're trying to say, defeat a member who's being voted on by a senate committee, we can talk about why it's important to Jacksboro and LaFollette, but it was also important to have the Consumer Federation of America, and the Sierra Club, and Friends of the Earth, and Natural Resources Defense Council say: "What TVA does has national implications." So we got their attention on a local issue, explained why it had national implications, and we couldn't have done it without that. And there are some other issues; we did the same thing with the Coal Employment Project and some other activities.

JW: Can you talk about some of the poverty work that the ETRC worked on?

NM: Let's see, that would come out of the economic development group, that we worked a lot with a little group up in Clairfield called the Model Valley Economic Development Council, and in the early '70s, they decided that cities had model cities, and Clairfield needed a model valley program. So we helped them with some startup businesses, with some grants, with some local projects. It was and still is one of the most entrenched, deepest pockets of poverty in the whole country. And that affected women, families. The health work that we did, getting the state to follow Medicaid standards that are supposed to control health access for children. We did studies on how the state was complying with that, made them into national issues, and have been working on that for

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forty years. Either made progress or stopped things from being much worse than they would've been otherwise.

And then the health clinics were a response to people's inability to pay for, get to, know about health access outside their community. So it really was all tied together. I think the evolution of SOCM shows that interconnection, because they've moved from being first a strip mine group to an environmental group to a multi-issue group that has strip mining and environment as one of a half-dozen issues that they focus on and work with communities on.

JW: Were you involved in the early stages of SOCM?

NM: Mmm-hmm. We were their lawyers, and did the tax studies; we did some individual litigation against specific coal companies. We advised the organization as an organization. Starting in, as I say, 1973. SOCM officially organized in 1970, something like that. So it had been established, but didn't really have access to full-time legal help, until ETRC got set up.

JW: How much have you come into contact with the Appalachian Regional Commission? Was there ever a relationship, were they helpful, or not?

NM: Yeah, we made some early efforts to monitor ARC, the Appalachian Regional Commission, the way we did TVA. And to try to encourage it to put more of its economic development efforts into what we would consider community-based needs. We did a few things in that field, but it never developed the way the TVA work or the Coal Employment work did. And it was not as newsworthy; they were basically just a grant-making organization. But I always felt that if ARC had had some full-time, outside, community-based monitors, it could've been more effective. We could've made

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it more effective. But it just didn't develop. But you're right; that could've been an important issue, and we did some work with it. We knew about it; we'd helped people do grants and things like that. But it was not a huge focus of what we did.

JW: Can I ask some more about you, personally?

NM: Sure.

JW: So you said you went to Hamilton College, and I'm curious, given what you were doing in the '70s, what were you doing in the '60s?

NM: [Laughter]

JW: What were you doing before you decided to come to east Tennessee?

NM: Well, let's see. After I left Hamilton, I went to law school at the University of Virginia, which was then and mostly still is a very conservative place. I've always felt, after that experience, that being radical or even progressive in the South was a harder thing to do than it was in most of the rest of the country. And you had to really know what you wanted to do to stay engaged with progressive issues if you're in the South. I've always had special respect for citizen leaders, activists, community leaders in the South, in a different way than I respect them in other parts of the country.

So when I moved to Virginia, to UVA, there was this small group of people who were interested in legal aid, civil rights, environmental issues. And we found each other relatively quickly. We were a very small group, maybe a dozen in a class of two hundred, something like that. But we tended to support each other a lot, and it tended to sort of--. Being moderate in Virginia looked like you were radical. Okay? So it pushed us into a clearer picture of what we wanted to do. And that certainly happened to me.

And I came to law school as a not terribly activist but moderate person, and left as sort of



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a leader in some civil rights and public interest things. During school, I helped set up a legal aid program for the Charlottesville region. I organized a new group that was affiliated with a law student civil rights organization. The experience of being isolated in a relatively conservative place made us more engaged in the issues that we were interested in.

JW: And did you meet your spouse there?

NM: I met my spouse while I was working for the ACLU in Atlanta during my second year of law school. So I went down with a little stipend from this law student group where I was an intern with the ACLU, worked with one of the leading civil rights lawyers in the country, a guy named Charles Morgan, Jr., who did jury desegregation and voting rights cases, and shaped the civil rights agenda in the U.S. Supreme Court for probably twenty years. And any rate, my wife was working for that--well, was sort of affiliated with that when I got down there.

JW: So what has been your understanding of race and civil rights in southern Appalachia, or east Tennessee in general? And how do you feel like you've been able to address--?

NM: Yeah. Well, that's a complicated question, and the counties where we did most of our work, they literally ran out black families at different periods of time, and there were very few in the area. I mean, they are still an important part of history, but it was--. Black-white issues were never a major daily factor of life in the coalfields of east Tennessee. And it had conflicting, just the small numbers had--. The homogeneity of the population in the mountains has different impacts. Sometimes, you had the most blatant racism, that people would know not to do in Mississippi or New York or other places.

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But on the other hand, since there was not a real economic community housing threat seen by the majority white populations, being racist just wasn't an active part of their lives.

JW: One question in my own head that I've been dealing with more lately is how poverty has really been racialized black in this country, especially in the [19]60s, '70s, probably before then. But definitely more strongly later, in the way that the federal government was addressing poverty and the way people were talking about it. But you were in a place where poverty was also [something] white people were dealing with. So I wonder if you might say a little about it.

NM: I would answer it a different way. In a lot of the country, it is definitely a racial issue. But in all of the country, and especially in places like east Tennessee, it's an issue of gender. And the poorest people in this country, by far, are single-parent families with kids, headed by women. So the poorest person in this country will be a kid in a single-parent household headed by a woman. That's just the dominant fact of life here, and I think in most of the country.

In Tennessee, if you are a single mother with two kids, the maximum cash benefit that you can get from the state is \$185 a month. You can also get food stamps; you can wait on a waiting list for months or years rather, and get into public housing. You can get healthcare. But the single cash benefit that you'll get in Tennessee is a hundred and eighty-five bucks a month. And that's if you don't have anything else. And that's the third-lowest level in the nation, behind what I call good ol' Mississippi and Alabama. So how do you raise two kids with a hundred and eighty-five bucks a month? I mean--. It shapes everything: health care, education opportunities, things like that. Poverty is a

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deeply gendered issue; any statistic that you find that has a man in a household will be more stable, more economically self-sufficient than otherwise. So. You know. For us, it's been a gender issue, rather than race.

JW: What have been the biggest barriers to address that issue?

NM: Um.

JW: Or to change it, I should say.

NM: Yeah. The mystery to me is how the victims of that situation tolerate it without being more engaged. At the state level, at the federal level, they vote for people who believe in--. That it's okay to pay a hundred and eighty-five bucks a month to somebody. The state, by the way, cut it from a hundred and ninety-five from about fifteen years ago. Just the tolerance and acceptance of those disparities is, even after forty years in working in this field, I still just don't understand. And I know the barriers to people getting out and forming organizations and writing letters, but I don't understand why they're not more angry. So that's the barrier that I see. And then you get into elected officials that don't care, and don't need to care, for any reason of personal benefit. For the most part.

JW: Well, what have been some of the more successful moments in challenging gendered poverty?

NM: Oh, let's see. Over the years, we've helped--. My field, my legal field, is representing nonprofit corporations. And I take real pride in having set up, and gotten groups on the right track, that run domestic violence shelters, that run schools, that run health clinics, things like that, and I can see them providing daily benefits for decades, and I take real pride in that. The lawyers that I work with have shaped the way decisions

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get made in healthcare and have won rights for people to contest the denial of health services, or the denial of insurance eligibility from the outset. And so there's ways to appeal.

Using that system, we've gotten huge benefits for individual people, and people overall have gotten much better decisions about whether a kid gets braces or not, whether a transplant is considered experimental or not, access to dental care. It's affected thousands of individual families, all over the state. We've done some things in the field of housing that affect how much people pay for rent, how much they get support for their utilities, things like that. Some of them sound sort of geeky and technical, but they really affect what resources a family has to try to succeed.

JW: What are the major projects you're working on now?

NM: We are in the middle of a dramatic cutback in the state in home-based health services. What they call Home and Community Health Services. These are sometimes medical people, sometimes attendants, that come into a house and allow a severely disabled person to stay at home instead of going to a nursing home or hospital. And the state is dramatically cutting back what it will approve for those families. We've filed two federal actions; we're doing lots of individual cases that are trying to slow that movement down until healthcare reform provisions come into effect in the next three or four years. So that's something that we're real involved with.

And then we're always looking at how--and when I say "we" now, I'm talking about the Legal Aid Society, which is a publicly funded legal aid program that has thirty lawyers in eight offices, all over middle and east Tennessee. I'm general counsel to that group, and my mission is to make the work that our lawyers do as strategic and

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purposeful as it can be. As opposed to passively responding to whatever walks in the door. That's kind of the bottom line. We have some good luck in doing that; but that's what I'm doing now. We work a lot on health care, we're still working on how law enforcement responds to domestic violence. We work on a lot of issues that affect how special education students get services in school, things like that.

But the other thing is, that's also real exciting, is not so much what we're winning, but how we're offering services. We have two partnerships that are real exciting. In Nashville, with the Vanderbilt Hospital, we have what's called a medical-legal partnership. In which we address legal issues that affect what they call the patient outcome. The ability of a patient, usually a child, to be treated successfully. So if a kid comes in with an asthma attack, doctors stabilize him for three days, send him back home. If he goes back home to a house full of mold and roaches, the treatment is almost irrelevant. And so they'll call us and say "Look, we've got this person in an unstable house, unsafe house, serious asthmatic condition. Can you do something?" And sometimes we can. We can sue the landlord, get them another apartment in public housing, we can find a private lawyer that'll sue the landlord for money. So that's real exciting, and what it means is that the legal work we do also helps stabilize a family medically. That's kind of national movement that we were part of.

And then the other thing is--and we are the only people in the country that do this--we have a similar partnership with schools. Where we have special grants, although we would do this even without the grants, in which we go into the school and we work with the teachers and counselors and families to identify legal problems that interfere with the ability of a child to succeed in school. So if you're in a rural area, then we have this in

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Oak Ridge, and we have it with two schools in Campbell County. So if you have a Campbell County family that's about to get their car repossessed and the family has to drive them to where the school bus picks them up, the kid can't go to school. So we would deal with a car repossession, we'd deal with domestic violence, we'd deal with the housing condition, a tax issue that is illegally where the IRS is illegally failing to give somebody a refund. And again, what it means is that the legal work we do will have an education benefit. As well as whatever benefit you get out of the legal work. We have the only education-legal partnership in the nation; one is funded by a student group in Columbia University, and then one is funded here by a local United Way grant. And it's really exciting and the other thing I'm doing in our organization is pushing people to collaborate more. Again, rather than just take what comes in the door. So that relationship to the community and institutions, and form of delivery, is real exciting for the leaders of the program and something that we're real proud of.

JW: Well, we're getting towards the end here, so I want to ask if there's anything you want to add, or anything that you want to touch on that we haven't in this hour.

NM: Well, I'll tell you a personal story that I rarely tell people. When I was with ETRC, one of our victories was--well, first we tried to get the county commission in Anderson County to repair a swinging bridge. Historically, and under the highway law in Tennessee, a swinging bridge is part of the public transportation system, just like a road. We had a bunch of families that used the bridge to get their kids to the bus stop. It was just a footbridge, but it got the kids to the bus stop. And without it you had to drive several miles around, and the other route would be flooded, things like that. So we didn't convince them to actually fix it through the highway department, but they got out the

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National Guard, and we all went there and helped rebuild this bridge. And that was a nice thing, and we took real pride in that. But as I was driving home afterwards--and this is a sort of elitist, professional reaction. But I'm thinking "Ok, um, I'm a graduate of one of the best law schools in the country, you know, have won cases in federal court and have done all this stuff, and is this really enough?" [Pause] And I'm not making this up. In the car, as I was driving back, there was an NPR national report on the study that we did of voting patterns by the Tennessee Valley Authority [Board of Directors]. This was on, you know, the NPR national evening news, which was really kind of community-tied look at decision-making by TVA, and it just really reminded me of what you can do if you're grounded in a community. And so, personally, professionally, that was a good day.

JW: Yeah. Well thank you for sharing.

END OF INTERVIEW

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