



Photo of Norman Rice by José Mandojana, courtesy of UW Columns

Seattle Metro Chamber – Under Construction with former Seattle Mayor Norman Rice

Marilyn Strickland: Welcome to Under Construction. I'm your host Marilyn Strickland, CEO of the Seattle Metro Chamber. In each episode, we take you behind the scenes with the people shaping our evolving region. Today, we meet former Seattle Mayor and Councilmember Norman Rice. Mayor Rice, thank you so much for being here with us today.

Norman Rice: Glad to be here.

Marilyn Strickland: So Mayor Rice, you were Seattle's first and only African-American mayor elected, in 1989. You were also the first African-American mayor in the nation to govern a city with an African-American population of less than 10 percent at the time. Can you talk about what it was like to run and how it felt to make history?

Norman Rice: Oh, I don't think about it that way. Because I tried to run for mayor and lost. I ran for Congress and lost. And so I was pretty much sure that I wasn't going to be elected to anything.

Norman Rice: And then in 1989. Roughly right around then, the issue to repeal mandatory busing in the city of Seattle came on as a ballot. To repeal busing.

Marilyn Strickland: Interesting. So it was really integration that brought you to the, brought you to the table and got you to run again.

Norman Rice: And everybody was kind of skirting the issue because the polls showed that the vote to repeal busing would probably pass.

Marilyn Strickland: Interesting.

Norman Rice: And I felt that it didn't make any difference whether it passed or not. It was how you stood on the position of it.

Norman Rice: And so I jumped into the race. Maybe eight hours before the filing deadline and decided to run for mayor and pulled it together. I always say it wasn't as dramatic as you think because, because I had run for Congress. I had some market penetration. Even if I didn't win.

Marilyn Strickland: You had some name I.D.

Norman Rice: Exactly. Exactly.

Marilyn Strickland: So you talked about busing as an issue. But what was your platform, aside from busing when you ran for mayor?

Norman Rice: I was really fortunate and I think people forget about that. I had served for 11 years on the city council.

Marilyn Strickland: Right.

Norman Rice: So I was finance and budget chair. I knew about the city. And I knew about municipal government. So it wasn't a matter that I had to be prepped to understand that. And I was president of Mount Baker Community Club. So I was networked in my community. Worked for the Urban League. So I had a pretty broad network of community service, so to speak.

Marilyn Strickland: Right.

Norman Rice: So I think people were waiting for a voice that wasn't being heard.

Norman Rice: I think people felt very strongly though that a lot of people didn't like busing.

Marilyn Strickland: They didn't.

Norman Rice: African-Americans and whites. But at the same time, I began to hear this kind of shrill and divisiveness that was going on. Which I didn't think would be good for the city.

Marilyn Strickland: Right.

Norman Rice: Or good for anybody. And I decided to jump in the race to challenge that assumption. And people were waiting for it. So, by the time I jumped in the race, I became somewhat of a frontrunner. Got most of the endorsements and kind of moved from there.

Marilyn Strickland: That's great. Well let's go back a bit, because I want to hear more about your early life. Because you have a really interesting personal story. So I read that your father was a railroad porter and owned and operated a restaurant. Your mother was a

caterer and a bank clerk. So tell us about your parents. Tell us how they influenced you. Because we know that you were born in 1943 during World War II. So talk about your childhood.

Norman Rice: Of course I don't remember World War II. No, I had a pretty good childhood growing up. You're absolutely right. My father was a rail carrier. My mother used to work and also do domestic work in homes. And then they got together and pooled their resources and opened up a restaurant and tavern called Rice's Taproom, which was one of the popular restaurants in the area called Five Points in Denver, that catered to African-Americans.

Marilyn Strickland: Interesting.

Norman Rice: And that's where we worked. And then they divorced and that became a new experience. The three things that were really important: church, Sunday School, learning to read. And I loved, I was active reader. My mother was an active reader. And so the idea of reading and education were paramount in our family's mind.

Marilyn Strickland: Interesting.

Norman Rice: And as I grew up, my grandmother decided to become a minister at a time when African-American women weren't welcome at the pulpit, as you could know. So, I used to have to drive her to little churches all over southwest Colorado. And sometimes we'd go to places where they would lock the door and not let her in because they didn't want a woman minister.

Norman Rice: And then I thought I was going to be a minister. I wanted to be a minister. But I wrote a poem once and I said, 'Somewhere along the line, I lost the call.'

Marilyn Strickland: But you found another one.

Norman Rice: Yeah, I went to Boulder and played. Drank beer, for a while, and then I flunked out of the University of Colorado.

Marilyn Strickland: Well let's talk about that. When I opened this interview I talked about, you ran for mayor and you won, and you reminded me, it's like, well I didn't win every election. And then you just referred to your experience at the University of Colorado.

Marilyn Strickland: And you know, the lesson is, success isn't always immediate and perseverance after failure can actually change your path.

Norman Rice: That's true.

Marilyn Strickland: So talk about what you did at the University of Colorado. What happened and what did you learn?

Norman Rice: I went to the University of Colorado. And I learned how to party. And to drink a lot of '3.2 Beer.' And I did that with style. Mind you. With style. I just didn't have the right attitude.

Marilyn Strickland: Yeah.

Norman Rice: So I dropped out and I got jobs. I worked in a gas and electric company. Worked in the mailroom. Became a meter reader. I always like to tell people the funniest thing about being a meter reader back then, is meter readers didn't have uniforms. And they carried a flashlight in their back pocket. And they sent new meter readers to all over the city to read in places you've never been before.

Norman Rice: I could see some people seeing an African-American guy walking down their alley.

Marilyn Strickland: With a flashlight.

Norman Rice: With a flashlight. And I had a couple people call the police on me in that whole process. But it was fun.

Marilyn Strickland: So, you decided to go back to school. And you know, in our research, you talked about April of 1968 when Dr. King was shot and killed. And you said that was really a turning point in your life. So talk about how that affected you.

Norman Rice: Well, it was clearly a defining moment. I started finding, kind of my sea legs in acting. And we were performing in 'Raisin in the Sun,' and it was the night that King died. A lot of people called that night to ask us if we should shut the theatre down and have it dark in deference to King. And when we got there, all of us were feeling pretty badly. We came to the theatre because a cast becomes like a family, so to speak.

Marilyn Strickland: Yep.

Norman Rice: When we came into that room, everybody was there. And we elected to go on with the play, because we felt 'Raisin in the Sun' resonated the themes and the idea about a family trying to move up, you know, in a lifetime. And so we performed.

Marilyn Strickland: So for, for members of our audience who may not know what 'Raisin in the Sun' is, could you talk about the story and how it resonates?

Norman Rice: It's a wonderful story, with all the kinds of characters you want to see. A grandmother, the matriarch of the family. A husband and wife. Husband worked as a maid for other people. Husband did menial work himself. Had a daughter, a sister who was going to college and the rest were going to school. It was kind of a Chicago ghetto family

that was growing up a track but could see dreams. And so Langston Hughes, the line comes from Langston Hughes. 'What happens to a dream deferred?'

Marilyn Strickland: Right.

Norman Rice and Marilyn Strickland: Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?

Norman Rice: So, it had all the themes that you wanted about what character is, and what a family is, and what builds it up. I would have liked to play the lead, but I was a little too skinny and young so I got a part playing African suitor of the daughter. We were there in the studio playhouse. The director came in. Said, we have a lot of people calling up saying you should put the theatre dark in deference to King. We sat and decided to go on. And we got through it fairly well. Until we came to a place where the grandmother says, 'It seems that God didn't see fit to give the black man nothing but dreams. Nothing but dreams.' And we broke up.

Marilyn Strickland: I know.

Norman Rice: And probably at that point I decided, I didn't have time to act or do anything. I needed to go back to school.

Norman Rice: So literally in about four months, I kind of packed up my bags and I had a cousin who lived in Tacoma. And she said, you know, if you feel like coming back here, they've got a great community college system. Why don't you come up here, back to school?

Marilyn Strickland: So you came from Boulder to Tacoma. Started going into the two-year system. Aside from having family up here, what was it like up here back in 1968? And tell us what's so special about Washington state. Why did you decide to stay?

Norman Rice: First, its natural beauty. There's no place more beautiful all year round than the Pacific Northwest. In Colorado, you had the mountains with snow. I used to tell my friends in Denver, 'You don't have to shovel rain.'

Norman Rice: But the other thing that was really important at the time was community college system. Which Washington state and especially in Puget Sound had some very good community colleges. So I was able to come in, go to community college, work nights at J.C. Penney's in Southcenter and go to school fulltime in the day. So it was a perfect kind of thing, and since I was so driven, I didn't realize how much I was depriving myself of partying, but I was ready to work.

Marilyn Strickland: That's great. So speaking of natural beauty. Tell us about your wife, Constance. She is the chair of the board of regents at the University of Washington. Very, very accomplished in her own right. The first African-American woman to receive a doctorate in higher education administration at the University of Washington School of

Education. And you got married in 1975 at the iconic Mt. Zion Baptist Church. So talk about how you met. What was it like when you first met her? And tell us about your courtship and your 44-year marriage. It's amazing.

Norman Rice: As I was going to school, she lectured a class that I had. Because she was already working on her master's and I was still in the undergraduate school. And I happened to be struck by that woman. And so I came up to her and asked her for a date, and she looked at me said, 'I don't date freshmen.' And I said, 'Okay, well I'm older than you are.' And I showed her my I.D. That didn't go over well.

Marilyn Strickland: It didn't work.

Norman Rice: Because she said, 'Well, why are you still in college?' So, she motivated me to work hard. So I took her out.

Norman Rice: Then I, I wooed her, and she had an operation and. And I used to visit her all the time and I used to write poetry. So I entrapped her.

Marilyn Strickland: That's very romantic. And again 44 years. And you have a son, Mian, who was recently named the new contract diversity director at the Port of Seattle. And this is a really big deal because you know, it's an effort on the part of the port to diversify their procurement spending and really supporting small women- and minority-owned businesses. So you know, you were in the public sector for a while, and now it's 2019. Tell me how you think the public sector has performed over time when it comes to minority- and women-owned businesses and procurement.

Norman Rice: I think the public sector has been perfunctorily good. But where is your passion and commitment? It's hard to gauge.

Marilyn Strickland: Yeah.

Norman Rice: Everybody now knows that diversity and all those things are a critical part of their DNA for their businesses. But how many believe it? How many teach it? How many work with it, is really another story and it's still some work to go.

Norman Rice: I think the face of the city and the region has changed so drastically.

Marilyn Strickland: Sure.

Norman Rice: But at the same time, there's still people who need to be pulled up.

Marilyn Strickland: I agree. When I started, when I entered the workforce there, there was some conversation about diversity but now we talk a lot about inclusion. And that is you know in my opinion, the action to hold people in. And to really engage folks to be inclusive. Whether that's board leadership or you know, how we do procurement.

Norman Rice: Because my theory is, if I don't see my face in the people who are working for and serving me, talking to me, then I'm not there.

Marilyn Strickland: Right.

Norman Rice: And as much as people might talk about it, seeing it, watching it, watching people who are promoted moving through, tells me more than anything you could say.

Marilyn Strickland: Absolutely. And who's in positions of leadership.

Norman Rice: Exactly.

Marilyn Strickland: That's really important. So you know, we talked a bit about you know, the issue of busing that inspired you to run for mayor. And talk about what it was like to serve as an elected official when you served. And tell us about some observations that you're seeing happen today. And you know, in some cases, when you think about why people run for office, sometimes the issues don't change that much. But you've seen Seattle change since you led the city. So what were some of the challenges you faced then and what would you see happening today?

Norman Rice: Well, I think when I came into office, we were still looking in the economy with that still reeling from the last person leaving Seattle. Turn out the lights. Boeing. With the loss of the SST and all. And so getting a diverse economy and getting something moving again was really important.

Norman Rice: It's hard for me sometimes to dissect it. But between civil rights. Between Dr. King's death. Between an awakening for want of a better word. People began to say, wait a minute. We need to do something. And we need to make sure we're pulling everyone up and everyone along. I went on to work for the Urban League here in Seattle. I worked for the Puget Sound Regional Council in Seattle to begin to talk about regionalism.

Norman Rice: People used to look at me and say, what's this guy talking about regionalism? But you've got to look at the whole and you've got to see then how the parts fit. And you've got to be able to speak to everybody so they can see where they're part of the whole. But they also can see the pathway to success.

Marilyn Strickland: I'll tell you why that's really important. You know, we talk about the fact that we are called the Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce because we understand you know it's about metropolitan regions. That's really what drives the economy in the United States. And we have different municipal boundaries, but at the same time, commerce doesn't really know about boundaries. And so how do you think about sharing prosperity, geographic equity and how we make sure that people can participate.

Marilyn Strickland: Now I have my own Norm Rice story. We all do. And you know I want to share this with the listeners. It was my first job out of college. I worked in an insurance company in downtown Seattle. And one of my co-workers had won at an auction, lunch with Norm Rice. And the day of, she calls in sick and says I can't go. It's like, Marilyn, maybe you should go. So I'm like, sure. So I met you for lunch in Pioneer Square. And I remember I had a giant salad. I still remember what we ate. We sat outside and I didn't know you. So you were very graciously asking me, well who are you, where do you go to school. And I still remember a piece of advice you gave me. And you said to me, go to graduate school. And I said, to study what. And you said, it doesn't matter. Just get a graduate degree in something. And what I didn't know then that I know now is, you know you were pointing out to me that as a woman. As a young woman of color, I probably needed to be more credentialed to be taken seriously in my career and to have more opportunities. And so on behalf of my parents and myself. Norm Rice, thank you so much for inspiring me to go to graduate school. Because I ended up moving to Atlanta and thinking about what you told me, I got a master's degree from Clark Atlanta University in business.

Norman Rice: You need to thank Constance.

Marilyn Strickland: Yes.

Norman Rice: I married a person has a master's degree in Public Administration and a PHD in higher education. I think I, I understood.

Marilyn Strickland: Yeah, you got it. I still remember that you know. You really didn't know me, but you just gave me a piece of advice. I thought that was interesting. So, let's talk about something that I discovered when I got to the Chamber. There was an issue of Fortune Magazine from 1992.

Marilyn Strickland: And on the cover was Mayor Norm Rice, Bill Gates. And leaders from Boeing and Nintendo. And the cover of the magazine named Seattle as the number one city for business. So talk about how in a really short period of time you got that reputation. And what's interesting is that the top 10 cities listed on that cover then: Seattle, Houston, San Francisco, Atlanta, New York, Raleigh/Durham, Denver, Chicago, Boston and Orlando. And that list really hasn't changed that much. So talk to us about what, why do you think those cities are listed and why do you think Seattle consistently ranks in the top when it comes to those lists?

Norman Rice: Number one, those cities have unparalleled beauty. Natural beauty. In Denver, the mountains. Seattle, the water.

Marilyn Strickland: Yeah.

Norman Rice: Places where people feel at one with nature. In some ways. They all have powerful universities and schools. And so most people who come to school or stay, they stay here. They don't go away.

Marilyn Strickland: Right.

Norman Rice: So those things work really well in your favor.

Norman Rice: The real thing about economic development and growth is they have to be compatible. And they have to fit. So just having a whole bunch of industry in your town without really thinking about where people live, how they move, how they can get around is really important. And it's that whole that I like about Seattle. And the way people think about it in a holistic way.

Marilyn Strickland: Interesting.

Marilyn Strickland: When you think about where we are now, because you touched on this a bit in 1992 or 1989 when you won your election, Seattle had not invested in mass transit the way they should have. And so talk about what you've seen kind of as a consequence of not doing that? Because some of the challenges we see today are a result of not making those investments back then.

Norman Rice: No, you've said it all. We defeated the mass transit propositions a lot. If we had passed some of those early on, we would have been probably ahead of the game with a light rail system.

Norman Rice: It's a no-brainer to me. But the hourglass shape for Puget Sound from Seattle to Tacoma. There aren't that many roads.

Marilyn Strickland: Right.

Norman Rice: So how are you going to move people and goods and services faster and quicker? Light rail is going to have to be an integral part of that decision. A strong port system.

Norman Rice: All the kinds of things that help with goods and services and moving forward. And then last but not least, because I was finance and budget chair for so long. How do you pay for all those things?

Marilyn Strickland: The question that we always ask.

Norman Rice: I think citizens will pay for a lot. And they understand the investments that you're making. But you can't just ask them to pay without showing them what the return on that investment is going to be.

Marilyn Strickland: And especially in the public sector where people you know, they want transparency. They want to know how the money is being spent. And no, Seattle voters are

very generous when it comes to approving tax measures. But they also, they want confidence that the money is doing what was promised.

Norman Rice: I think the best experience I had. Although some of my colleagues, when I was on the council used to tease me, was being finance and budget chair.

Norman Rice: You know, there's an old saying. 'Don't let your mouth write a check that your, I say, assets can't cash.'

Marilyn Strickland: That your assets can't cash. I like that. That's a, that's a very elegant way of putting it.

Norman Rice: So you've got to show that for every investment you're going to make, there's a way to pay for. And that there's a return on that investment. And a powerful city, the things that you have, are a return on that investment. You need to make sure that you're talking about that all the time.

Marilyn Strickland: You know, I worked in downtown Seattle back in the 80s. I remember hearing about department stores closing and there was a big need to try to do some revitalization. So talk about your role in trying to reverse the economic decline of Seattle's downtown core.

Norman Rice: It was like getting to be Death Valley. And we really started thinking about what we need to do. And I give Nordstrom some credit stepping up. To build the shop. And then Pacific Place.

Marilyn Strickland: Right.

Norman Rice: Which laid the groundwork for the restoration of downtown. And we had to make a hard decision about Westlake Park.

Marilyn Strickland: It was controversial at the time.

Norman Rice: Because at the time we knew that if we didn't divide the park in a way where traffic and people could move, it could be isolated. As beautiful as the vision of Westlake Park could be, it could divide the city. And if you're thinking about the things that are really important, it's mobility.

Norman Rice: So we took we took some hits for it. For you know, opening up Westlake. But we knew that in the long term, it was going to build the economic vitality of downtown.

Marilyn Strickland: So, I want to switch over to a topic that comes up in every conversation and that's about housing affordability. We never anticipated this growth at this rate. And so you know, lack of lack of transportation infrastructure, not building

enough housing. When you think about Seattle today and the housing situation, what are some things you wish we could all do together? And that is not just saying it's one person's responsibility. But you know, what could the public and private sector do better together to solve some of our biggest challenges around housing?

Norman Rice: That's a more difficult question.

Marilyn Strickland: I know.

Norman Rice: Because what are the things that are gonna make people feel like they're in a community and a neighborhood? Still investments in parks. And investments in the amenities around what you might have in your home. But pocket parks and places where people can walk to where they want to take their kids to play. Giving them that sense of, of scale that makes it good for you to still want to stay in the city.

Norman Rice: The second thing is making sure that you have a strong transportation system allows people to connect and get to places where they can go quicker faster. One of the things I think has helped is the metro transit has really improved enough so that you have other alternatives. I think our world is changing so much now that you don't need a car.

Marilyn Strickland: No, you really you don't.

Marilyn Strickland: You know in the end I say that. I mean and that's a credit to a city where you have such a robust transit. I mean it's not as robust, robust as it is in some international cities and some domestic cities. But you know it's, it's, it's there. It's improving a lot. And you know one of the things that I have said Mayor is that you know Seattle for a long time was a large town and now we are a real city a big city and we have population density. And in many cases it's time for us to rethink what it means to be securely housed in a metropolitan region.

Norman Rice: I think when we lost the SST I think everybody had to rethink being the one industry down. And looking at the development of an economy that is multifaceted. And bringing in those kinds of things.

Marilyn Strickland: And I'm glad you raised that point because I think sometimes you know when people think about Seattle and depending on who you ask they just think exclusively about tech. And you know we have a diversified economy we have a strong maritime industry. We have life sciences we have technology we have manufacturing and so we have health care. So there are a lot of great sectors that we have and that is really in many ways what keeps a community more diverse. Now you know we want people to be able to afford to live near where they work and that's a conversation about you know where we site jobs but at the same time you know people are a thousand people a week moved to King County. That is a staggering statistic and you know it's a testament to the

quality of life here. But it also begs the question of but what about the people who've been here for a long time.

Norman Rice: I think that's always going to be kind of a tension. But I think it's, I think it's changing more drastically because the people a long time are the people who came in and is next in this last rush. So I think they see things differently. But the big thing is to always think about what are the amenities around the neighborhood and the places? It doesn't have to be that everybody has a yard in the backyard. That's why parks are important. Making sure that scale makes a difference. That density is not going to be a substitution for quality of life. And so if you understand that balance, you can start to do those kinds of things you want. I think one of the things that was really helpful for me and I think still in the cities a lot of neighborhood councils a lot of people are engaged in their community besides just the city council and the like. That makes a big difference.

Marilyn Strickland: No, it really does. So let's talk a bit more about increasing density of housing. And you know I think you just touched on it. We are allowing more multi-family housing more duplexes whatever you want to call them and to the people who oppose adding density to our neighborhoods, I mean what would you say to them?

Norman Rice: I'd speak softly. I think it's really hard.

Norman Rice: I don't think it's ever going to be something that's easy. I think what you have to do is really think about a strategy about where are our new parks. Where are our places where if you can't have the yard in the backyard there's a place where you feel very comfortable where your kids can play?

Marilyn Strickland: Right.

Norman Rice: Where they can feel the sense of what is a broader community and an environment that you have. I'm laughing to myself because I don't want a yard and I don't like mowing a yard or you know raking leaves. But at the same time you want to make sure you're close enough or that if your child walked out you know was able to be on your own. There was a park close to home for them to play right.

Marilyn Strickland: I mean you know and you know this coming from local governments. Like people, just the nuts and bolts of local government. You know you want our neighborhoods to be safe, clean, attractive. And you want people to feel comfortable where they live.

Norman Rice: And that's always going to be. But that's, that's the challenge. And it's the way in which you speak to people. I always say that you don't always solve anybody's problem. But if you can articulate with them the problem, they're willing to work with you. But if you try. If you ignore what they're saying and ignore what they're doing, then you really just have tension and you can't build something.

Marilyn Strickland: And you have people talking past each other. Around each other. Not listening.

Norman Rice: Some people say, Oh God. Here comes Norm Rice and another process but engage people in a dialogue. Engage them in the principles that you're working on. Have them help you make those principles. Then it isn't just that that's a little nice feel-good effort.

Norman Rice: You can articulate to them by their principles how what you're doing. When you can say OK. Remember we met last week you said you want X Y and Z. Here's how I'm going to do it. But always reference the relationship that you had with the parties that you had doing it. Rather than say let's have a community meeting. You talk for two hours and then you go away and you come up with a plan. Neighbors said we didn't say that. You spend the time to keep talking to people about you said X here's what I'm doing. Here's how it works. Here's what I can't do. And then you know I always say, the best feeling I ever had one day after one of those. A guy came up and said, you know something, I don't believe half of what you said but you listened to me.

Marilyn Strickland: And also to being honest and telling folks, this is what I can't do and here's why. I mean I think what I would say that in my experience, like what. What people get frustrated about is promises you don't keep, and leading them along and not giving them an answer. Even if it's the answer they don't want to hear, they respect you at least for being honest about where you're coming from.

Marilyn Strickland: So you had a long career in public service and then you went into banking. So talk about the transition from the public sector to the private sector. And what did you like about working in banking. How'd you end up there?

Norman Rice: The Federal Home Loan Bank was a lot different than what people think. It was a bank that lent money to you know, financial institutions that invested in communities and housing. So it was an extension of what I like to do.

Marilyn Strickland: So it was investing in communities and people.

Norman Rice: That was kind of our mission. And trying to build affordable housing. I think the biggest thing though with the Federal Home Loan Bank is that there was some people who wanted to run it like a bank.

Marilyn Strickland: Right.

Norman Rice: And there are others who said, wait a minute. You have a kind of license about being bigger than a bank. And, and walking that balance. So I found it very good. I found it a logical extension of what I had been doing as a mayor. And so I feel really comfortable about that.

Marilyn Strickland: Excellent. Well, I want to switch over to talk about the importance of sports to a city. And you actually worked with SuperSonics owner Barry Ackerley to renovate the Seattle Center Coliseum into KeyArena. And I was actually a partial season ticket holder during that. What I called the Shawn Kemp era. And so tell us why you made the decision to invest in that facility. And why it's important to really, what I call the heart and soul of a city.

Norman Rice: The vitality of a city is all the things. It's not just one. Theatre, sports, you know, playgrounds. You want to have a magnet that gets people to come to the city who want to live there. And so you don't walk away from a sports team. But you know you get the feeling of remember the big rush, we went for the pennant and you know what I mean. And refuse to lose. Yes. And the energy that you have from the game.

Marilyn Strickland: And how that brings people together.

Norman Rice: Exactly. So, I didn't see that as somehow, oh it's just for some rich, you know, owners.

Marilyn Strickland: Right.

Norman Rice: It's about the spirit of the city. And having a good team. I like the idea of have three major league teams in your city. I think that's important. I think it helps with the spirit. I do think that what owners have to do. And I always say that easily they have to engage in the community though. They can't just ask you to do to build everything and not give something back.

Marilyn Strickland: You know, and one thing I will say just, you know, observing that although the whole issue with how the Sonics ended up leaving Seattle. It's not as though the Sonics had a winning record. Or that fans were filling the stands every night. And typically, when teams leave cities, it's not because they're doing well or because ticket sales are off the chart. But at the same time, I think your conversation about longevity with owners, and sticking out even when times are bad.

Norman Rice: I think. I think and that's where you come full circle to arenas. New stadiums. Things that are more attractive. I think it's always hard.

Norman Rice: I think the Sonics is a classic example although I think the remodel is going to help a lot of things. But it's hard when you've got a city that's going to dig a hole and give you everything you want. And you've got a city like Seattle that can't dig as many holes and has some very wonderful structures and institutions that you just don't want to see it destroyed.

Marilyn Strickland: You know, and I will say, you know, to the credit of Seattle. This time you know, this time around they did get some good community benefits out of it. And so I think it was it was a good deal.

Marilyn Strickland: So let's talk about something you're working on right now. A book about civic engagement. And the title from what I understand is, 'The Soul of the Messenger.' So tell us what inspired you to write this book and what message do you hope to convey?

Norman Rice: I don't know that's going to be the final title. It really goes into what drove me into the successful race for mayor.

Norman Rice: And so what I really want to write about is how a divided community over the issue of busing and racial integration. How do you bring them back to a positive idea about where you want to go?

Norman Rice: And then, the real theme is, how do you listen to people? I always say some people would rather you hear their complaint than solve their problem. You've gotta create a forum where people can express themselves. And then you have to create a way in which you can come back to it. And tell them what you heard. And then there's the third thing, which some people forget is, here's what I'm doing and here's how it relates to what you told me.

Norman Rice: Now some people say oh God, that's Seattle process. But if you want powerful investment from a community in what you're doing, communicating that along the way and showing them how you have used what they've said in the way that you're moving forward is a partnership that's going to last forever.

Norman Rice: So, you can always get to people's anger.

Marilyn Strickland: Mm hmm.

Norman Rice: You can always get to people who can easily vote 'no.' But how do you get them to vote 'yes'?

Marilyn Strickland: Yeah. That's an interesting point you raise because people often become engaged precisely because they're unhappy about something. And so you know instead of just bringing people to the table so you can say you checked a box, you're talking about actual.

Norman Rice: You've got to have, once you're done you've got to ask them to help you. You can't just have a bunch of hearings and walk away. There's no plan that's so solid that it's just going to be laid in concrete and move along. People are gonna have ideas and you've got to create a communications link to come back and say OK, you said X. Here's what I'm doing. May not be what you want. But this is the way I will do it. At the end the day, I guarantee you most people would say, you know. But I don't agree totally, but you listened to me.

Norman Rice: You have to show what you've done and what you've heard. Not necessarily do what everybody said. Because when you talk about your dreams and your hopes in other people's language, they're going to believe you. But if you can kind of go away and have a hearing, come back and say Here it is. And everybody says, That's not what I said. Then you haven't really had engagement.

Marilyn Strickland: And I think that's important because you know what you're talking about is you know setting expectations that are transparent and honest. And you know listening is not necessarily synonymous with 'do exactly as I say.' But it's hearing someone out.

Marilyn Strickland: So I have two questions I want to ask you. One: When you were mayor because you know a lot of it was motivated by the whole conversation of busing, but you were one of the mayors who very early on understood that mayors have a very strong role in education. And even though school districts are separate entities - they're separately elected bodies - you understand that having a pulpit means you can actually affect outcomes. So talk about being a vanguard as a mayor who really wanted to get involved in public education. Not just the busing part but why was that important to you?

Norman Rice: Well the real issue with education is and I have to come back to busing, but not to busing as a whole, people had a fear that somehow if you bus, the quality of education would drop. And so you had to show that you're building a quality education system. And so then what you do if you look at it that way, you start to say what is it that you need so you can continue to have a quality education?

Norman Rice: You need partners. And one of the things I like about Seattle, the business community, others were partners in helping schools and people move. So they didn't put the whole responsibility on the school district.

Marilyn Strickland: Yep.

Norman Rice: Everyone has a responsibility to have a quality education system. So you definitely have a role. And I think that was the fun part of the family and education levy and putting it together.

Marilyn Strickland: And when we think about education, you know obviously one of the desired outcomes is to help prepare someone to participate in the workforce. But I have often said Mayor, that you want our young people to become responsible adults who participate and contribute positively to their communities and in many ways. And that's really for me what the essence of education should be.

Norman Rice: An enlightened society.

Marilyn Strickland: That's right.

Marilyn Strickland: 2019 is going to be a very big election year with the Seattle City Council. What advice would you give to someone in 2019 who wants to be part of the Seattle City Council? What should they focus on? What's important to the city?

Norman Rice: That's probably where today I feel out of touch. I like the idea of every candidate having to not run by districts, but run citywide.

Marilyn Strickland: OK. Talk to me about that.

Norman Rice: Well because you have to hear everybody. Sometimes in a district, you can narrow your focus and you may not hear everybody. And so, I want to make sure that we've got candidates who are listening to everybody. Who articulate a vision and a hope and dreams that are not divisive. But our healing, our looking at ways in which you can collaborate and move together. That sounds touchy-feely to some people. But I don't want to see candidates that are so strident. Tearing people apart and pointing fingers. Making people enemies. I want to see people who are talking about how they create creative partnerships to make things work. You need a business. You need the tax base.

Marilyn Strickland: Right.

Norman Rice: You can't build what you want and tax everybody to death. They have to be at the table and sit with you and you've got to respect what they do. I think the best thing about growing up with a mom and dad who ran a restaurant and tavern, people need to know what it takes to run a business. Than just that you can tax them for the revenues. At the end of the day, how can I help you? How could you help me? How could we do it together?

Marilyn Strickland: Absolutely. Well, thank you for sharing your personal journey. Your professional journey. And really you know one of the takeaways for me is that you know sometimes it doesn't work out when you first try. But with perseverance and determination, you know, you can do it. And sometimes you're just called to do things and it sounds as though you know you really had an important calling.

Marilyn Strickland: I want to get more to what I'm calling the lightning round now. Let's get to, let's get to know Mayor Rice better. So what is something people would be surprised to learn about you?

Norman Rice: I wouldn't tell you. It wouldn't be a surprise.

Norman Rice: I do have a sense of humor. And I like to talk in voices. I can talk underwater. So, I do those kinds of things. That's how I make my grandson appreciate me as he grew up. I like to joke and play.

Marilyn Strickland: I can tell you have a sense of humor. I see mischief in those eyes. Sitting across from you.

Norman Rice: So some people always think I'm serious. But I'm actually a lot more fun-loving.

Marilyn Strickland: More laid back. Okay so let's get to know more. So I want to expand on that. So what's on your playlist?

Norman Rice: I'm not into music that much. So I'll listen to anything but I don't turn on the radio. I like being solitary a lot. Reading and being quiet.

Marilyn Strickland: So, OK. But my husband asked me a question the other night so I'm going to I'm going to ask you. So he said, we were talking about music over the years. And he said, so what album did you own that you played more than any other?

Marilyn Strickland: What got a lot of play? And I said to him I said, it's Aretha Franklin. 'I Never Loved a Man.'

Norman Rice: OK.

Marilyn Strickland: And so I said, of all the albums I've ever owned over the years, that probably has gotten more rotation. So there's, there has to be something.

Norman Rice: I was thinking of a song the other day and I don't why it got in my mind. But 'War'?

Marilyn Strickland: Yes.

Norman Rice: 'Slippin' Into Darkness.'

Marilyn Strickland: Yes. Yes. That was a great. Great band. Great song.

Norman Rice: I love that one. And then, on my way from Denver to Seattle, 'Light My Fire.'

Marilyn Strickland: That's right. You said that when we were, before we got on the air.

Norman Rice: You know it's going to be all right. Come on baby, light my fire.

Marilyn Strickland: There you go.

Marilyn Strickland: So your parents owned a restaurant. And you said they specialized in what kind of cuisine?

Norman Rice: Was mostly soul food. They used to, their staple was chicken in the basket.

Marilyn Strickland: So what's your favorite dish from the restaurant that your parents used to make?

Norman Rice: My favorite dish is making red beans and rice.

Marilyn Strickland: Red beans and rice. There you go. Very good. Well thank you so much for joining us on the podcast. It has been delightful to have you here Mayor Rice. And you know, an iconic leader even today among some of the folks that I'm in contact with. They say got to be, Norm Rice was probably one of the best mayors that Seattle has ever had.

Norman Rice: And that means I left at the right time.

Marilyn Strickland: It means you had an impact. You're being a little too modest.

Marilyn Strickland: Anyway, thank you so much. We appreciate having you here. Thank you so much for being here, Mayor.

Norman Rice: Thank you.