

Kitty Gurnsey Papers, 1970-1997

Overview of the Collection

Creator	Gurnsey, Kitty, 1927-
Title	Kitty Gurnsey Papers
Dates	1970-1997 (inclusive) 1970 1997
Quantity	4.0 linear feet, (7 boxes)
Collection Number	MSS 161
Summary	Correspondence, memoranda, speeches, clippings, campaign records, photos, and other papers, from Mrs. Gurnsey's career as an Idaho state legislator (1975-1996) and her chairmanship of the Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee (JFAC), the legislature's budget committee. Includes material relating to the role of women in government, 1970s-1990s.
Repository	Boise State University Library, Special Collections and Archives Special Collections and Archives 1910 University Drive Boise ID 83725 Telephone: 208-426-3958 archives@boisestate.edu
Access Restrictions	Collection is available for research.
Languages	English
Sponsor	Funding for encoding this finding aid was provided, in part, by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities
Digital Objects	60 total - see all

Biographical Note

Kathleen W. Gurnsey represented the North and East ends of Boise in the Idaho legislature for twenty-two years. First elected to the state House of Representatives in 1974, she was reelected ten more times before retiring in 1996. Mrs. Gurnsey made her mark in the legislature as co-chair of the Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee, the House-Senate panel that serves as the state budget-writing committee. Appointed to JFAC in 1976, she became co-chair in 1980 and served in that capacity for sixteen years. "In her role as budget co-chairwoman, she brought a flair for numbers and an institutional memory that outlasted three governors and five speakers," wrote the Idaho Statesman in 1996. The newspaper called her "the most powerful woman in state government." House Speaker Mike Simpson commented, "She runs the state budget like it's her own checkbook." Her papers do, indeed, reflect the close scrutiny she applied to the details of state spending and to state government operations.

Kathleen W. Gurnsey was born on June 23, 1927, in Donnelly, Idaho, the third of six children born to Robert G. Wallace and Thelma Halferty Wallace. Known as "Kitty" since childhood, she grew up on a ranch in Donnelly and graduated from McCall-Donnelly High School, where she was valedictorian of her class. She also attended Kinman Business University in Spokane, Washington. In 1949, while

working as a secretary for the U.S. Forest Service in McCall, she met Vern L. Gurnsey, a forester with the Boise Payette Lumber Company. They were married in 1950. The Gurnseys relocated to Boise, where Vern Gurnsey eventually became a vice president of Boise Cascade Corporation. They had three children, and Kitty Gurnsey was active on behalf of a number of civic and charitable causes, including the PTA, Red Cross, YMCA, Fundsy, and St. Luke's Hospital Auxiliary. In 1970 she was one of the Idaho Statesman's Outstanding Citizens. She was also an elder of the Presbyterian Church and an avid golfer and bridge player. While raising her family, Mrs. Gurnsey took college classes, graduating (after a twenty-year effort) from Boise State University with a degree in business administration in 1976.

Kitty Gurnsey made her first run for the state House of Representatives in 1974, defeating an incumbent legislator for the Republican nomination from her district. The primary election campaign was decided more by the candidates' get-out-the-vote efforts than by issues or ideology, though Mrs. Gurnsey did make an argument on behalf of women candidates. "Practically all legislation is connected to the family...and I believe more women should seek public office and participate in the governmental process," she said in the Statesman. When she was elected in November, she became just one of nine female legislators in Idaho. She followed in the footsteps of her grandfathers, Robert Halferty and Frank Wallace, both of whom served in the legislature before her.

During her twenty-two years in the state house, Kitty Gurnsey established a reputation as an independent legislator. Most often labeled a moderate by political commentators, she openly identified with JFAC's "Republicrat" coalition, moderate Republicans and Democrats who resisted severe budget cuts in the early 1980s. She opposed Idaho's rescission of the Equal Rights Amendment, sponsored the legislation that established a state-supported kindergarten program in 1976, opposed the One-percent initiative in 1978, championed public funding of the state women's commission, and opposed the antiabortion bill (HB 625) of 1990. She faced primary challenges from an outspoken conservative in 1982 and a right-to-life activist in 1990, and was attacked as a "Democrat in Republican clothing" by a conservative Republican state senator in 1994. Yet she also faced vigorous Democratic opposition in her reelection efforts, particularly toward the close of her legislative career. She lost her traditional support from the Idaho Education Association in the late 1980s because of her votes for leaner education appropriations than the association favored. The IEA backed strong Democratic challengers in the 1988 and 1990 elections, and in the 1990 race Mrs. Gurnsey held on to her seat by only 356 votes. The political makeup of her district was indeed becoming a problem for her, for by the 1980s it had become the most Democratic district in Boise. The district's Senate seat went Democratic in 1976, and the other House seat went to the Democrats in 1982. So while under fire from some Republicans for not being conservative enough, she was criticized by Democrats in the general elections for being too tight with the budget, particularly with education spending. She explained her dilemma in a 1983 interview in the *Idaho Statesman*. While she characterized herself as a strong supporter of public education, she maintained that the people "have to realize I am chairman of the Appropriations Committee and I am dedicated to balancing the budget." In 1992 she told the newspaper that her votes in JFAC had indeed become more conservative, largely because of her long legislative experience and an increasing willingness to challenge state agency funding requests. During her last campaign in 1994, the *Statesman*, in an editorial endorsing her reelection, described her as a "fiscal conservative but a strong supporter of education." She won reelection that last time with fifty-one percent of the vote. In 1996, without Mrs. Gurnsey on the ballot, the seat finally fell to a Democrat.

Kitty Gurnsey was an active member of the National Conference of State Legislatures, the National Order of Women Legislators, and the Pacific Northwest Legislative Leadership Forum. In 1982 she was appointed by the U.S. Secretary of Defense to the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) and served a three-year term. Service on that committee took her to military posts and conferences across the country. In 1995, Kitty Gurnsey received the Legislator of the Year award from the National Republican Legislators Association, one of only twelve legislators in

the nation so honored that year. She received the Distinguished Community Service award from the Boise Area Chamber of Commerce in 1996, an honorary membership from the Idaho Public Employees Association in 1995, the Distinguished Alumni award from Boise State University in 1991, and BSU's Silver Medallion in 1996. She has served as a trustee of the BSU Foundation since 1978.

Sources: *Idaho Political Almanac*, by Randy Stapilus (various editions)

Biographical material within the collection, including *Idaho Statesman* clippings dated: May 17, 1970 (Box 1, folder 1), June 1, 1974 (Box 1, folder 32), May 17, 1976 (Box 1, folder 32), February 22, 1983 (Box 1, folder 33), May 21, 1992 (Box 1, folder 34), March 8, 1996 (Box I, folder 1)

Content Description

The Kathleen W. Gurnsey collection contains letters, memoranda, speeches, clippings, campaign records, photos, and other papers from Mrs. Gurnsey's career in the legislature (1974-1996) and from her campaigns for office. The bulk of the collection dates after 1989, except for the campaign files, which document the 1974 and 1994 campaigns best. The collection does not contain all the paperwork that crossed her desk. There is little constituent correspondence. Briefing materials presented by the state agencies to the Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee during the annual budget hearings are not present; nor are the fiscal analyses and briefing papers prepared for JFAC by the Legislative Services Office. Instead, the collection focuses on Mrs. Gurnsey's own work as JFAC co-chair, particularly her active oversight role over the budget and state government operations.

Much of the Legislative correspondence (Box 1) consists of personal letters to and from state agency administrators about their budget requests. Many of the letters are from the administrators responding to particular questions Mrs. Gurnsey raised during the hearings. There is one file of letters from Joe Parkinson of Micron Technologies, Inc., regarding a dispute over patents by the University of Idaho (Box 1, folder 15).

The Issue files (Box 2) contain documents relating to issues and projects in which Mrs. Gurnsey was particularly interested, chiefly in the 1990s. Undergraduate engineering education in Boise, the proposal to build a governor's residence, management of state veterans' homes, and the marketing of liquor in Idaho are particularly well documented. The collection contains a study she wrote on liquor marketing in 1975.

A great many of the Speeches (Box 1) relate to fiscal issues and the Idaho budget. Also included are notes for the floor speech Mrs. Gurnsey delivered on behalf of the kindergarten bill in 1976 (Box 1, folder 24). The newspaper clippings from her Scrapbooks (Box 1) document in some detail Mrs. Gurnsey's career as covered by the press. She has kept the original scrapbooks; these clippings are photocopies. Included in these Scrapbook files are also records of her 1974 campaign (Box 1, folder 36). Mrs. Gurnsey's opinions on the role of women in government are found throughout the Speeches and Scrapbook clipping files.

Use of the Collection

Preferred Citation

[item description], Kitty Gurnsey Papers, Box [number] Folder [number], Boise State University Special Collections and Archives.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Gift of Mrs. Gurnsey, 1997.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Container(s)		Description	Dates
Box	Folder		
1	1	Biographical material	
1	2	Biographical questionnaire	1989
1	3	Awards	
1	4	Correspondence (General)	1985-1996
1	5	Correspondence: Annual constituent letter	1976-1980
1	6	Legislative Correspondence	1977-1985
1	7	Legislative Correspondence	1986-1989
1	8	Legislative Correspondence	1990
1	9	Legislative Correspondence	1991
1	10	Legislative Correspondence	1992
1	11	Legislative Correspondence	1993
1	12	Legislative Correspondence	1994
1	13	Legislative Correspondence	1995
1	14	Legislative Correspondence	1996
1	15	Legislative Correspondence: Joe Parkinson	1993

Container(s)	Description	Dates
1 16	Speeches	1975-1976
1 17	Speeches	1977-1978
1 18	Speeches	1979-1980
1 19	Speeches	1981-1982
1 20	Speeches	1983
1 21	Speeches	1984
1 22	Speeches	1993
1 23	Speeches: Miscellaneous (Undated)	
1 24	Speeches: Kindergarten bill	1976
1 25	Speeches: Milton Small "roast"	
1 26	Speeches: School finance	1983
1 27	Speeches: Hazardous wastes	1985?
1 28	Speeches: Associated Taxpayers of Idaho	1990
1 29	Speeches: Boise Cascade	1976?
1 30	Speeches: Leadership Boise	1994
1 31	Speeches: Privatization/U.S. Forest Service Retirees	1996
4 7	Speeches: 65th Anniversary of the Long Valley Picnic	
4 8	Speeches: What are Idaho's Legisladies Like?	
1 32	Scrapbook: Clippings (Photocopies)	1974-1980
1 33	Scrapbook: Clippings (Photocopies)	1980-1988
1 34	Scrapbook: Clippings (Photocopies)	1989-1993

Container(s)		Description	Dates
1	35	Scrapbook: Clippings (Photocopies)	1994-1996
1	36	Scrapbook: 1974 campaign papers (Photocopies)	1974
1	37	Scrapbook: Other material (Photocopies)	
2	1	1% Initiative	1995-1996
2	2	Audit coordination	1988
2	3	Boise State University: Building projects	1981-1993
2	4	Engineering education: Correspondence	1995
2	5	Engineering education: General material	1995
2	6	Engineering education: Boise State University	1995
2	7	Engineering education: University of Idaho/Boise	1995
2	8	Financial exigency	1982
2	9	Gooding State School	1984-1987
2	10	Governors residence: Committee minutes and correspondence	1993-1995
2	11	Governors residence: Division of Public Works	1993-1994
2	12	Governors residence: Permanent Building Fund Advisory Council	1993
2	13	Governors residence: Proposal, 1972	1972-1988
2	14	Governors residence: Proposed sites: State lands	1993
2	15	Governors residence: Proposed sites: Boise	1993
2	16	Governors residence: Proposed sites: Eagle	1993
2	17	Governors residence: Schematic design	1994

Container(s)	Description	Dates
2 18	Idaho fiscal history, General Fund	1975-1994
2 19	INEL settlement agreement, Nuclear waste	1995
2 20	Judiciary: Fiscal oversight	1986-1995
2 21	Mammography/Insurance coverage	1991-1992
2 22	Marketing Liquor in Idaho: Gurnsey study	1975
2 23	Marketing liquor: Background information	1975
2 24	Payette Lakes land exchanges	1976-1996
2 25	Permanent Building Fund	1985
2 26	Square dance	1989
2 27	State budget, Fiscal year 1994	
2 28	State budget, Fiscal year 1995	
2 29	State budget, Fiscal year 1996	
2 30	State budget, Fiscal year 1997	
2 31	State employee count	1994
2 32	State General Account: Unexpended balances	1989
2 33	State government travel costs	1989-1992
2 34	Veterans homes	1991-1992
2 35	Veterans homes: Management proposals	1991-1992
2 36	Veterans homes: Management proposal, National Heritage	1991-1992
2 37	Veterans homes: Management proposal, Roe	1991
3 1	DACOWITS	1982-1985

Container(s)		Description	Dates
3	2	DACOWITS	
3	3	Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee	
3	4	Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee: Rules	
3	5	Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee: Rules	1980
3	6	National Conference of State Legislatures	1978-1996
3	7	National Order of Women Legislators	
3	8	Pacific Northwest Legislative Leadership Forum	1990
3	9	Campaign literature	1974-1988
3	10	Campaign literature	1990-1994
3	11	Campaign records	1976-1992
3	12	Campaign records	1994
3	13	Political: Miscellaneous	
3	14	Political: 1986 Legislature satire (Card party script)	1986
3	15	Political: White House luncheon memorabilia	1987
4	1	Photos	
4	2	Memorabilia	
4	3	Memorial Service	2015
4	4-5	Mark Larson Cartoons	
4	6	Certificate of Nomination	1988
4	9	Petition for Candidacy	1980
4	10	Report on the National Order of Women Legislator's Convention	1979

Container(s)	Description	Dates
4 11	Report on the National Conference of State Legislators	1979
4 12	Writings	

Find Related Collections

Subject Terms :

[Idaho. Legislature](#)

[Idaho. Legislature. Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee](#)

[Idaho--Politics and government--20th century](#)

[Women legislators--Idaho](#)