Rawlins: How did you first get involved in the, with the Wagonwheel [?]

Steele: We lived eight miles downwind from where they were going to vent the gas?

Rawlins: I mean, how did you hear about it?

Steele: Through the news.

Rawlins: In the newspaper?

Steele: Through the newspapers, and radio. And the local news. And investigating. And after we figured out that they were going to vent the gas eight miles, and we were eight miles downwind of it and it was radioactive tritium was going to be in the gas, you know, we were just outraged. And that's how we got into it. That's how mostly everybody got into it. Ken Perry lives next door to us, he's down, you know, it's the same problem.

Rawlins: So with the Wagonwheel Project, do you remember after you read about it in the news and stuff like that, did any person specifically ask you if you wanted to be involved in it or did you [?]

Steele: No, I went down and talked Ken Perry into the fact that he ought to be. You know, I went down and said, "Aren't you concerned?" And he said yes, he was. And so the two of us got very concerned. And then we discovered there were other people in the area that were also concerned. And we all kind of just came together through that mutual concern. We all, I mean, the very thought of, that they, that because we're a sparsely populated, this philosophy, we're sparsely populated so they can radiate us. They wouldn't do it to a populated place, but we're sparsely populated so. You know, so it, and it seemed to

us that that's what they were saying when we read those reports. But they were going to vent this gas, and of course, the isotopes that were going to land on our land out here were going to be Iodine 131 and Cesium, I think it was 137. It wasn't, you know, if you knew anything about chemistry that was a pretty ghastly prospect. And that was back in the days of the big cover-ups. Nobody ever said anything to anybody about what they were doing. And when you tried to start

doing research and you tried to, you know, into the effects of some of these things and into what harm they had already done with their atomic testing to people in Utah, you ran into one big cover-up after another.

So here, so here locally, who, after you talked to Ken and stuff, do you recall who —

The people that were most, all right, there was Ken Perry and myself. There was Sally Mackey and Doris Burzlander. Daphne Platts. Bernie Gosar. Mrs. Burzlander. A.B. Cooper. Mr. Hammonds, who was the well driller and was highly, he's dead now, but Mr. Hammonds, H.L. Hammonds was the well driller and he had profiles of every well that had been drilled around here practically, because he drilled them all. And he knew how fragile that layer between the first water and the second water was. So he was very concerned about the aftershocks. Floyd Bousman was another one. And Phyllis Burr, who doesn't live here anymore. And when we went to Washington, H.L. Hammonds didn't go. He was elderly and didn't like speaking in public. John Perry Barlow, man, he was just a kid then. So those were the people that were mostly the ones that were the movers and the shakers and the doers.

So there wasn't really, there wasn't like one person just sort of said, "Hey, let's have a committee and advertise in the paper." It was more people talking to other people and that sort of thing.

No. No. This was a, well, I would say there were probably twelve people who came together as a group and there was no, out of those twelve people I would say they were pretty much the kind that exert leadership in the community anyway but there

was no one person that was the leader in the Wagonwheel Committee. They kind of separated themselves into jobs that they could do well. Phyllis Burr was just a natural born promoter. I mean, she was one of these people, she got Floyd Bousman on the Today Show when we went to Washington. You know, she could go in and con people into doing those kinds of things. Floyd is just a very, he's just a natural fine public speaker. Ken Perry was a geologist that knew his

stuff and had taught in the university. I did a lot of the writing for them. I wrote a lot of rebuttals to the things that the El Paso Natural Gas Company put out and the Atomic Energy Commission put out. And I did a good bit of their writing. So I mean, everybody, right from the beginning Sally Mackey was the one who kept the records. She was a librarian by trade, you know, I mean, she, by profession. So she, her whole house, her basement is, her, she's got one room in there still that's full of Wagonwheel material.

Rawlins: Yeah, she showed me the boxes. She's got boxes and boxes.

Steele: Yeah. So they, we kind of all, each person did what that person was best qualified to do. And it worked quite well. Everybody was uniformly concerned.

Rawlins: You were, at that time you were a science teacher?

Steele: I was teaching in the, let's see, that was '72? No, I was, I had been a science teacher for seven years but I had retired because I had small children, babies. I retired from teaching when I was, when my first kid was born. And by '72, I had a kid two and a kid one, so, or a kid almost two and a kid almost one.

Rawlins: Was that, was that a factor in, you know, I imagine, it sounds like part of your concern was based on a certain amount of specialized knowledge about the chemistry and about radioactivity and stuff. But was having two young children, was that also a part of your —

Steele: Well, the fact that I, well, that was naturally a factor. It wasn't just my two young children. It

was everybody in those days had milk cows. We were, we had six or seven milk cows, and we sold cream to the dairies in Utah. Every, every ranch lady, that's how the ranch ladies got their, that was traditionally the ranch ladies' spending money. You run the separator, and you have to wash that messy old separator, and so you sell the cream and then you make the money off the cream. And every ranch lady around was selling cream off of cows that were grazing on these meadows. And if the meadows were full of Iodine 131, then

everybody that drank the milk was going to get thyroid cancer. You know, I mean, this was a horrendous concern. And that wasn't any, you know, I mean --

Rawlins: And pretty tied into daily life, it sounds like too. It wasn't just the thought of it, it was a, you had some real practical [?]

Steele: Oh, yeah. You know, and then, see, when they started saying, "Oh, well, we'll reimburse you for the hay." They came in here, and they kind of arrogantly said, "Oh, yeah. We'll take care of this. We'll take care of that." And just as an example, all right, the ranchers that are on this Boulder ditch are assessed a tax assessment every year for this ditch. It's a substantial portion of a rancher's taxes. It's quite a lot of money. All right, this ditch has features in it, for instance up there in back of Floyd Bousman's house, just up over the highway here, there's a concrete siphon that it costs, it's worth $91,000. Or it was back in 1972. God knows what it would be worth now to replace it. In the first place, not only were those people so arrogant that they hadn't even really figured out what structures were likely to be damaged, you know, that were there to be damaged, they didn't know that water's worth anything. And they said, "Oh, well, if you're worried about the dam, we'll drain it." Like an acre foot of water isn't the most precious thing there is around here to a rancher in the summertime. You know, "Just run that water on down to, down the river." You know. "And then put, then fill it up again when we're done." And that kind of attitude. And that arrogance. Floyd Bousman used to get totally apoplectic. I mean, just, so, they sent some people up to walk the ditch. Well, he was, he was on the ditch

committee. I mean, you know, all these guys had been, at some time or other, officers on that group that, of neighbors that get together and run the business connected with the ditch. And he said, "Well, what about the siphon?" They said, "What siphon?" So he took them out and showed them. And then he asked them about other features on the ditch. And so, and he found out they hadn't really surveyed any of that. They didn't know anything about that. They didn't know, and that this Wardwell dam down here, you know, "Well,

just drain it." You know. He said, "Don't you realize that the water is valuable? That it's, you know, around here it's an extremely valuable resource?" Well, no. They hadn't realized that. So those were some of the, you know, the things that really torqued people. And the danger. You know. The fact that this radioactivity, just, just breathing the air and eating the. And, of course, when a cow grazes on the grass that has had Iodine 131 drifting down on it, the cow concentrates that radioactive isotope in the milk. And then when the kid drinks the milk, or an adult or anybody, they're going to get thyroid cancer.

Rawlins: Because it concentrates in the thyroid gland.

Steele: Yeah. Just like, it concentrates in the thyroid gland. And they had, we, we unearthed, I don't remember now, I mean this has been over twenty years ago, but we, I went and researched, back in those days, all those, all the things that we could find about nuclear testing when they first were working on the bomb. And that they irradiated all these poor people down in this, in the Marshall Islands, for example. And they got dosed with Iodine 131, and the amount of thyroid cancer that was, that came about in those people, was horrendous. We read about places in southern Utah where they were, where they had above-ground testing. And those people were encouraged to go out and watch the glow in the sky and the bombs going off, and whole towns, practically, died of, the populace died of cancer. And of course, that didn't show up for twenty to thirty years later. Well, here lately, now it's the '90s, all those things that used to be, that were so heavily covered up. And we met one gentleman from Utah, he was a man who was a researcher down there in

the University of Utah. And he had tried to bring the government's attention to some of the effects on some of the people in that community, and he did a lot of research on iodine in milk. And they kept, they ran this calculated cover-up. They sabotaged the man's career. They, they finagled so they kept his writings out of the journals. That kind of thing. And they're just, in the '90s we're just finding out just how bad those cover-ups were. And there have been some real good books written about how bad they were. This one book, called The Day They Bombed Utah.

Rawlins: Yeah.

Steele: It's, the one guy that had the badge on his shirt, that turns black if you get too much, and he walked out in the community and his badge turned black. And he got in his car and fled, and there were women wheeling baby carriages all up and down the streets. And he never said a word, never told the radio station, never told the police, never got those people off the streets. Left. That man's got as many deaths on his conscience as a good many Nazi officers.

Rawlins: So this, so this, finding this stuff out, was this, this was in the course of the, after you had initially sort of formed the group.

Steele: After we formed the group, we did a tremendous amount of research.

Rawlins: And this was the course of research. Okay.

Steele: We spent, all of us did, but myself especially and Ken Perry, and there were some of us. There were some that did more of the, oh, the administrative type thing. Sally Mackey and Mrs. Burzlander and so on, they did a lot of the administrative things. Bernie did a lot of the promotional things to get people aware. But those of us that had the training, like Ken and myself, and Hammonds and A.B. Cooper, who was an engineer, you know, he had a dragline and it, he knew quite a bit about the formations. Vern [?] was a geologist. He wasn't active, especially, but I mean he did contribute some information. So those of us that had this, had the background, set about doing a real program of research. I mean we just did, it wasn't hit or miss. We did, I wasn't working. I was, I had little kids, but I could spend a million hours in the library. And I did.

Rawlins: And what, so what, of the things that the committee did, one was obviously the research. One, as you said, was to, you know, sort of write rebuttals or write letters. And what were some of the other things?

Steele: We studied what they put out and then we put out rebuttals. And one thing we did, they put a, see, the federal law said that you had to have an

Environmental Impact Statement. So they put out an Environmental Impact Statement which was a joke. I mean, it was a joke. It was not researched, it was not, it was just a flimsy little piece of garbage that was designed to satisfy the federal requirements so they could say, "Oh, yeah, we put out an impact statement." 'Cause they never thought any of the hicks in this part of the country would ever even think, they doubted that people here knew how to read! And so they didn't even bother putting out a paper that, you know, amounted to anything. Well, we tore that to shreds. We got ahold of that very first one and I've got a copy in my office here still. We got that first one, and we found passages in there that said, "Oh, yeah, there'll be iodine in the grass, but we'll buy the hay that year. We'll pay them for the hay. Oh, yeah, the Wardwell dam'11 get cracked, but they can drain the water out of it." You know, and those things that just, I mean, just caused the local people to see red. Well, their, their answer to our rebuttals to their Environmental Impact Statement. And of course, we right on in the beginning contacted our congressional delegation, which was Cliff Hansen, Gale McGee, and Teno Roncalio. And those three gentlemen did us a very fine job. All three of them, they did a wonderful job for us. Well, when they got the heat from them, these guys thought, "Well, we'll put out a second. That was a preliminary environmental statement. Now, we'll put out the real thing." And all they did was to take all the controversial passages and eliminate them. So I have the second one, and I can show you on the pages.

Rawlins: Is that these two, like this draft one and then the --

Steele: There's a draft one and then there's the other one. And I could go through that today, and I could show you the parts they left out. Okay, they, there were paragraphs in that first one, that it was like a red rag to a bull. And they, there, when they rewrote it, they said, "We'll just leave those out. Leave those out." Now, let me tell you what kind of research they did. All right, I happened, I had been teaching for seven years in the Pinedale school system, and I taught all these kids that were in the University of

Wyoming now. And I had, for years those kids were in the habit of coming to see me at Christmas and vacation time, and I had this deal where I'd say, "Okay, you know, did, when I taught chemistry what could I have done better? What did you get there and you didn't know that you should've known?" And that kind of thing. So these kids were in the habit of dropping in and talking about what they were doing in the college. Well, some of them were dropping in just because they were friends. Well, a couple of young men, and these young men weren't kids that I taught, but they were roommates of kids that I taught, they were in the, there was a, they were in the department where they had a scientist that was a, an expert on grasslands. Well, see the El Paso Natural Gas Company hired this guy to do some research over there to prove that they wouldn't be harming these, the grasslands and stuff. Well, this guy's name was Fisser, that was the man's name, Fisser.

Rawlins: Like how do you --

Steele: F-I-S-S-E-R. Well, Mr. Fisser, they, when we got the new environmental statement there was a footnote in the back, there was a report supposedly that had been done that was going to prove that there was no harm to the grasslands that was signed by this Fisser. And it was put in as a footnote. And so naturally you assume that when you see a footnote and it says Fisser and they have a title and they have a journal, that this is a valid, that this is a real article. So we went, we took their bibliography, and we went to get all their supporting articles. See, that's another thing Phyllis Burr was really good at. She did all those kinds of things. She'd write all those kinds of letters: "Well, you know, we want a copy, we want a reprint of this article,

Mr. Fisser." Well, so, she couldn't get it. She couldn't get it, she couldn't get it, she couldn't get it, she couldn't get it. And, boy, she was on this guy's back. Well, in the meantime, comes the holiday, here come these two young men that had Fisser for a teacher, and they said, "This is a." So I was telling them that we couldn't get it. Well, here these kids are laughing, and they said, "Well, Fisser was running around like crazy Friday, saying, 'I need a girl that will type for

me. I'll pay a quarter a page. I have this thing that's got to be typed.' " He had not finished that article yet, and he had not gotten that to the publisher yet. And they had used that as a reference in that environmental statement. And those were the kinds of things that we caught them doing. Well, when we went to Washington, in those three days when we went to Washington and took on the forty lawyers of the Atomic Energy Commission, and the spokesman for the El Paso Natural Gas Company and whatever, at the end of the three days, after the final big showdown with the Atomic Energy Commission officials and our congressional delegation and the eleven of us, who were, who had our way financed to Washington by the proceeds of the Wagonwheel Blast that they had in town. They had a town-wide party, wide open, swinging party. And all the proceeds went to sending the eleven of us to Washington to fight the powers that be. Well, at the end of this whole thing, naturally we needed to unwind. Floyd Bousman had been on the Today Show that morning for fifteen minutes and Floyd came out looking like Henry Fonda. And Mr. Randolph came out looking like a used car salesman. And that did us a lot of good. I mean, a million people saw Floyd look, you know, come off really good. Well, we were needing to unwind so we suggested that we all go to the bar and have a drink. And I gathered up two young men from the Livermore Laboratories who were witnesses for the forty lawyers of the Atomic Energy Commission. I said, "Gentlemen, why don't you join us? You know. I mean, try, making out like this was, you know, I mean, we're opponents but, you know, we're speaking to each other and everything." So they came. One guy's name was Thoman, and I forget what the other one's name was. But we took them down to this local bar and we got Thoman pie eyed. And you can come down from 7,000 feet and you can

out-drink anybody in Washington, D.C. And he was from sea level and he couldn't, we out-drank both of those young men but the other guy was a little more aware of what was happening. We got them to admit things that you can't believe. I mean, they were drunk. In fact, the other guy finally got up and got Thoman by the elbow and he said, "We're going home. We're going to leave. We're leaving. Right now. We're leaving." Because Thoman was spilling the beans, see. For example, things like, well, Randolph spilled this in the taxicab

going to the, going away from the Today Show. "Oh, yeah," he said. "Actually this is just a power play." And he said, "We're trying to jack things up so we get the price controls off of natural gas. That's, it's a power play." El Paso Natural Gas Company never put a nickel of their money into this. It was all public money that came to them through the Plowshare Program. It was the, the millions of dollars they spent drilling that hole that, you know, it was taxpayer's money. And they were going to irradiate the taxpayers and they didn't give a damn and this was a power play so they could get the price removed from natural gas. And it was those kinds of things that really torqued us. We went down there, that was about the time, that was when Nixon, well, we went in there and there was an aide. This was in the three days when we were in Washington. Here's this aide, his name is Fairbanks. Brash young man. You know, real, real, you know, looks down his nose at this delegation from the hinterlands, you know. Well, he made a big, bad slip, that young man did. He was Nixon's aide, and Nixon was president. Okay. The governor of Colorado had gotten a letter from the Atomic Energy Commission when they were going to do that Rio Blanco shot. They gave him the veto power over it. And he was under a lot of pressure from the environmental groups to use his veto power to veto the damn thing. Well, he was also under a lot of pressure from every kind of group, especially in Colorado. Anyway, this, he was supposed to make this announcement. Well, this Fairbanks blew it, see. He told us, he didn't say, "If the governor uses his veto power." He said, "When the governor says it will go ahead." He knew. Before the, everybody else knew. He knew. And the reason he knew was that they had bribed the governor not to use the veto

power. And the thing they used for the bribe was, right after the whole deal was over they made him the energy czar. He got the job as energy czar, the first one. See, those were the kind of things, when you get into it, you pick it out. Teno Roncalio went to a dinner in Washington. He was telling us this, and he said all these big heavies from these companies that were in energy development that were arguing the fact that they should go ahead with this. You see, their whole,

their argument for doing it hinged on the fact that there was an energy crisis.

Rawlins: The gas in the formation was otherwise unrecoverable.

Steele: Well, they needed the gas. Yeah. There was an energy crisis and that's why we needed to develop these alternate strategies for getting the gas out of these tight sands. So one of these, couple of these guys looked at Teno and they said, "Really, what we ought to do is just move everybody out of the state of Wyoming. There's only 400,000 people living in the state of Wyoming. We ought to move them all out and just use the whole state for energy development." And here old Roncalio is, he's, you know, his family had lived here forever. And he was just apoplectic, I mean. He said, "The gall. The nervel" You know. "The nerve of these people." Well, that was the mentality. Well, Cliff Hansen was the oil man's senator, and we kind of worried about that. You know, we thought, how really sincere is Cliff going to be. Well, Cliff did us a lot of good. He knew the ins and the outs. And he served his constituents. He rose up that last day that we were there in Washington, and the head of the El, the president of the El Paso Natural Gas Company had a, he had a great big long speech all prepared. I mean, he wrote his out. We spoke, we didn't use notes. We each got up and made a speech and none of us used notes. This guy had a speech all prepared to read. And it was all based on the fact that there was this energy crisis, and so therefore anything went. Cliff got up and he said, "Before my people even say their pieces, I want you to know one thing, gentlemen. We're not contesting the fact that there's an energy crunch. These people aren't contesting that there's an energy crunch. If you want to develop that piece of land out

there that has that gas in it, use hydrofracturing. They're wholly in favor of that technology. They're not saying, 'Don't get the gas out of the tight sands.' They're saying, 'Do it by an environmentally safer means.' Use hydrofracturing. They're in favor of that technology." Actually it worked better. That's why, you know, it made more roads — but who the hell cares out there. Roads, you know, they can, roads are going to be an ephemeral blot on the

landscape that you, ten years later you won't even know those roads were there. So that took the wind out of this gentleman's sails pretty badly. And he, you could tell. I mean, he was angry. Because his, his speech that he was clutching in his hand was totally invalid. I mean, he couldn't get up after Cliff Hansen said that and say, "Well, there's an energy crunch and these people are standing in the way, you know. Their patriotic duty is to help the United States get out of the energy crunch." Because we weren't arguing that there was an energy crunch. We were just questioning one technology and there was an alternate that worked better. Why didn't they use that. Well, it was, like I say, it was a power play. But when we got into doing it, you know, when we got into the, we discovered things when we did that research. We had a gentleman from Denver who helped us out and lost his grant and lost his, the work of, you know, his career was blitzed for helping us. There was a doctor named Pendleton from Utah, who came up here and spoke at these meetings. They, they trashed his career.

Rawlins: So who was the guy from Colorado? name? What was his name Do you recall?

Steele: Oh, David. . . . It's in my, it's in those papers I gave you. I can't remember. You know, it's been years.

Rawlins: Okay. Yeah. If it's in the papers.

Steele: It's in those papers. David.

Rawlins: Just to veer back to something here, what about Gale McGee. You mentioned Teno Roncalio. What, did McGee do anything specific?

Steele: Gale McGee. Gale McGee did us, he did us, you know, everything he could do, he did. He, I can't remember any, you know, all of them, well, Gale McGee, for one thing, you know, he came to those meetings in Big Piney. He had an aide that was handicapped. And it was rather funny because this gentleman was, was deaf. He had been born deaf. And he read lips, real well. He talked, he would, you know, they're not deaf and dumb. People with that sort of handicap, if you're born deaf and you've never heard a sound, it's hard for you to

learn how to talk. Well, he had learned to talk. It was rather difficult to understand him, but the guy could sit on the other side of the bleachers from the humongous big gym in Big Piney where they had that meeting, and look over there at the two El Paso guys with their heads together, and read their lips and tell you what they were saying. (Laughs.) Which, it, you know, I'm sure those gentlemen had no idea that that was going on. But it was kind of funny. But no, all the congressional, whatever help they could give they gave. And I, let me put a little human interest story in here. This has nothing to do with the Wagonwheel. But Cliff Hansen was an elderly, you know, he was up along in years. We, Gale McGee threw a dinner in the Capitol building for the delegation from Wyoming, for the eleven of us. And while we were waiting out in the hall for the dinner to begin, all of the guards in the Capitol building, most of the uniformed guards that were walking around or standing there, there were two gentlemen standing there, and we got to talking to them. They were black men. And Washington, D.C., evidently has a really bad problem with prejudice against blacks and all this kind of stuff. And, of course, from Wyoming the people don't think that way. These two black men, "Who are you people?" And, "Oh, Gale McGee. Yeah, we like Gale McGee. Ahh." And then we said well, our congressional is Cliff Hansen. I remember this black man, he said, "I got to tell you about Cliff Hansen." He says, "Our messengers are black." He said, "They're all black." He said, "Our messengers," he said, "it's the congestion of the traffic is such that if a senator wants to send a message to another gentleman, he sends a runner. You know, he sends a man with a message." Well, it turned out that Cliff Hansen happened to be standing under the, among all those pillars out

there. And it was a real bad winter day, and there was slush a foot deep on the roads. And one of those runners came across, I don't even know if it was a man Cliff knew, but the, or maybe it was a man that he, I guess it was a man that he knew. Anyway, this runner came across on his way to the Capitol, and he got hit by a car. And Cliff Hansen went down on his knees in his very, in his good suit in the slush and held that man's head on his, in his arm, held the man in his arms until the ambulance got there. And those black men

standing on that portico looking out there at a white man from Wyoming holding one of them in his arms in the slush, they never forgot it. When you mentioned Wyoming, they said, "Cliff Hansen. That's the man who did that." They knew he was a senator, you know. It was kind of neat. Anyway, they all, everything they could do they did. They did it, they did it with pressure on people like officials in the El Paso Natural Gas Company. They did it with sending aides to these meetings or going themselves to the meetings. They all went to those meetings in Big Piney. On getting our message across in the proper places in Washington. On getting us publicity in the national news. All those sorts of things they did. I couldn't say that any of them helped, Teno was a Democrat and the other two were, Gale McGee was a Democrat I think, and Hansen was a Republican. It didn't matter, you know. They were behind us. They, everything they could do they did. I have no fault, you know, I'm not saying, "Oh, it was lip service," 'cause it wasn't. Actually, we were one of the few grassroots groups that ever prevailed. So, and then Floyd Bousman and Ken Perry and three or four of those guys went down to the, when they did the shot that the governor caviled on, you know, he went, he didn't use his veto power. And so they did the one down there at, I forget whether it was Rulison or Rio Blanco, Floyd would tell you which one, they went down and visited. Well, they had a tour bus that they took all these people that weren't, you know, and they had these guys giving the spiel. Oh, I guess it was reporters and it was, you know, showing them. Well, Floyd, those guys went in their own outfit. Well, they had a stone building that was a historical site. I think it was an old stone schoolhouse or something. I don't even remember now, but it was

some little stone building that was, had historical significance. And so when the tour bus got there, Floyd and those guys were standing there and they watched the bus disgorge all these people. And they hear the tour, "Now, see. Nothing happened to this nice old historical building." And Floyd said, "No, and they never mentioned the fact that they had wrapped it three times around with all these cables and padding, and propped it up with boards. And done all this stuff to keep it from getting cracked. And they

had taken all that down before the tour bus got there!" See? Oh, yeah, "See? Nothing happened." And they, all the way through the whole thing, those kinds of things happened. You know, you'd catch them, it was just as though anything went, you know. Any shady means they could use to make it look different from what it was they would do.

Rawlins: Do you think, do you think part of that was the, oh, for instance since the, you know, since the atomic weapons were so prominent in the war effort, do you think that some of that wartime kind of ethic, you know, of, do you think that was sort of carried over to the way they were dealing with the citizen population?

Steele: No.

Rawlins: What do you think it was?

Steele: I think El Paso Natural Gas Company was motivated purely and simply by greed. I think that the --

Rawlins: Was that El Paso people or AEC people that were

Steele: Well, the El Paso people were motivated by greed. The Atomic Energy Commission people fell prey to a syndrome that government officials get to falling prey to quite regularly. If you are supposed to be the regulatory agency, but you somehow convert yourself into a promotional agency, and you forget that you were there to be the watch dogs and you're right in there helping eat the sheep. You know, I mean, they, you get that syndrome. I don't know how that happens, but I think part of the reason it happened was that they had that Plowshare Program. Okay, you know, "Let's beat our swords into plowshares. Let's use our atomic energy for peaceful uses." That sounds wonderful, you know. "Oh, let's never have weapons of mass

destruction. Let's never have another Hiroshima. Let's build reservoirs. Let's do this. Let's do that." Well, all of a sudden there's a million guys whose jobs are based on that program continuing. And so when they find out that they're killing people instead of doing noble work, they cover it up. It's a natural human instinct to cover it up because they don't want to lose their jobs. And even to this day, that same

syndrome is continuing. See, we don't have the Atomic Energy Commission any more. We have the Nuclear Regulatory Agency. They're, right in the name, they're supposed to be regulators. But you watch Sixty Minutes on television, and here they're in there saying about how, you know, all these leaks and all these things. They're still covering things up. And they're still wasting money. And they're still keeping jobs. And they're still hiring people that really aren't doing any useful work, but they're paying them a salary and millions of dollars of this money is coming out of the taxpayer's pocket.

Rawlins: So a lot of the, it sounds like a lot of the sort of the enthusiasm of people on the Wagonwheel Committee in part, you know, there was a feeling of not just taking on the issue itself but sort of taking on some of this poorly exercised power of government that was being focused on [?].

Steele: Well, in the beginning it was to protect ourselves from being exploited and being endangered. And as time went on and we saw, we got to see some of the things, some of the methods they were using and some of the callousness that existed and some of the arrogance, naturally there was anger, there was disgust, there was, you know, this feeling of, "They are the enemy and we've got to defeat them because they're not only killing us, they're killing people in Utah, they're killing; they don't care. You know, they're going ahead and doing these things without ever, without ever, and not to mention the fact that they're wasting millions of dollars of taxpayers' money doing all this kind of stuff." But there was a, the committee itself, there was this dedication. I mean, it became an obsession. It became an absolute obsession. "We are going to lick this.

We are not going to let them detonate those five devices down that hole eight miles from Boulder. We're not going to allow this to happen." And that, that spirit was contagious. We, we were, you know, they looked at a place this size, at a community of this nature, rural community. Now, Floyd Bousman is a man who is a rancher. He's ranched all his, you know, I mean he's not a, I'm not even sure, I don't know whether Floyd was a college graduate even.

Rawlins: I don't know.

Steele: I somehow rather doubt it. But he's a highly intelligent man who's a phenominally good public speaker. Just, that's a natural ability. And he's got a very sharp mind, and he's a natural-born debater. And he never gives up. You know, he's like a bulldog. He hangs right in there. They never expected that they would meet with as varied and unique a group of people who were all getting along perfectly with each other, and all working together with such. Oh, yeah, for example, you asked what the different ones were doing. Well, Sally Mackey, her house was kind of our headquarters in the middle of town. When we were going to Washington we put out a printed thing with a lot of our excerpts from a lot of the things we had written, and different things. It's in there. I gave it to you, among the stuff I gave you. It has a plastic see-through cover and it's the thing that we handed out to everybody in Washington. We went to see Earl Butz. And Earl Butz, I think that he was, he was in office then and --

Rawlins: Secretary of Agriculture.

Steele: Yeah. He was Secretary of Agriculture. So we handed him one of these brochures. And it was quite thick, about half-inch thick, and it had a, it looked quite nice. It was typed, it was, they were run off on a Xerox machine but they had been

Rawlins: Your statement of opposition?

Steele: It was, yeah, a statement of opposition. And it had this real good-looking cover. And, "Well!" he says, "And how much federal money went into the publication of this?" And we rose up as, eleven

of us together and we said, "Not one single penny!" The way we put that booklet together, every single page was piled up in Sally Mackey's house. Well, you started at the living room, they went through the living room, through the dining room, and into the kitchen. And into the hall leading to the bedroom. And people who helped on the committee, not the eleven of us but little old housewives, little old ladies, they came in in a line that formed out on her lawn, and they marched

through. And they each picked up one page and when they got done they had one booklet. And they laid that one booklet down. And one lady was sitting there putting the covers on them, and then she'd put it on the pile. And that went on, I think for two days. And that's how we made that booklet. And we got Earl Butz by the kazoo, and we said, "Let us tell you, that there is no, this is how we made this booklet. And everything in there is hand-done." And Earl Butz, at the end of it, he was kind of bemused by the whole business. We were very articulate. And when we got done with the meeting, Earl Butz looked and he says, "You know, when I got up this morning," he said, "I went and turned the television on." And of course, he caught Floyd Bousman on the Today Show. And he, "These are the people that are coming to see me, and what in the hell is this?" He didn't have any more idea what we, you know, what we stood for until we got there than [?]. He hadn't done any preparation.

Rawlins: So you were, you were talking to him sort of the aspect of the ranchers and the irrigation and the

Steele: Yeah. We, we got in to see him because, what we wanted to do was acquaint him with the fact there was a segment of the agricultural community that was highly upset at the, you know, what the other branch of the, you know, what these other people were doing. See, we, we have, we're not a republic anymore. We don't have the kind of government. You think of us as a republic, you think of us as being governed by elected officials. That's not true. We're governed by hirelings that are in a regulatory capacity. Those people never stand for election. So you get a humongous big group like the Atomic Energy Commission, and you count off how many people are

working for that under the present day Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Those people are hired for jobs. They never stand for election. They're a regulatory group. And all over the United States, every aspect of our lives is being hedged in by these regulatory groups that are passing, like OSHA, for example. Four million regulations. You buy a stepladder and you want to get up to the top of your greenhouse and put a piece on the roof, and it says, "Do not step on this top step." Now,

that ticks me off. I want to step on the top step and take the risk, that's my business. They have no right telling me that I can't step on the top of the stepladder I just paid $45 for. You can overdo that regulatory business.

Rawlins: One thing, one thing that occurs to me, and that is most people in this area are pretty, oh, you know, pretty conservative and patriotic as far as, oh, you know, military obligations, things like that. And I, one thing that interests me is that sort of dual image of the government. On the one hand, you know, it's the government that you owe your loyalty to and the Constitution and that aspect. And then on the other hand, you're talking about this sort of governmental monster and it's —

Steele: I think that if you left the people in a community like this, if you didn't inflict on them dangers like the one, of the sort that the Wagonwheel Project posed to the people of this community, they're very patriotic. But they don't think of it as patriotism towards, they think of it as the country being separate from the government. They think of the country as the aggregate of the two hundred and fifty million people that live in it, as the historic body that, you know, my husband's father fought through World War I. He and his brother had exemptions. They did not have to go to war, but they each volunteered to go to Viet Nam because that was, the men of their family, if it was time to go fight they went to fight, you know. They were, but their patriotism was, was not, they had, it's a real dual, it's a duality. They don't trust petty officials. They don't trust bureaucrats. They have a natural aversion to regulations, period. But they have a very deep love for the country as the, as the place that the land, the land and the people who live on the

land. My husband's family came here in 1888. They have a, there's a code of behavior that the people in this community hold. When you give your word, you don't need a contract. If you say that you're going to sell your calves to somebody for sixty cents a pound, you shake on that. If the price goes to a dollar and fifty cents three days later, you keep your word and you sell them for whatever you said you would. They never used to ever sign any kind of contract over those kinds of

deals. I mean, your word was your word. There were, there were all these aspects of that code that they lived, that's the code they lived by. They still live by it. They, the code arose out of the things you had to do to live in this kind of a community. And patriotism was part of that code. But petty bureaucrats, they don't even see as being, they see that as being a flaw in the system. And a, petty bureaucrats are bad enough, but self-serving individuals who callously endanger other citizens, wantonly cause, knowingly cause damage to other people, they have no use for them whatsoever.

Rawlins: Just, just cultivating, cultivating power or some kind of advantage like that.

Steele: Yeah.

Rawlins: I think it's about time to flop this over. Let me. [End side one.]

Steele: David Metzger was the name of that gentleman from Colorado.

Rawlins: Okay.

Steele: You know, I haven't thought about those people's names in so long that after, you know, between '72 and '94, you have to strain your brain to remember.

Rawlins: Yeah. Well, I'm going to, I'm going to, I've got to go over to Cheyenne next week. I'm going to see if I can get in and talk to Teno Roncalio over there. As far, as far as the, you know, the work of the Wagonwheel Committee and the effectiveness of it, and it sounds like the trip to Washington was sort of the climax of the effectiveness. Is that where you'd say that the hardest work got

done or the most work?

Steele: Yeah, I think that was probably, well, I wouldn't say that's where the hardest work got done. I think we worked, we did a lot of, you know, we constantly worked. We did research, we put things together, you know, we wrote letters, we made phone calls, we spent a million hours on the telephone, we spoke at public meetings, we made presentations at all sorts of places. The work

was ongoing. I guess we would say the excitement was greater when we went to Washington. We were very conscious of the fact that practically, you know, enormous numbers of people in this community turned out to go to those. It was a town-wide party. Wagonwheel Blast. It was in three bars. And I met ladies in the bar that night that I had never, that don't drink. And never, you know, little old ladies that had never in their whole lives been in a bar turned out to go to those parties and contribute because they felt that this was a good cause. So we collected enough money. Oh, I, there were two gentlemen that went to Washington that I have to, that I have to mention, they went on their own money. We went on the money that was raised by the Wagonwheel Blast. But Phelps Swift and John Chrisman, Sr., the old John Chrisman, they went on their own, you know, they were well off enough they went. And John Chrisman was an oil man. But he was, he was just disgusted at the way the El Paso Natural Gas Company was wasting the taxpayers' money on this stupid technology. And they were very helpful to us. Both of those gentlemen. But the, they went on their own money. But the eleven of us that went on the money that was raised through the contributions felt an obligation to do the best job we could at presenting the case. I think that those, not, the, a lot of the, for example the president of the natural, the El Paso Natural Gas Company, those men have high positions, they're executives. They didn't speak any better than some of us. I mean, we were very articulate. We were used to getting up and making presentations. If you're used to, if you're a successful high school teacher you can speak in public. I don't think they expected people that were either as articulate or as intense or as dedicated or as knowledgeable or as absolute — back in those days I had ten thousand facts and figures in my head

which have all escaped me now because I haven't thought about this for twenty-two years. But at that time I could stand up and answer questions on my feet. I could listen to a man giving a speech as I did over in Big Piney, sit there and listen to him, catalogue in my head six or eight things that, instances that I had, that I knew about that I could use to rebut what he was saying. And then stand up and make a speech that's, that's a well thought out speech where you're not repeating.

yourself sixty-eight times and you're not using slang and you're not, you know, you're not, like I'm sitting here talking to you and rambling on. That was to the point, it was brief, and it was a good speech. That's where I met Malcolm Wallop. Malcolm Wallop got, I went to a meeting in Rock Springs and I gave a speech, an anti-Wagonwheel Project speech. And I stood up and I don't know how long my speech lasted. Probably fifteen minutes. And I had never written it down. I had laid in bed every night for about eight or ten days, cataloguing in my head everything that I wanted to say. And saying the speech in my head. You don't ever memorize a speech, because it's, it's, if you forget one word then you have a big pause and you can't remember. You don't ever do that. But I had all these points in my mind, so that when I stood up to give my speech in Rock Springs I never used a note. I walked up to the podium and smiled. And so I, 'course, when you don't have to use notes you're not reading from a, like the president reads from a TelePrompTer. He's pretty good. I have to give, I'll give him that one credit. He's pretty good, he, you know, he doesn't, you don't, you watch his eyes and he looks like he's looking at people and you don't think he's looking at the TelePrompTer. But anyway, he's had a lot of practice. But a lot of men that speak in public, like the president of the El Paso Natural Gas Company, are relatively ineffectual speakers. And they're depending on that bank of forty lawyers to back them up on their facts and figures. They don't have them in their heads. We had them in our heads. Well, when I went to Rock Springs and gave that speech, it was a good speech. It was a well thought out speech. And I had, I mean, I had lived this for so long it was part of me. It was like getting up and stating your religious beliefs that you've had

all your life to somebody that's a Zulu from Africa. Why do you do the things you do? Why do you behave the way you do? Why do you hold the codes you hold? Things that are so much a part of you that you have no trouble explaining that to somebody. That's the way I felt by then about our position that we were taking on this Wagonwheel Project. Malcolm Wallop walked up to me and congratulated me. He said that was one of the best public speeches he'd seen made. Well, I was thinking the same thing about his. And that's

where I got to know him, and he got quite, that's how he got interested. And he, he supported our position. He wasn't, he was running for something that he lost that election. I forget. I think he was running for governor, then he lost. Anyway, by the time you were able to speak with that fervor and make people believe you because they could sense that fervor, you had the edge over the forty lawyers the Atomic Energy Commission guys brought with them.

Rawlins: So as far as the, as far as the effectiveness of the committee, I guess one thing I'm trying to figure out is, is, in terms of the effectiveness of the Wagonwheel Committee, do you feel like the, the trip to Washington sort of, was one of the most effective things that you all did? Or did it, was it more symbolic? I mean, that was more like a [?] that was actually riding out to the dragon's cave? Did you accomplish more here, more there? How would you sort of rate the effectiveness?

Steele: No, I think it was, I think it was extraordinary. No, Ir we couldn't have done that without all that months and months and months and months of preparation here. We couldn't have done that. We couldn't have made the presentation we did, had we not done all this terrific amount of work ahead of time. But it was a culmination in a sense. Because there we were face to face with the faceless enemy. You know, there we were looking him right in the eye. And one thing that John Thoman that we, the gentleman that we got imbibing pretty freely in the bar, one thing he did tell us, he said, "Boy, I'll tell you what." He said, "You guys tore that original draft environmental state." He said, "I'll tell you what." He said, "You changed forever the way environmental statements have to be written." He admitted that.

He said, "Boy, if." And, see, nowadays, they got forty lawyers in there working on that, I mean, just figuring did it, did it cover everything. I mean, we nailed them to the cross on that draft environmental statement. So all that preparation enabled us to make a really good program. I think that was probably culminatory. There were, there were, we always said that we were one of the few grassroots groups that won. I'm not sure whether that's really a hundred percent accurate. What we

did, we delayed. We, they would have, they would have irradiated us. If we hadn't done anything. There, that, there was no. I mean, we fought and fought.

Rawlins: They already had the hole drilled and everything.

Steele: Yeah. We delayed and delayed and delayed. We caused so much, we caused them to delay until the facts came in from Rulison and Rio Blanco. The technique does not work. Instead of the five nuclear devices making the cracks reach farther and carry more gas, the weight of the overburden of rocks all crumbling, the cracks opened up and then they shut tighter than they were before. On the bottom of Rio Blanco, there was, see, they had neon, they had a marker in there so they could tell what was in, you know, which device, which hole, there were all these separate places in which. So when they got done with their study from those they found out that the gas was entrapped forever. That you did, the technique did not work. Now, had the technique been a glorious success at Rulison and Rio Blanco, I rather imagine that either we, one of two things would have probably have happened: We'd either have gotten irradiated or there'd been a civil war in Sublette County. There'd be men like my husband standing over there saying, "You're not going to do this." And arriving with, prepared to actually take up, you know, whether it was violent or nonviolent I don't know how it might have happened, you know. But if you, I'm sure if you got a thousand people standing there and saying, "We're not going to move. You're not going to do this to us." I mean, we'd have got on the national news that way. And we wouldn't have done it to get on, we'd have done it out of conviction. I mean, that's how strong the feelings were on the whole deal.

Rawlins: Was there any serious talk about that?

Steele: No, there was never any really serious talk about that. No. But what I'm saying is, that I know how, I know how strongly, how strong the feeling ran. And we took, we used a democratic approach. We never made threats. We took their writings and we published them. We, we went through our congressional delegation. We tried to be very

aboveboard. We met them face to face on our money. We used the media the way they, we used it rather better than they did. We went all the, all the routes that were open to a civilian population. But what I'm saying is, the feelings were dreadfully strong. And had it come, after all this, and all this demonstration on the part of the community that they did not want this here, if they had tried to force it on us, they were going to radiate you anyway, I'm not sure where it would have ended. I really, I'm not. Now, that's my personal opinion. But then I know these guys. You know, I know these people really well.

Rawlins: Things could have gotten pretty Western, huh?

Steele: That's quite possible. But let me, let me emphasize that it never, there was never any talk of that. Never. There never was. Because we were, we had faith in the democratic system, mainly. We, we were pretty well convinced that if we went all the way through the channels open to us, through the media, through the government, through our delegation, through our ability to present our case, that we would beat it. And we, and when, now, the fact that it was, the technology didn't work surely didn't hurt any, you know, but I mean.

Rawlins: Well, that, that, I'm sure that, well, for the natural gas company that definitely removed the motivation.

Steele: Oh, no. It didn't. It didn't?

Steele: No. See, if the natural gas, let me tell you this, if the El Paso Natural Gas Company had ever said a sincere thing in their lives, if they had really wanted the gas out of the fields here in Sublette County, they did do a hydrofracturing

experiment over there. And we got information about that that said that the technique worked so very well that Phil Randolph ran out of trucks. See, they pump it full of water. They do this business, you know, it's, it's water fracturing. And you force the water into these, into these cracks. Well, he ran out of water. They ran out of water trucks. The thing worked, they do it,

they, it's a regular explosion and then you pump it full of water. But he ran out of water. He didn't even, that was a token, another one of those token things. See, that technique worked really well. And they said, "Well, why would you want that technique when there'd be all these roads and it'd interrupt the wildlife and it'll do this." And now here they're running. And we said, "If you have to do it 'cause there's an energy crunch, so what? So wildlife will separate and they'll move somewhere else. So you make a million roads. You're going to put it back, aren't you? In ten years the brush will grow over it. You plow a field up and you let it go to [?], the brush will come back. We're not worrying about that. We just don't want to be irradiated." Well, see, they weren't sincere. They, they didn't care what happened to this field. They were doing it as a, as a, to put pressure on our government to get them to deregulate the price of natural gas. And it just dropped their jaws down a yard when we all rose up in the meetings and said, "We're not against deregulation of the price of natural gas. In fact, we're in favor of that. We're in favor of deregulating the price of natural gas. Let it flow up there. Sure, we're all customers. Let it flow up. Let it pay. That's where your bills ought to be paid. Shouldn't be paying it out of our tax money using these stupid techniques that are endangering the public." So they didn't expect us to take the stand that we did. And it undermined most of their arguments. Because they hadn't studied how we reasoned nearly as thoroughly as we had studied how they reasoned. And that's why we were able to make them look kind of foolish there in Washington.

Rawlins: Mm-hmm. Was there, as far as the, you know, it's

always seemed to me that there's a fair amount of difference between Pinedale and Big Piney, you know, possibly just because there are ranchers in both places, of course, but because a lot more people in Big Piney work for the oil and gas industry.

Steele: That's right.

Rawlins: Was there a difference, like were there people from Big Piney who were pretty angry with you?

Steele: Oh, there were people from Big Piney that were, no, they were pretty upset with us. There were a lot of people from Big Piney that were with us, but there were also a lot of people from Big Piney that were against us. And Joe Budd was one, for example. I mean, there were people there who were totally for the El Paso Natural Gas Company. They, they made a lot of money off those gas companies and all those years and everything. And they were, they never looked into it. I think some of them, later on, after they got to looking into it, they, it worried them a little, you know. But, oh, yeah, we met up with quite a bit of opposition over there. So, I mean, you can't say the county was a hundred percent united. But there were so many more people that took our point of view, especially after we got to presenting what, the ins and outs of this. A lot of the people that initially thought, "Oh, they're trying to drive away an outfit that's going to make us some money." And after they got to looking at what that might do to their land and their cattle and their children and their health, they changed their minds. I wouldn't say all of them did, but let's put it this way, we never noticed, that opposition didn't carry, I mean, it didn't, there wasn't too much impetus from it that affected us once we got to Washington or once we, you know. I mean, it wasn't the sort of, you know, you meet them in a bar having a drink and, "Ah, you're one of these guys that wants to run these guys out of here." That's about all that happened. They weren't out organizing and presenting their case the way we were. So, you know, that didn't amount to that much.

Rawlins: Now, the, that straw poll that was conducted, that was county wide. That was, and you did it in Big Piney and —

Steele: Yeah. Bernie Gosar pretty much did that. They did it everywhere there was a polling place. The, we followed the law exactly. I mean, you have to be so many feet from the door of the polling place. And she was quite meticulous in making sure that no legal, you know they couldn't throw it on the, that we weren't violating any laws. And the straw poll clearly showed that overwhelmingly the people were against the project. And it was pretty, you know, that hurt

them. I mean, every time we got up to speak, there that came, that straw vote and different things. There were a number of things that hurt them. When we caught them in these, in these, in lies. Floyd caught some of those guys in some, in some real, you know, they changed, then they changed their position, and, you know, they, instead of addressing your concerns they would just say, "Well, that's not a concern. We won't even look at that." You know, a lot of the ways they behaved just, they did themselves more harm than good by the way they handled it. They weren't upfront, you know, they really weren't.

Rawlins: Yeah. Yeah, it sounds like, it sounds like the, that kind of behavior definitely, there was a certain amount of sort of pure fury involved in this after all that stuff came out.

Steele: It was. There really was. There really was.

Rawlins: As far as, as far as, once, you know, once the trip to Washington was over and once it became apparent that the Colorado project hadn't, you know, produced the results that they were after, was there any, once the immediate threat was gone, was there any way in which the information committee [ ? ]

Steele: The Wagonwheel Information Committee was incorporated. It still exists and it still meets once a year to keep its incorporation. I was an officer up until two years ago. And I wasn't home the day they called me up and said, "Will you still?" because I never used to go to the meetings. But the officers would meet once a year. It's still here and it's still waiting for them to try it again.

Rawlins: So, but, was there any, for instance was there any

Steele: Twenty-two years later

Rawlins: Was there anya ttempt to introduce any other issues.

Steele: Twenty-two years later.

Rawlins: Was there any attempt to introduce any other issues? [?]

Steele: No. Never. It was never, there was never any other issue but that one. But see, the Wagonwheel Information Committee, we never trusted the fact

that just because the technique didn't work, you know, they might decide to do aboveground blasting. We never knew what they might do. We would have believed them capable of anything. So we never disbanded the committee. We never undid the structure. We kept our legal standing as a nonprofit organization that was incorporated under the law. And we still are. We're still here. We've never had any further threat. The site is over there, capped off. It's still, the hole is still out there. No. We, and the people, it's kind of amazing because other issues in the community have been very divisive. These are purely local issues. For example, how do you run your school? Have nothing to do with national politics whatsoever. And so some of the people that were among those eleven that worked so terrifically well together throughout that whole period have taken opposite sides on other issues. And gotten pretty well bruised in their personal relationships through the intensity of the feelings that were generated by purely local issues that have nothing to do with this. When I look back and I think, "How did you have eleven people with such strong personalities and such, people with such, that when they develop a feeling of conviction, you know, they develop a really strong feeling of conviction. How do they work together so smoothly? With no real one of them ever being a leader." No one person ever stood up and said, "Okay, you guys, this is what we're going to do next." Nobody ever did that. Everybody had this terrific respect for everybody else's ability. And I look back now, and I think the reason it worked so well was because of those strong feelings of conviction all being the same. "We aren't going to let them do this to us. We're going to take, it has, we're not in this for the glory." I mean, I wasn't in this so I could get my mug on the news in Washington. I was in this

to prevent them from doing that.

Rawlins: It was a pretty big, in other words it was a pretty big dragon.

Steele: It was selfless. It was, we were not politicians. We were not people that were doing it for any personal reason whatsoever. In fact, it cost most of us a lot of money. I mean, it cost us money for traveling. I mean, nobody paid my way to Rock

Springs and back for that meeting, for example, or the wear and tear on my car. It, the million hours that I spent, if you paid me five dollars an hour, I'd, I'll tell you what, there were a lot of hours went into that. And all of that was out of that personal conviction that this must be stopped. It was very, there was no selfishness operating among the eleven people. And I think that had a lot to do with the success.

Rawlins: Well, do you feel like, do you feel like the experience that you and the other people on the committee had, do you feel that there's been a sort of a legacy of that for the community? You know, for instance, just looking at Johnny Barlow, I'd say he probably learned a few things, I don't know if he used, that he used for the Union Pass issue was —

Steele: He learned quite a bit. You'll have to ask John what he learned, but he learned quite a bit. Oh, I'm sure he did, I'm sure that John learned a lot of techniques. He learned that you better be prepared and you better know your stuff. And when you make a speech, you better make a speech with fire and conviction, and you know. He admitted, he was quite young then, and he admitted that. He said, "Well, some of you ladies were really prepared and I think I could have prepared a little better," one time. And he admitted that. And I think he did. And as a, I mean, John was a person who intended to go into politics. It was a tradition in his family. And I think he learned a lot. None of us were professional politicians. None of us had ever run for an office. Of any sort. I got written in for one once. But when I got, I got written on to the school board. Nobody asked me if I wanted to be on. They wrote me in and I had a baby, and I said, "Look, here I am, I'm having a kid. I don't, you know, I'll come

back -- later." So they reorganized the district so everybody had to go off and then run. And I just chose not to run. But other than, and that one little thing, it had nothing to do with anything, I mean none of us had run for any of these local offices like county commissioner at that time or anything like that. Floyd did later, but not then. We were just business people, professional people that were concerned citizens. And we had never had any experience at running any

show like that. But we had a lot of talent in the group. A lot of knowledge in the group.

Rawlins: I guess what I'm curious about is whether, whether you feel like, the experience and the work that was done in the committee, if that, in some way that changed the community of Pinedale in a way that another town that hadn't been through that wouldn't have been changed. Do you think it made a difference for the community as a whole?

Steele: No. I don't think, I think once the danger was past, oh, I think there was, there might have been a little legacy, that working together on a community problem you can, you can solve it. You know, that kind of thing. But let me, let me point out that the very things that made us strong, the very, you know, that, the strong personalities, the talent, the drive, the, when, you know, they were all pulling together then. But this is a community of, that has very diverse populative, I would say on the average there's more talent, more intelligence, more education. It's disproportionate if you look at communities in the United States as, on the whole. You have more of that sort of people here and fewer of the sort that you find say, oh, in ghettos or in very low income areas. If you take a population of any city in the United States and say, "Well, if you average it all out, this is what you have," this is a unique community. It's not a typical community, even though it's small. It's not a, you know, so it's, and they're very independent minded people. Goes with the code. You know, I mean, so as far as a legacy, once the danger was over they went, they turned their minds to other things. And other issues came up, most of them local. They didn't happen to be, you know. And they went forging ahead and did other things. I have to, let me mention one thing that kind of

tickled me. When we went to Washington, out of the eleven people that went, let's see, only four were men, seven were women. Okay. We were at some, I don't even remember where we were. But myself and Sally Mackey and Daphne Platts and Doris Burzlander were talking to some ladies that had been involved in a deal in their community. And I don't even remember now how that came about or what those ladies were doing. You know how you just talk in a group and you're waiting to go on

and you're thinking about what you're going to say when you get up there. So you're not really, you're not really, you know, you're being polite and you're listening and you're visiting, but you're not, your mind is really on, "Fifteen minutes from now I'm going to be speaking before this group so I better be, you know." So I don't really remember exactly what those ladies were telling us, but I do remember real clearly one lady looked at, after we told them what we were doing, and this one woman looked at me, and she said, "You know." Now, you have to remember this was '72 or '71. She said, "You know, we do a lot of," she said, "we're fighting to be accepted as the equals of men in the workplace." She says, "You ladies just assume that you are, and you forge forth from there." She says, "You're not worrying about whether you are the equals of those forty lawyers in there, you're just, you just assume you are and you go ahead and do your thing." She says, "Men are going to rethink how we're attacking this." And I've never forgotten that. You know, feminism has been a movement that generated the same kind of fervor and the same kind of deep conviction and the same kind of outrage on the, you know, that the Wagonwheel Committee did to these local people. So there are parallels. There are women that are in the feminist movement that really, you know, they feel very strongly about what they're doing. But that lady, she said, "Maybe just fighting to be, for that, maybe we should just forge forth and act as though we are and force people to accept that." She stood out. I mean, that remark she made stayed with me for twenty-two years.

Rawlins: One other question that I had is that you had, you had come here to Pinedale from —

Steele: New Jersey.

Rawlins: New Jersey, and how long had you been here when the, this all started?

Steele: Well, let's see. I came here in '63.

Rawlins: Uh-huh. And this all started up around '69, so you --

Steele: I had been here ten to eleven years. I had been here as a visitor before that. But I came here to live, I taught in the high school from '63 to '70. Okay. My kid was born in '70. The second kid was born in '71, they were eighteen months apart. So I had been here like eleven years.

Rawlins: How did this, for instance, did being on the Wagonwheel Committee and going through that, did it change the way you related to people around here, change your feeling about the community? Did you come out of it feeling different about the town and the people than you felt before?

Steele: Well, with a greater appreciation for the resources, the intellectual resources the community offered, yes. Although I was pretty, let me, as far as how I viewed the community, when I came here I was single, I was thirty years old, I did my thing, I was a good teacher, I was an experienced teacher, I was, I think that I probably got to know most of the people as well as I did through my relations with the, you know, through being a teacher and being, meeting the parents that way. But I had three sets of friends. Teachers, as a group, tend to be cliquish. So in this community there were three sets of social, there were three different social groups at that time. There were the cowboys, the rodeo cowboys, the ranchers, that type of person. Most of the ones that I knew there, I either knew because I had their kids in school or I knew them because I met them in the bar. And I spent a lot of time in the bar because we considered that the same way people think of country clubs. That's where you go to meet people, especially if you're single. So there were the cowboys and the rancher types. And I got to be very, very, very friendly with them. 'Course, I worked in the summertime for an outfitter and I knew a lot of those guys

personally. And that helped. That helped. Most teachers don't do that. Then there was a second set of social, there was a second group that was pretty much separate from that group, and that was the old-time town people. Okay, the Mackeys, the Sievers, the Falers, the people that owned businesses or were lawyers or doctors or whatever. I was friends with them because I met them the same way. I had their kids in school, I meet them in the bar, I could sit down and talk to any of

them. I wasn't limited, you know, to any one group. I could talk to old Gene Fisker about why is a lined back cow not going to bring as much money in the market as I could sit with some doctor and talk about the latest scientific development. Okay, then, the third group of people were the teachers. And there were a lot of them. And they were quite, you know, they tended to be their own little social group. So I knew more of the community before I ever got into this Wagonwheel deal. I was, I, I really, I had adopted this community as my home. I knew tons of people. And so I was fighting as much for my adopted home as I was for my kids and my husband's land and my, and our business and everything else, as anything else. I, I, you know, when I look back, that's funny you asked me that, when I look back now, I was here ten years. Now I've been here thirty years now. I felt as much at home and as much a part of the community that eleven years after I got here than I do now.

Rawlins: So that was, that was sort of a conscious choice that you made or [?].

Steele: Oh, yeah. I picked this town out of the whole, I've been in practically every state but those on the west coast. I had spent a lot of time traveling. I was thirty years old. I changed my profession from being a research chemist for a pharmaceutical company to being a science teacher so I could move here to Pinedale. I mean, I picked this town. I didn't just wash up here on the shores of, you know. I spent a lot of time trying to get back here and have a place in the community, and have a profession that I could have a good life here. And I did that.

Rawlins: Well, I can't, I'm about --

Steele: Maybe I gave them back a little.

Rawlins: Uh-huh.

Steele: By keeping them from being irradiated. Or being one-eleventh, or no, I shouldn't say that. One-two-hundredth or one-three-hundredth of the group that kept the rest of them from being irradiated.

Rawlins: Well, it sounds like there were, there were a, probably a lot of people who were members, but it sounds like there was a, somewhere between ten and twenty people that really did most of the real active work.

Steele: That's right. I would say probably fifteen. Fifteen movers and shakers that, as a, that worked as a group. There was no real leader, but those fifteen, I've never seen a, I've never seen a community group work as well together as those people did.

Rawlins: Yeah, it sounds like it. Well, I can't, I can't think of any other things that I have.

Steele: Well, if you think of any others, come back and I'll build another pot of coffee and sometime, some other time. You might, you might interview the rest of those people. A.B. Cooper, I'm not sure lives here any more. I don't think he does. H.L. Hammonds is dead. You want to be sure you get all the eleven. But after you get finished interviewing all of those, you might want to come back and, you know, ask something. I, I'm your neighbor, I live pretty close, you know.

Rawlins: Mm-hmm. Yeah, I've got to, I've got to, what I've got to do is I've got to [?]

Steele: I'm rather proud of what I did in that. You know, I feel like that was a service to the community that somebody had better do it. You know, I, I don't think people should sit still and let their government do the dirty on them.

Rawlins: Mm-hmm. Well, there's a, there's a point at, point at which sometimes you feel like it's no longer your government.

Steele: That's right.

Rawlins: That's the, that's the point at which, I guess, you get your back up and start doing something.

Steele: That's right. And you know, I'm 58 years old, and I look back over the, over my life. This is not the country that I grew up in. This is a whole different sort of, did you turn that off?

Rawlins: No. Not yet.

Steele: Oh. Well, it isn't the country I grew up in. It's changed dramatically. I think the thing that made it change, I think the, I think the one thing that made the change occur was not all those wars. It was not either prosperity or recession or depression or any those kinds of things. I think it was the fact that we're the only nation in history that ever in one generation totally trashed its educational system. We cut our kids off from their heritage in a very short time. And through policies in our schools, of the way we teach and what we teach and how we teach it, that we, we just shut them off from their, from their heritage. We severed their ties to the past. Who was it that said if you —

Rawlins: Those who forget their past are condemned to repeat it.

Steele: Repeat it. That's right.

Rawlins: I can't remember who said it.

Steele: I don't either now.

Rawlins: Okay.

Steele: But it's not the country I grew up in.