Oral Histories: Hon. Susan Lenehan

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Emeritus Professor Clem Macintyre, Interviewer

The Hon. Susan Lenehan, Interviewee

CLEM MACINTYRE: Susan Lenehan, member of parliament for the seat of Mawson from 1982 to 1993.

SUSAN LENEHAN: It was also the seat of Reynell. It changed to Reynell.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Correct, thank you; I did know that. You were a minister in the Bannon government in a number of portfolios. Thank you very much for coming in and agreeing to talk to us today. I think it is great to get on the record the memories and the experiences of as many former members as we can, so thank you. Let me start by going back to really early days and ask you a bit about yourself: where you were born, when you were born, what sort of community you grew up in and those sorts of things.

SUSAN LENEHAN: I was born in Gympie in Queensland. I was born during the war. My father served with the Air Force. I lived with my mother and grandparents in Gympie until he returned from the war. I was then educated in Brisbane in Queensland. I went to a local convent, then I went to All Hallows'. I then left school. I was a therapeutic radiographer for three years. I moved to Sydney. I worked there as a radiographer. I then got married and had my first child. I went back to university; I had a major in education. I became a teacher. I taught at St Patrick's at Strathfield in Sydney. I then moved to South Australia, where I taught at Mercedes College.

CLEM MACINTYRE: And then into the parliament.

SUSAN LENEHAN: I left the classroom on a Friday afternoon, and I was elected to parliament on the Saturday.

CLEM MACINTYRE: We will come back to that if we can, but just go back to your childhood a bit. Was it a political family?

SUSAN LENEHAN: No, not at all. My mother and father didn't know how each of them voted. My mother came from a very conservative family. She was a pharmacist. Her father had a chemist shop in Gympie. I would say they were Country Party voters. I came from a very Catholic family, Irish Catholics, and I am very proud of my Irish heritage.

CLEM MACINTYRE: So religion mattered in the family?

SUSAN LENEHAN: It did matter in the family. My father was High Church of England. My parents were married in the Catholic Church but at a side altar. They couldn't be married at the full altar because it was a non-Catholic marrying a Catholic; it was in those days. I was brought up as a Catholic, and I was actually in a convent until I was 18. I boarded at All Hallows' Convent in Brisbane until I was 18.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Was moving from rural Queensland to Brisbane much of a challenge for you?

SUSAN LENEHAN: No, I was only a little one. My parents moved when my father got back from the war, so I can't remember any of that. My father was in a bank. I think they moved around in the bank, and he was then stationed in Brisbane. That was when I went to All Hallows'. When he was transferred to a place called Eumundi in Queensland, I went to boarding school.

CLEM MACINTYRE: So not a politically active family, but an interest in public affairs?

SUSAN LENEHAN: I can't remember that. I think I got my social justice and commitment from the time I was in the convent, which is interesting.

CLEM MACINTYRE: What would be your earliest political memory?

SUSAN LENEHAN: My earliest political memory is being a young married woman living in Sydney in a place called Croydon Park and discovering there was no child care. I didn't have any family in Sydney, so when I had my children, I was completely on my own.

CLEM MACINTYRE: This was in the 1960s?

SUSAN LENEHAN: I would have been 22 years of age, so in the sixties. There was no child care. They did have a thing where you could leave your children with a person who minded children. Her name was Mrs Rice. I remember leaving my elder daughter with her as I went to work.

CLEM MACINTYRE: So, it was around the provision of public services, and so on, that began to stir your interest in—

SUSAN LENEHAN: Yes, I started to get interested. I got interested in politics through that, and then through the Vietnam War, which was on at the same time.

CLEM MACINTYRE: I was going to ask if that was a factor in the 1960s.

SUSAN LENEHAN: Yes, the Vietnam War and the need for a basic thing like child care. I had family day care—that's what it was called, I just remembered. She used to look after children. You would take your child on a bus. You would have to go on a bus to her place and then get a train to where I was working and the reverse going home. It wasn't easy.

CLEM MACINTYRE: And you were employed as a radiographer?

SUSAN LENEHAN: Yes, at that stage.

CLEM MACINTYRE: What was the training for that?

SUSAN LENEHAN: A three-year course in Queensland, the Queensland Radium Institute.

CLEM MACINTYRE: That was the equivalent of an undergraduate degree?

SUSAN LENEHAN: It was, the equivalent of that.

CLEM MACINTYRE: But much more focused upon that employment?

SUSAN LENEHAN: Yes.

CLEM MACINTYRE: What brought you to Sydney?

SUSAN LENEHAN: I married a man in the Air Force and he was stationed at Richmond, so we had to come to Sydney. Then he left the Air Force, so we stayed in Sydney.

CLEM MACINTYRE: You said university in New South Wales?

SUSAN LENEHAN: Yes, I went to Macquarie University in New South Wales. I have a Macquarie University degree. I subsequently finished that degree in Adelaide at Flinders University. I did a subject at Sydney University by correspondence at one stage. I moved to Sydney, and that is where I got my university training and became a teacher.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Lots of people talk about university as a time of political awakening and exposure to new ideas and social change, particularly in the late 1960s and into the 1970s—was that your experience? You were a mature-age student, I presume, because you had children by then?

SUSAN LENEHAN: Yes, a mature-age student and I did very well, even though I had three children and worked full time. I remember one particular vivid experience when we were doing our education degree. We went out to Mount Druitt, a very new developing suburb in Sydney—very poor, working class—and we were going to the high school to meet with the principal and look at the school. I remember vividly the principal saying, in a rather condescending tone, 'I see my role as civilising these students.' I remember thinking about that all the way home and I thought, 'That's an horrendous thing.'

It wasn't about educating them, giving them opportunities, ensuring they reached their potential—it was about civilising them. He obviously would have been middle class, and class was a big thing in those days. The children were from working class, and I think that just horrified me. I think that was part of it, as well as through the Vietnam War part and finding ways of looking after my children, because I had no family there.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Talking about university time again, I suspect you were too busy to be involved in on-campus activities and class in society. You weren't politically active at the university?

SUSAN LENEHAN: No, I was not. I was going to university after I finished work.

CLEM MACINTYRE: It would have been very challenging.

SUSAN LENEHAN: It was terribly challenging and I could never do it again. How I did it then I will never know. I think you do it because you are so motivated to get things finished and to achieve something and get on with it.

CLEM MACINTYRE: I can understand that. You completed a degree, you qualified as a teacher, you were teaching in Sydney?

SUSAN LENEHAN: And then I moved to Adelaide.

CLEM MACINTYRE: What brought about that?

SUSAN LENEHAN: My marriage broke up and I got offered an opportunity to work at Mercedes College. I moved to Adelaide with the children and taught at Mercedes College. I was elected to parliament, as I have said, from my classroom in Mercedes College the day before the election.

CLEM MACINTYRE: So joining a political party?

SUSAN LENEHAN: In the process I lived at Glenelg and Barbara Wiese, who was a member of the upper house, knocked on my door one day. I had been a member of the Labor Party in New South Wales—I forgot to mention that. I had been a member of the Labor Party and it was considered to be a terrible thing because I remember once in the suburb of Baulkam Hills where I lived that somebody said something to me and I said I was a member of the Labor Party and she said to me, 'You are not a card-carrying member of the Labor Party, are you?' I said, 'Well, yes, I am.' It was considered to be something almost along the same lines as a mass murderer. So I did not do a lot there. I think I might have handed out how-to-vote cards at an election or something, but I didn't have the time with three children and a career and studying to do that.

Then I moved to South Australia. Barbara Wiese knocked on my door in Glenelg and we got talking and I thought that I really wanted to join the party here. The other thing—I have admitted this—is that when I was a housewife at home with no family it was very lonely and challenging, but what kept me sane was listening to ABC radio. Don Dunstan used to be interviewed in Sydney because he was such an Australia-wide leader doing things, changing things and being progressive, and I almost felt I knew him, so when the opportunity came to move to South Australia I already had an idea of what the state would be like with Don Dunstan as the Premier.

CLEM MACINTYRE: So you arrived in South Australia in the very late seventies, early eighties, perhaps, if it was two years?

SUSAN LENEHAN: The late seventies, it would have been.

CLEM MACINTYRE: So just as Don was leaving?

SUSAN LENEHAN: He was there when I got here, I think, but then he left almost immediately. Yes, that is right.

CLEM MACINTYRE: So Barbara Wiese and Don Dunstan were big influences?

SUSAN LENEHAN: Yes.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Were there other things you were reading, things you were—

SUSAN LENEHAN: Yes, I have always been one for watching the news and knowing what is going on. I loved the big picture and so, yes, it would have been a matter of other, but probably not as stark, influences.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Bringing you to become more involved in the party.

SUSAN LENEHAN: A level of consciousness, care for the community, understanding of people.

CLEM MACINTYRE: When did you first allow yourself to think that maybe you would put yourself up for election?

SUSAN LENEHAN: After Don Dunstan, Premier Des Corcoran came in. Des Corcoran, of course, lost the election. I was a member of the Glenelg branch of the Labor Party and he lost the election, but the seat of Mawson was also lost to the Liberals.

CLEM MACINTYRE: So Glenelg was in Mawson at that time?

SUSAN LENEHAN: No, the suburb of Glenelg was in the seat of Glenelg, but I was living outside Mawson. They were adjoining electorates. I got a phone call, which I think might have been from the party secretary, because I had been fairly prominent in being a representative at Labor Party conventions and I had moved motions about reducing class sizes and I had taken on the then minister for education and the Premier and won and that was written up in the paper. Of course, I was a 'mother of three' and I was not allowed to be a 'Ms'. I had to be a 'Mrs' even though I was not married to the man of my surname, but it was so very controlled in those days. So I was written up in the paper.

Then when they lost the election, I think they were casting around and they must have thought, 'Well, maybe we will approach Susan Lenehan and see if she wants to run in a seat.' I was asked if I would like to run. I think they were thinking of Glenelg initially and then Chris Schacht said to me, 'The seat of Mawson is coming up.' I asked what the percentages were and I worked out that it would be easier to win Mawson. I knew that I would give it 110 per cent because that is just what I am like, so I said, 'Alright, I will run. I will put my hand up for Mawson.' So I did.

But of course there were four candidates: three men, including the person who had previously been the member and been defeated when Des Corcoran was defeated, two others who were local and myself, so that became, shall we say, a challenge.

CLEM MACINTYRE: But you presumably had a fair bit of support from within the party if you were—

SUSAN LENEHAN: Actually, no. I had support from the left. In those days there was the left and there was the centre left. The centre left always got up at the convention and they were the dominant faction. I had aligned myself, because of my values, with the left, so the left was supporting me but the centre left was not. That was a big challenge.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Was it a close-run thing, the preselection?

SUSAN LENEHAN: It certainly was. I used to, after school, go to the unions and talk about who I was and what I stood for. It could be very nasty and bitter. At one union I went to they said that, because I worked in a Catholic school, somebody had decided that I must be anti abortion. Nothing could be further from the truth. Fortunately, they raised it and they said, 'We believe that you're anti abortion.' I said, 'Absolutely not. I am totally supportive of a woman's right to abortion.'

Whoever had been spreading that around I never found out and I didn't bother. I made clear that this was what I stood for. I will go on to say that I did all the work I possibly could. When we came to the day of preselection, we all had to stand up and make a speech. I can still remember what I wore, I still remember my speech and I just talked from the heart. I talked about education, my passions and women. It wasn't radical stuff, I think it was just common sense.

There was a group of women who had come from the South-East branches in the South-East, and they had not been bound. We are not talking about physically binding people. What used to happen is the delegates were often bound by their branches that you must vote for X in this ballot and Y in that ballot. Nobody had said to these women, who were delegates, that they had to vote for one of my opponents, so I got up and I made my speech with a bit of passion. If you hear me today, I am a fairly passionate person, and I was genuine and sincere.

At the end of the speech, these women came up to me and said, 'We want you to know we voted for you'—and these branches would normally have not voted for somebody like me—'on what we heard you say, and we think that was wonderful.' I thought that was a good positive sign. Looking back, I think that's probably what got me over the line, because against the white ticket (I was on the green ticket) I got preselection.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Do you think being a woman was a handicap when it came to talking to things like union groups and so on, or were you conscious of the fact that you were the only woman on that panel to be a candidate?

SUSAN LENEHAN: I knew I was the only woman there, but I didn't use it as a, 'You've got to vote for me because I am a woman.' There was none of that.

CLEM MACINTYRE: But you didn't feel overt discrimination against you because you were a woman?

SUSAN LENEHAN: No. If it was there they didn't make it overt, except the business about the abortion thing.

CLEM MACINTYRE: But that was perhaps more on the basis of religion?

SUSAN LENEHAN: Yes, but it was also political. But I think I was so busy getting on with the job that I didn't have time to think, 'Am I being discriminated against?' or whatever. I was just determined that I would win, and I did.

CLEM MACINTYRE: A good approach to go in with. You were preselected a couple of years ahead of the—

SUSAN LENEHAN: Two years. In 1980, I was preselected and the election was in 1982.

CLEM MACINTYRE: So it was basically canvassing as much as you could while you were working full time?

SUSAN LENEHAN: You may have heard, as I said in my speech, that I taught full time in a secondary school, and I had three children.

CLEM MACINTYRE: You were still studying?

SUSAN LENEHAN: No, I wasn't studying at that point. I had finished my degree. I would doorknock every weekend and on holidays. I said in the parliament that I doorknocked almost the whole electorate. I think I did doorknock the whole electorate, but I didn't want to make a claim that someone could say, 'Well, in 1981 she didn't knock on my door,' because I am very conscious of trying to dot those i's because, being a woman, some people loved to do that.

I worked very hard. I can still see myself writing press releases to the local media on my dining room table. I lived in Glenelg. I wasn't in the electorate. I had intended to sell and move into the electorate, but what the state secretary said to me was, 'No, that will take you off electioneering. Stay where you are and just keep going.' That is what I did.

CLEM MACINTYRE: What were the key issues that were central to the campaign? Were they local issues? Were they broader statewide ones that you were conscious of?

SUSAN LENEHAN: Both, but you have to be very conscious of the local issues. Again, as I said in my speech, there were no childcare services. Child care was one big issue. The buses were just crazy. The buses from the south, coming up South Road, did not divert into Flinders Medical Centre. The poor people would be let out on South Road and have to walk a considerable distance.

Those were two issues that I remember, but there would have been others. We are talking about something like 43 years ago. I can't remember other issues but those two stood out. I went to the election promising I would do something about them. I had spoken to John Bannon and said, 'Is that okay?' He said, 'Yes, that's fine. You promised that; we will deliver that.' There were some other things, and I would have to go back and search somewhere to find them.

CLEM MACINTYRE: It was a result of the doorknocking that brought those local issues to the fore and became central to your campaign.

SUSAN LENEHAN: Of course.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Do you remember election night?

SUSAN LENEHAN: I do indeed. It was quite exciting when the election results came through and it was just wonderful to have my campaign director there, who is here with me today. Yes, it was very exciting to be elected, but of course I had no idea. I had come out of a secondary school classroom, as I said today, never having worked for a member of parliament or a minister or anything really.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Had you been into the parliament itself before?

SUSAN LENEHAN: I don't think so. No, I don't think I had. I might have been in for some social thing, but certainly I wasn't popping in here every other day or knew all about what was happening, so it was a huge learning curve.

CLEM MACINTYRE: So celebrations on the night but then back to work. Presumably, you had to resign from teaching.

SUSAN LENEHAN: No, you had to wait for the declaration of the polls, but then you are tidying up all your stuff from the school and getting yourself together. I remember coming down to the electorate office and walking in and it was just like a barren thing.

CLEM MACINTYRE: This is taking over the office from your predecessor?

SUSAN LENEHAN: Yes. He left nothing. There were just two pictures on the wall. There was a phone, a desk and a chair and that was it. You had to start from scratch, having telephone directories and local directories.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Did you get help from the party?

SUSAN LENEHAN: I got help from nobody in the electorate office.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Even in the Labor Party?

SUSAN LENEHAN: No, they don't have the resources I suppose. There were four of us that were elected, first-timers. It was a learning curve.

CLEM MACINTYRE: I can imagine. Talk about the first time you came in and took your seat here. What was that feeling like?

SUSAN LENEHAN: Oh, wow! That was interesting. Again, we came in before the parliament started, because I think they did a bit of an induction for us. We had a room. I shared a room with Terry Groom, who is now no longer with us. We had to share rooms as backbenchers. I shared one up on the first floor. My seat was right in the back of the parliament. I think I was almost the last seat. Any further to the back and I would have been outside. Kym Mayes was next to me and then Don Ferguson and then some of the members who had been in the parliament before but were re-elected. We were there as newbies.

It was exciting, I have to say, and I was thrilled and honoured. I never put a lot of time into thinking, 'Oh, I'm the only woman here.' June Appleby was the whip so she sat in the second row on the corner. She got something straight off, whereas where we were you could call us division fodder, but we were keen to be there.

CLEM MACINTYRE: You were certainly happy to have succeeded.

SUSAN LENEHAN: Yes.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Did you have family and friends and so on in the gallery when you were being sworn in?

SUSAN LENEHAN: When I made my maiden speech, my parents came down from Queensland. They were in the gallery and that was exciting. I don't have a copy of my first speech; I could probably get it from the *Hansard*. But, yes, they were there and that was exciting.

CLEM MACINTYRE: I have read the first speech.

SUSAN LENEHAN: Was it any good? I don't remember what I even said.

CLEM MACINTYRE: A strong focus again on local issues.

SUSAN LENEHAN: Really? Was it?

CLEM MACINTYRE: Housing in particular—

SUSAN LENEHAN: Housing would have been a thing, yes.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Transport, housing and consumer affairs and things like that you were mentioning in your first speech.

SUSAN LENEHAN: Isn't it funny? I can't remember those. That is such a long—

CLEM MACINTYRE: Were you nervous when you gave it, standing up the first time in the house and speaking?

SUSAN LENEHAN: I don't remember, I really don't. I wouldn't be honest if I said, 'Yes, I was,' or, 'No, I wasn't.' I suppose I was nervous and I was excited because my parents were there. I was the first member of either side of the family ever to be elected to parliament, so the whole family was really thrilled to bits that one of the family was elected to a parliament. My parents were conservatives—they were from Queensland; say no more—but they changed very quickly.

CLEM MACINTYRE: The process of learning the ropes as a new member in terms of procedure and perhaps behaviour around the house and so on, was that something you got any help with, again from the party or from—

SUSAN LENEHAN: No, I think the parliament people themselves helped us. We would have had an induction, I think. I don't remember what it was about but it would have been about those sorts of things. I think the Labor Party would have—people like Frank Blevins would have said, 'This is what you do here,' or if you stepped out of place they would have said to you, 'No, that's not how you do it. You do it a different way.'

CLEM MACINTYRE: Right, so there was some mentoring within the party.

SUSAN LENEHAN: Yes, there was some but not a lot.

CLEM MACINTYRE: It is a hard question to phrase, but what was the atmosphere like when you came into the chamber in 1982? We are used to seeing it these days; it is easy to forget how much the feeling and the sentiment can change in these places. You were one of three women in the chamber when you took up your seat.

SUSAN LENEHAN: That's it, and in the second election I think Di Gayler joined us, but that was all. It was a very male environment—a completely male environment. The language was very much male, as you heard when I read out about what was said about my hat: it was all 'his', 'him', 'he' and no 'her'. I am a feminist, but I don't remember being angry or raising those things. I think I just got on with the job. I had a huge job to do and I got on with it.

CLEM MACINTYRE: One of the things that I noticed when I was doing a bit of reading was that you were often regarded as the person who asked the most questions from the backbench, other than the Leader of the Opposition.

SUSAN LENEHAN: That would be right!

CLEM MACINTYRE: You had a reputation as being pretty feisty and assertive.

SUSAN LENEHAN: Yes.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Was that you or was that a policy you adopted or—

SUSAN LENEHAN: No, that would be my nature. I believe in fighting for the underdog and I believe in saying what I think. I would have asked a lot of questions because I was interested. I was on ministers' committees of tourism, of the Premier and of the Attorney-General. I think Gavin Keneally was transport because transport was a big issue down in the south—it was then and I am sure it probably is now. I was known as 'the mouth from the south' because I stood up for the south. I promoted that. It wasn't particularly flattering but I didn't care—'Oh, thank you very much.' I promoted that because, as a woman, you have to fight and you have to be assertive. I hope I wasn't aggressive and horrible or anything, but I don't think I was.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Did you feel you had to work harder because you were a woman—

SUSAN LENEHAN: Yes, I did.

CLEM MACINTYRE: —and you weren't taken as seriously by colleagues?

SUSAN LENEHAN: I think I was, but not by some of the opposition members. For example, you would know the former member Peter Lewis. When I was preparing for today, I went through the *Hansard.* I was amazed, even as a minister, not a backbencher even, how he would interrupt all the time. He really had a bit of a fixation. I don't want to say too much, but that was obvious.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Did that mood shift during your time, or would you still say that was the prevalent mood?

SUSAN LENEHAN: Well, I noticed it when I was reading the *Hansard* that he was still doing it as a minister. Another thing—no, it didn't. My press secretary once came to me. Some of the people in the media who followed things had said to her, 'Look, the only problem with your minister is her voice is too high. You need to get her to speak lower.' I have a fairly low kind of voice. I don't talk up here. They said, 'She needs to speak lower,' because you see I was the only female voice in the parliament, really, except for Jennifer Cashmore, because June Appleby very rarely ever asked a question. She was busy doing her whipping, so to speak. I will never forget this: she said, 'Unless I could organise a sex change for Susan, I don't think I can do much about that.' This was the media in South Australia in

the late 1980s, when I was a minister, and the early nineties, not understanding that a woman does have a lower register. I've got a pretty loud and strident voice, I have to say.

CLEM MACINTYRE: It's advice that Margaret Thatcher was given as well in the seventies—

SUSAN LENEHAN: Isn't that interesting?

CLEM MACINTYRE: —to change her voice to be taken more seriously.

SUSAN LENEHAN: I can't remember that I got hysterical and spoke up really high or did anything like that. It was just that there was such a contrast with all male voices and only one female voice.

CLEM MACINTYRE: It was very much a men's club, really, with a couple of exceptions.

SUSAN LENEHAN: Yes.

CLEM MACINTYRE: You talked about the parliamentary staff getting you up to speed with the running of the house and so on, but in terms of when you were generating those questions, were you using things like the parliamentary library?

SUSAN LENEHAN: No, a lot of them would come from the ministers' offices. You would have contacted the minister and said, 'Look, I've got an issue. I have constituents wanting to know about X or Y,' and often it would be the staff of the minister who would generate the question. So I didn't have to do a lot of that, but you were the one who initiated all of that.

CLEM MACINTYRE: So the process was much more managed by the political party than would appear on the surface?

SUSAN LENEHAN: Yes. I didn't use the library. I really didn't have the time.

CLEM MACINTYRE: We have talked a bit about the atmosphere in the house and the challenges that you faced. How long do you think it was before you became really comfortable and felt, 'I am at home here. I know how it's all working, and I can'—

SUSAN LENEHAN: Hold my own?

CLEM MACINTYRE: Hold your own, yes.

SUSAN LENEHAN: I really don't know. I imagine that would have been a fairly gradual process. I think I developed much more confidence then as a minister, because you do. You have the legislation to take through, you have been really well briefed by your department, the speech is written for you, you are answering questions when they have the committee stages. I think I did develop confidence then.

CLEM MACINTYRE: But you must have had a bit before you became a minister, because you were unlikely to have reached cabinet rank if you were not—

SUSAN LENEHAN: No, I was 5½ years on the backbench and, of about 11½ years, I was about six years as a minister.

CLEM MACINTYRE: So you must have felt at home, in a sense, before the promotion to cabinet?

SUSAN LENEHAN: Yes. I would have wanted to become a minister earlier, but Kym Mayes got there before me. I do have to say Kym Mayes is a really good friend of mine, but I am quite sure, because the unions backed Kym Mayes and they didn't back me, he got there first. I don't believe—and I would say this to him now: 'Mayesie, I don't think you were a better minister than me,' but he was a male, and he got there first. I remember being hurt and deciding, 'Well, I am going to do as much exercise and become as fit as I can, and I will be ready for the next one,' and I was.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Were those choices largely shaped by factional battles?

SUSAN LENEHAN: No, we were both in the same faction, but he had been in the PSA, and so the union movement would have backed him to the eyeballs to John Bannon, and so when it came to the time—

CLEM MACINTYRE: Reading some of the press accounts at the time, before you were appointed minister, there was some speculation that there was a range of other people who were likely to be next promotions to the—

SUSAN LENEHAN: Was I on the list?

CLEM MACINTYRE: You were certainly on the list as one of the up-and-coming people but someone like Mike Rann was also—

SUSAN LENEHAN: Yes, because he hadn't been in the parliament very long. He came in later.

CLEM MACINTYRE: He had arrived but made a big reputation.

SUSAN LENEHAN: And he came after me. He got the ministry after me. But, you see, he had worked for the Premier. You have to understand the way the system works. It is how well you are known. It's who you—I didn't spend a lot of time doing, what would we call the word?

CLEM MACINTYRE: Cultivating the—

SUSAN LENEHAN: Cultivating people and doing things. I had a big electorate. It was marginal because it had been held by the opposition and then I won it. I had to hold it, and I held it for three terms.

CLEM MACINTYRE: You had a big swing in the first term to you—

SUSAN LENEHAN: Yes.

CLEM MACINTYRE: —and then it began to fall away a bit.

SUSAN LENEHAN: A bit. Well, of course, the State Bank did me in.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Of course, yes, a big swing from Reynell. Just staying in the chamber, as it were, are there any particular events or notable moments that stand out in your mind from your time there? Who were the great debaters?

SUSAN LENEHAN: John Bannon. John Bannon was excellent. Lynn Arnold was good. He was very verbose but he was good.

CLEM MACINTYRE: And who on the other side would you have said was leading the charge?

SUSAN LENEHAN: It's a long time ago. I must say, I got on very well with David Wotton. He was my counterperson with environment and planning, but it was a different world then. When I would have some function I would invite him to come. I really tried to work in a cross-party way with things, and we did. The two of us did in some things. I will give you some examples if you want them.

CLEM MACINTYRE: When you are talking to members of parliament, I think the thing that the public is less familiar with is that sense of engagement across the floor of the house, and friendships forged between members from different parties and so on. That is often not well-known outside but it is an important part, I think, of the process of the parliament working.

SUSAN LENEHAN: I don't know how that works now. I am in New South Wales and I don’t think for one moment it works there. I don't get involved. I am involved at the local level supporting my two candidates, federal and state, and they are brilliant women, but I don't go down to the New South Wales parliament and sit and listen because they call it a bear pit and that's what it is. It is nothing like here. Well, it wasn't like that here.

CLEM MACINTYRE: So, 5½ years as a backbencher, but working very hard, busy, with lots of questions and so on, did you have time for a private life as well during that time?

SUSAN LENEHAN: Well, you do. I was studying. I started my MBA when I became Minister for Education because I thought it was important to be studying, to be educated, to be showing some leadership and all of that. I think I was leading a pretty busy, normal life really.

CLEM MACINTYRE: And you had to balance work in the parliament with constituency work in the electorate office.

SUSAN LENEHAN: Yes, I was in the electorate office.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Clearly, good staff in the electorate office.

SUSAN LENEHAN: Yes, I won the lottery there.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Did you feel the resources that you had available to you were sufficient?

SUSAN LENEHAN: No. At the beginning there was just Corinne and myself: two of us running the whole show. Of course, I would be in parliament. What happens if she is away or she's sick? But

then we did get some extra staff. I think I mentioned in my speech that there were two other people who came and joined her. We had a decent staff then and you could do more things. They could go and be at a meeting that you couldn't be at, whereas if you have one person in the office you can't do that.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Did the office help in that relationship you had with the press as well, in the sense of lots of media releases and dealing with inquiries that were coming in and so on, because you appeared in the newspapers pretty regularly for a backbencher?

SUSAN LENEHAN: I did. My brother and sister-in-law had a hot air balloon and, as a candidate, I went up in the Parklands—tethered, I didn't go sailing off into the wild blue yonder—in a hot air balloon. I think it was to highlight—because we were in opposition then—the fact that prices were rising and all this was happening and there was just a lot of hot air being talked. It was a fabulous thing to do as a completely unknown candidate. I was at a high school, so the only people who knew me were the people in the high school.

CLEM MACINTYRE: The media clearly were fascinated by this new MP from the southern suburbs who had the capacity to ask lots of questions and be fairly assertive and so on. Did that ruffle anyone else's feathers in the Labor Party? Did you feel that others were looking at you askance and that you were getting ahead of yourself?

SUSAN LENEHAN: Well, they could have been saying that, but I didn't experience that, because a lot of it was related to the electorate and I was a backbencher. Then, when I was in the ministry, there were issues that the government was supporting, so I am not sure.

We used to share ideas. Kevin Hamilton was one of the best local members, and he had been in the parliament and he used to tell us the things he did. We used to share what worked and then we would do it, because I had no idea—I was a backbencher. Also, our electorates were quite different. Kym Mayes had Unley, which is a very different electorate than when you go south and you have the wineries, all brand-new housing, virtually no facilities and the bus system didn't work properly, as I said. They certainly never said anything to me.

CLEM MACINTYRE: The factional battles inside the Labor Party, were they things you—

SUSAN LENEHAN: I am somebody who doesn't really believe in the factions, even though I was a strong member of the Left—well, when I say 'strong', I felt very much aligned with the ideals and the philosophy of the left. But yes, at times people like Michael Atkinson could be a bit tricky, but I got on with them.

There was only one occasion. I don't think it was factional; it was just bullying. I was a minister—and I won't name this person because I don't want any suing—sitting downstairs in my office. I had the corner office, right down at the bottom of the parliament, between Old Parliament House and the parliament. I was sitting there one night and in came this member, he was a backbencher and a big man, and he thumped the table and started shouting at me. He wanted me to give him something or do something as a minister. I let him finish, and then I stood up to my full five foot and 3½ inches and, in my schoolteacher's voice, told him what I thought: 'Don't you ever come into this office again and speak to me like this or you will get nothing.' I can still remember that.

He was in a different faction, and I thought, 'Oh well, here we go. I'll be badmouthed and run into the ground.' The next thing I heard was that somebody said to me, 'I heard from so-and-so. He was telling me what a fabulous minister you are and what a wonderful person you are.' It's that old cliche of standing up to a bully. I didn't call names; I didn't do anything. I may well have given him what he wanted—I don't know; I can't remember. But that to me was the male bullying trick, and I called it on. It was interesting because apparently he then went around Adelaide saying how wonderful I was. Well, I didn't mind that.

CLEM MACINTYRE: A good outcome at the end of the day.

SUSAN LENEHAN: I think sometimes you've got to do that, and I wonder whether that was very much the woman thing.

CLEM MACINTYRE: That was an exception rather than—

SUSAN LENEHAN: Yes, I didn't have people coming in and thumping desks and leaning over me—a big person, like your size and bigger—and shouting. He did shout at everyone. I am sure he did that to men as well, but I think it is particularly more aggressive if it is a woman.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Yes, I can understand that. Let's turn to services. You were on some committees before minister.

SUSAN LENEHAN: Lots of them. That's how you learn. They don't do that now. It was wonderful. I will just explain. Can I explain how it worked, and then they all worked like this?

CLEM MACINTYRE: Sure.

SUSAN LENEHAN: Before the caucus meeting on a Monday, it would have been, wouldn't it? Do they have their caucus meetings now on a Monday or Tuesday morning? Tuesday morning. We would probably go early. We would go to Chris Sumner's office in the upper house, and he would say, 'This is the legislation I am planning. It's been through cabinet, but this is what I am planning to bring in,' and he would talk about it and we would ask him questions: 'Chris, what does this mean? What happens with that?'

CLEM MACINTYRE: This is the committee?

SUSAN LENEHAN: This is the little backbench committee that we were, and we would have a discussion and we would say, 'I think that could be a problem in the electorate,' or this or that, and the ministers, by and large, would listen to the backbench committee if you spoke with some degree of intelligence and common sense. You didn't just come and say, 'I don't like that.'

CLEM MACINTYRE: Is this a party committee or—

SUSAN LENEHAN: A party committee, a Labor Party committee of the minister, and you put your name down for which ones you wanted. The Premier had one, and all the ministers had them. I wasn't on every minister's but I was very interested in tourism and I was interested in, obviously, A-G. I was on the Premier's committee, and probably education.

CLEM MACINTYRE: So these were like sounding boards for the ministers to take the temperature of the party?

SUSAN LENEHAN: Yes, they would come with the legislation or they would come before they had even gone to cabinet sometimes and say, 'We are thinking of changing this whole thing about education, so what do you think?' and we would have a discussion. Then, before it would go to the caucus they would bring the formation of the bill that had gone through cabinet, which was fair—that's what it should do—to the committee and say, 'This is what I am going to take in to the caucus.' So rather than everybody jumping up in the caucus and starting to ask questions, it was a very smart way of managing, but, from a backbencher's perspective, it was a fabulous learning process.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Yes, I could see that.

SUSAN LENEHAN: I really learnt a lot from all of that about the different portfolios or different legislation that I would not have known about and it was great. I understand they don't do it now, and I think that's a shame, a real shame.

CLEM MACINTYRE: What about standing committees?

SUSAN LENEHAN: Yes, I forgot about all that; I should have said something about this. I ended up being the Chair of the Business Development Committee.

I was on it to start with. We would get people coming in with proposals for the government to support. One such was Aboriginal art that ended up on planes. Owners of the company were an Aboriginal man and his lovely wife. They first came to us and we supported them. We had somebody from the department on a committee, we had opposition members and we had government members. I ended up being the Chair of that and I really loved that because we were doing something concrete to help business in South Australia. It was the business development committee—I knew I would get it in the end. That was great.

I remember Basil Kidd from the department was on that committee. He was from what would have been Treasury or one of the financial agencies. So we had that expertise. I remember Leigh Davis was on it. I got on really well with him. He was on it from the Liberals, I was on it from Labor. I think there were only about four of us—I can't remember; you would need to look it up and see how many. That was such a practical, sensible thing.

CLEM MACINTYRE: So your time on those committees you think was—

SUSAN LENEHAN: Well spent.

CLEM MACINTYRE: And influential in developing your broader perspective of the role of government and so on?

SUSAN LENEHAN: Yes, because it also helped me as a minister to look at the whole financial set-up of things, the whole breakdown of what works, what doesn't work, risk assessment, all of that sort of thing.

CLEM MACINTYRE: After 5½ years, I think you said, you were appointed to your first ministerial post, which was water resources and lands, I think.

SUSAN LENEHAN: I had water resources, lands, environment and planning, and community welfare—all in one great thing.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Talk me through the process. As somebody who emerges from the backbench to being a minister, what support do you get? There is no induction process that takes place there; you are just dropped in it, and you work out where to go and how to manage that process?

SUSAN LENEHAN: Yes, basically. That is why I made such a fuss of Geoff Loveday, who ran my ministerial office, because you really have to have good staff. I remember John Bannon saying to me, 'Susan, really good ministers appoint really good staff.' Geoff Loveday was (a) older than me and (b) much more experienced in a whole range of areas, and it worked.

I think probably the other thing is you have just not got to have an ego, because if you think, 'I am now the minister, I can run the show,' and you haven't had the experience and you haven't got the expertise necessarily—you might have the passion and the commitment, which is what I had. But to then get a team of people who could actually say, straight out of *Yes Minister*, 'Now, minister, what about this?' or 'What about if we did this?' or 'Somebody came into the office the other day and suggested so and so, will we have a look at it?'

I have to say one of my small number of virtues is my curiosity. I would be more likely to say, 'Yes, let's have a look at it. See whether that might work.' That was a great help. Once I got Geoff Loveday and I got the ministerial office bedded down, we were off and running. And I had such good CEOs, who I listened to. They wanted to brief me. They wanted me to know everything I could, and I wanted to know. I was like a sponge.

CLEM MACINTYRE: How do you balance the challenge of pursuing government policy and change sometimes when you have a Public Service that has its own ideas on how things should be going?

SUSAN LENEHAN: Yes, I thought you were going to get to that. I have to say that at the end of the day I only had to say, 'I would really like us to look at X, Y and Z, I think we need to do that,' and they would be off and running. Two of them are now dead, and I am not sure where the other one is, John Darley; he ended up in the parliament. I just think I was lucky. I inherited this whole department of engineers.

I had never worked with an engineer. They were the most wonderful people to work with. They would share their knowledge. They didn't talk down to you. They were so thrilled, I think—and I am going to just say this—to have a minister who was passionate about what they were doing, who wanted to implement things, who wanted to make the environment, water resources and everything better. They were just fantastic. I never felt that I was being snowed—and I am pretty smart—or that they were pulling the wool over my eyes.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Were you using one of the backbench party committees to help frame your ideas?

SUSAN LENEHAN: I cannot remember that. I guess I must have been, but I can't remember, to be honest. It is just something that isn't high in my memory.

CLEM MACINTYRE: When you were a minister, you moved effectively from a backbench role to the executive. The relationship with the legislature changes a bit. You are there now to get it to bend to your will rather than for you as a backbencher to sort of chip away at the edges and so on. Did your feeling or sense of how the parliament ran change then? Were you frustrated with process and procedures that sometimes got in the way of things; do you know what I mean? It's a different life being a backbencher to being a minister.

SUSAN LENEHAN: I have to say—what do you call the people who write the legislation?

CLEM MACINTYRE: The counsel? Parliamentary counsel.

SUSAN LENEHAN: Parliamentary counsel—I got to know them. You don't get to know them as a backbencher. You got to know them. You would talk about it. An amendment would come up, and you would want to talk about it: 'How do we fit this in?' 'Does that conflict with anything else we have in the legislation?' So I got to know those people much better.

I found the parliamentary staff incredibly helpful, everybody, from the people who just came in and put papers on your desk to the clerks that sat in front of the Speaker. They were really good human beings, really great people—I have nothing but praise. In my first cutting of my speech—thank goodness I didn't put it in—I had thanked all those people, and I thought, 'Susan, you just can't thank everybody, the speech will go on for two hours,' so I am glad I did take that out. But yes, they were great.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Were there frustrating backbenchers on your own side?

SUSAN LENEHAN: Yes. I was still a backbencher, but my colleague in the upper house, Carolyn Pickles, brought in a bill to decriminalise prostitution. I had written a paper on this in my academic life about how prostitutes had generally, when the research was done, been abused as children, as girls. It seemed absolutely wrong to me that, at the time, the police were charging the prostitutes and not charging the men. The hypocrisy of the whole thing was horrendous.

I don't know what it is like now because I got to a point where I just had to step back. Anyway, she had the bill in the upper house and I was going to take it through in the lower house, but some of our backbenchers—nervous Nellies and Neddies—decided they couldn't support it. I must say to you that I felt quite angry about that, and one of them was a woman. I don't have to say who it was, because you will work that out.

CLEM MACINTYRE: In cabinet the relationships were pretty strong? It was clearly a strong and successful government early, but then towards the end, as revelations of the State Bank and so on became clearer, there must have been a lot of frustration and not recriminations but—

SUSAN LENEHAN: Disappointments.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Yes, disappointment.

SUSAN LENEHAN: To give my perspective, I was in the parliament as a backbencher when the State Bank legislation came in. If you choose to look at that legislation, you will find that the then opposition insisted—and I mean seriously insisted—that the government have a hands-off approach. The government did not have any role in the State Bank. Interesting, isn't it? I remember that like it was yesterday. I think it was John Olsen carrying on—and I think you will see the legislation reflects what I am saying.

So, on went the State Bank. John Bannon would obviously have meetings with Marcus Clark. I had nothing to do with it. Cabinet had nothing whatsoever—we weren't discussing the balance sheet of the State Bank or anything to do with the State Bank, and I don't think it is breaking cabinet solidarity telling you that—that is the fact. The next thing we know, Marcus Clark has put the State Bank under a bloody log, it has just blown up, and John Bannon had to wear that.

I can remember feeling absolutely furious that he was having to wear that when he was legislatively (and he was such an honest and honourable person) not allowed to be involved. I know people at the time were saying that the dogs were barking around the town. I heard no dogs barking—I did not hear anything. If they were barking, they weren't barking in my portfolio areas, in my electorate and with all my huge ministerial responsibilities. It came as a huge shock to me and I was a cabinet member.

CLEM MACINTYRE: The cabinet was pretty united and collaborative—

SUSAN LENEHAN: Yes, we weren't pointing fingers at John Bannon or doing anything.

CLEM MACINTYRE: I am talking about the whole time that you were there, too, in the sense that there wasn't tension inside cabinet, there wasn't antagonism between members?

SUSAN LENEHAN: I think there was a little bit of tension sometimes between Frank Blevins and perhaps the Deputy Premier and the Premier—I don't know. John Bannon ran it so that you would go to him with something contentious before it went to cabinet, and he would discuss that with you. For example, nobody took a trip overseas without going to the Premier: you had to tell him what you were doing, why you were doing it, what was the benefit to South Australia, how much it cost and who you

were taking. Before cabinet even got that, John Bannon had said, 'Yes, you can take that to cabinet.' We didn't have any scandals about that. I think you would be very hard pressed to find a single scandal about anything like that, because that is the kind of man he was. So can you imagine the tragedy that he then wore the whole State Bank thing and he was a man of such principle.

CLEM MACINTYRE: So there was a great loyalty to him from the cabinet?

SUSAN LENEHAN: Well, absolutely. There was a little bit of tension at that time. Do you remember when Barbara Wiese's partner said that he slept with the minister and somebody had said that they had found out something to do with tourism or something. Look, I cannot remember the details. I just remember that there was a little bit of tension. We were all thinking, 'Oh, God, what is going to happen? Poor Barbara. What is going on?' But I do not remember anybody screaming and shouting or walking out of the cabinet or doing anything. That is why I have said it was a collegial cabinet.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Yes, okay. We are sort of going towards a conclusion. This is a very general question and I think I know the answer, but did you really enjoy your time as a member of parliament?

SUSAN LENEHAN: Oh, yes.

CLEM MACINTYRE: No regrets at all?

SUSAN LENEHAN: No, and I will tell you why. When I lost my seat after 11½ years and I had to stand up in front of everybody and everyone was crying and tearing their hair and whatever and I wasn't and I was strong for them I remember thinking that I had delivered everything I had promised. I could not have done more. Of course, I could have done more if I had been there longer, but I had no regrets. I had gone for things that people said you couldn't do and we had achieved. I just didn't have any regrets and that is not because I have a great big ego or I am living in a fantasy world—I really don't. When I said today that this was the whole high point of my professional life, I meant that.

CLEM MACINTYRE: What aspect did you enjoy the most?

SUSAN LENEHAN: I think being a minister because you could get things done. You could achieve things. You could help people. You could help your department people. You could make the state a better place. I think Greg Crafter touched on that.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Did you look forward to question time as a minister?

SUSAN LENEHAN: No. Anybody who says they look forward to question time is telling lies—absolutely telling lies. Because I had so many portfolios, I would go in there with things of everything else and the question is coming and you are looking for the right folder because nobody could keep their head around every one of the single issues. I only ever had one that was a bit touchy, which was to do with a seawall at west somewhere. I had answered a question genuinely and honestly and then there was some sort of mix-up or something. Well, the opposition carried on like I had killed 50 people, but it didn't go anywhere. It just showed how you had to be on top of everything if there was one little thing they could get.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Reading about the allegations that you were misleading the parliament, it was clear John Bannon was right behind you and very supportive.

SUSAN LENEHAN: Yes, well, I wasn't misleading the parliament. You see, what people don't realise is that every night you come home with your driver—I should have thanked my driver today—you would have a box of work. I used to come home with three or four of the old suitcases full of dockets and you had to read the dockets and sign them and they had to go back to the departments the next day.

I think what happened was that I signed a docket, probably at 10 o'clock at night—I used to read everything, but we are human—and maybe something slipped out or whatever. That got picked up and they asked a question in the house and I said, 'I can't remember having signed that.' Well, it went on and on and it wasn't even a major thing. It wasn't like somebody's life was at risk or anything else, but it was a good lesson to realise. Nobody could understand the workload of a really busy minister. It was just unbelievable.

CLEM MACINTYRE: So did being an MP live up to the expectations you had when you started?

SUSAN LENEHAN: I don't know that I had any great expectations. I just wanted to change things. I started off with education. I wanted to reduce class sizes. Because I was a teacher, I

understood that. There were so many other things that I wanted to do. I am not sure that I really had any great expectations. I just wanted to get in there and do my best.

CLEM MACINTYRE: But you would do it again in another life?

SUSAN LENEHAN: Yes, I would.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Would you say education is the most significant achievement?

SUSAN LENEHAN: No.

CLEM MACINTYRE: What would you list as the most significant achievement?

SUSAN LENEHAN: I would list my natural resources portfolio of environment, planning, water resources and lands, and the things we were able to achieve across South Australia, and I listed the bills. I visited the pastoral lands. I got to know pastoralists. We had to enact legislation. Don Hopgood used to say, 'If you haven't been consulted by Susan Lenehan in this state, you haven't been consulted.' I was a great believer in consulting. I would bring groups in.

One of the things that I haven't talked about is duck shooting. Oh my God! Duck shooting was the biggest issue since the Lord was crucified on the cross. You had the duck shooters over here, you had the conservationists here and you had landowners there. It was just a nightmare. In Victoria, the poor minister used to get dead ducks put on her doorstep. This is a fact.

CLEM MACINTYRE: I remember.

SUSAN LENEHAN: I thought, 'What am I going to do with this?' What I did is I think we had a seminar with everybody first. We talked about, 'We've got to find a solution that works for everyone.' I was totally opposed to duck shooting personally. I wouldn't approve of a single duck being shot, but that wasn't what I was there for.

Eventually, we got the duck shooters having to go to a TAFE course and learn how to recognise the different kinds of ducks so they were not going to be shooting and killing ducks that were about to be extinct. They had to have a licence to do that and they had to have their qualifications. The duck season would only open for a certain time. The duck shooters decided that they would establish ponds. What do you call them?

CLEM MACINTYRE: Lagoons?

SUSAN LENEHAN: Wetlands. Part of the whole deal was that they would establish wetlands and they would work with the farmers to get the wetlands, so they were fine. The environmentalists and conservationists, who would have liked to shoot me, I think, didn't want any duck shooting. I was able to convince them that this system would ensure that we had a healthy population of ducks. We were not going to get rid of the ducks that were under threat of extinction, etc., and in the end they all agreed.

At one stage, the people from the South-East who were mad right-wing shooters and killers, threatened my preselection, and I was a minister already. They were going to threaten that. Even they calmed down and we got them to come to the table. We got the legislation done and we got it all sorted. I don't know what goes on here now and I never want to know. I don't want to hear about ducks ever again.

CLEM MACINTYRE: I can see that it stands out in your mind as one of the big challenges.

SUSAN LENEHAN: Well, it was. What with that and dolphins and—

CLEM MACINTYRE: Coming back to the house and the parliament again, were there changes in things like sitting hours, procedures and so on during your time?

SUSAN LENEHAN: Yes.

CLEM MACINTYRE: For the better?

SUSAN LENEHAN: This is a confession: I can remember once, after sitting late at night, driving home. I lived at Glenelg and I went up on the median strip. I was so tired that I went up on the median strip, because we had to drive ourselves home back then because you didn't get taxis. After that, I think I must have gone to see someone and said, 'This is madness.' We were allowed to get a taxi home then and I think get one back the next day, and then they started to talk about changing the sitting hours.

We had all-nighters, the whole night, and you would be walking around with your eyes hanging out of your head. You could no more make a rational decision than fly out the window, but the problem was you had to drive home. Anyway, we did address that in the time I was in the parliament. Hopefully, now the sitting hours are civilised, are they?

CLEM MACINTYRE: I think more civilised than that.

SUSAN LENEHAN: They would want to be.

CLEM MACINTYRE: No more all-nighters. The introduction of information technology, computers and so on, was that during your time?

SUSAN LENEHAN: No.

CLEM MACINTYRE: So you were still—

SUSAN LENEHAN: Well, I think it was, but because I had staff—this is why preparing this speech was so hard, I had to do it all myself. I have been doing things all myself for a long time, but then I had staff. I didn't write speeches from first principles. I might have changed them and put in my own things, or put the speech in the pocket and given my own speech, but I wasn't learning how to do computers and all that sort of stuff. But I have learnt since I left the parliament in the last 30 years—

CLEM MACINTYRE: And it was pre-email of course and so on.

SUSAN LENEHAN: Oh, yes. I remember having a mobile phone that was like a brick. That's how far I go back.

CLEM MACINTYRE: After the seat was lost in the 1993 election, with a big swing against Labor—

SUSAN LENEHAN: That was the State Bank, of course. I was the last seat to fall.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Is that right? I didn't know that.

SUSAN LENEHAN: The last seat to go.

CLEM MACINTYRE: You had to turn to life after parliament. Earlier today we heard the Speaker talk about some former members having sort of PTSD in the aftermath of their time here. Did that strike a chord for you? Was it difficult to adjust?

SUSAN LENEHAN: I think I had a breakdown. You didn't talk about anything then, but I really had a difficult time.

CLEM MACINTYRE: How long did it take before you found employment and so on?

SUSAN LENEHAN: I reckon it was probably about a year. You are there today and you are gone tomorrow.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Sudden death, isn't it?

SUSAN LENEHAN: I can remember going down the street in Glenelg and people saying, 'There is Susan Lenehan. She lost her seat.' You could hear them. Nobody came up and said, 'Thanks for all the work you did' or 'How are you feeling?' or 'Drop dead, I hate you'—nothing. It was just this behind the hands kind of whispering. The party never rang me except for Chris Schacht ringing and asking me to pay the money for the

election advertising for my campaign. I said, 'I will pay for that when I get my pension,' and that's when I paid.

Nobody in the parliament ever picked up a telephone and said, 'We are going to have a bit of a get-together of the members who were there. Come in and we will have a glass of wine or a cup of tea.' There was nothing, absolutely nothing. Really, what I now know is I should have gone to a counsellor. Stupidly, I didn't have the brains and I wasn't in the proper frame of mind to do that, but I now can say that. I wouldn't have said that before because that would have been admitting, you know?

CLEM MACINTYRE: I know what you mean. I was going to ask what you miss about parliament, but I think you have touched on all the achievements and the sense of accomplishment over your time. What advice would you give to an aspiring MP aiming at being elected today?

SUSAN LENEHAN: I would say, if you are really passionate, you have to love people. You would know that we get people into parliaments who don't like people. They don't stand up and say

that, but they've got no people skills. You've got to be able to sell yourself to get elected—that's just a no-brainer—but you've got to be able to sell the policies you believe in and you've got to be able to sell the government that you are a part of and you've got to believe in those things.

There is nothing worse than someone who doesn't have that passion, who doesn't have those beliefs, pretending or trying to do something. I think the first thing you have to do is look inwards and say, 'Why am I doing this? Do I really want to make the world a better place? Do I really want to change things? Have I got some skills? Do I need some extra university work?'

I was going to do law. I have an honours degree and I was going to do law, but then I got elected. I thought I would love to have law under the belt because then you just know what's what. Well, I didn't have that opportunity. I am not saying people have to rush out and do law degrees, but you've got to feel confident that you can do the things I have just said, you can sell those things. If you do, and you really want to have a go and you really believe, get as much qualification as you can and get a bit of life experience.

I didn't go straight out of school into a minister's office. I did a whole range of things and worked in other things as well. Then, it doesn't come easily. You've got to be prepared for the hard yards. You've still got to go and do doorknocking. You've still got to be prepared to go to public meetings and meet people and do all those things. If that's for you, go for it. That's what I would say.

CLEM MACINTYRE: After 30 years away from this place, what does it feel like coming back and sitting in the chamber today?

SUSAN LENEHAN: It feels good. It felt good because I had people there who had helped me all the way. You do not achieve as a minister the things that I have been fortunate in achieving without having a marvellous team, without the Public Service, without the great CEOs and friends who support you. I had those people—not the CEOs—there today, so I felt really good.

CLEM MACINTYRE: That's very good to hear. Alright, I think we will leave it there. It's been wonderful. Thank you so much.

The interview concluded at 3.25pm.