

*[Ardena Matlack has contributed additional information to this transcript to clarify or correct her interview. She adds a postscript at the end of the interview.]*

Joan Wagnon: Good afternoon. I'm Joan Wagnon with the Kansas Oral History Project, and I have the distinct pleasure this afternoon of interviewing Ardena Matlack who served ten years representing Clearwater. And for two of those years, Ardena, you and I at least overlapped. I got to watch you in action in the Kansas House while I was still a brand newbie freshman. We've known each other a long time, and I am just so pleased that we could work this out this afternoon.

I'm going to do a little bit of an introduction. If there are things that I should have said and didn't, we need you to correct those so that we get them correct. What will happen is that after we finish this recording on Zoom, we'll make a transcript on this, both your interview of the video of the interview and a written transcript will be posted on the Kansas Oral History website, which is <https://ksoralhistory.org> and I'll send you a link so you can find it. It will be there for posterity and mostly for students and other people that want to check and see what happened during a pivotal period in Kansas history.

So with that, I'd like for everybody that's watching this to meet Ardena Matlack who served ten years from 1975 to 1984, representing House District 93, which was in Clearwater, Kansas. Is that Sedgwick County?

Ardena Matlack: That's in Sedgwick County, yes. We had a lot of legislators from Sedgwick County. I was outside the city. In fact, the first time my district was a doughnut outside of the city.

JW: Oh, really?

AM: It went clear up to Furley, Kansas, which is north of Wichita, clear down around to around the other side of Wichita to catch—*[Mt Hope, Valley Center, Andale, Garden Plain, Viola, Clearwater, St. Joe and Schuly.]*

JW: It just made a ring?

AM: It made a half a ring around Wichita.

JW: We're going to talk a little about what that district was like. When Ardena was first elected, she had been active in the Methodist Women and the Business and Professional Women's Club. Does that sound right?

AM: That sounds right.

JW: But I pulled out an old list of women in elected office, and you were listed as a homemaker.

AM: Okay, yes.

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JW: I guess despite the fact that you have a BA degree from Wichita State University and that you and your husband had joint interest in several businesses in Wichita and you had what, five children? [*Ardena's degree was in Music Education, a B.M.E. She says has 20 great grandchildren, and by August of this year, she'll have 22!*]

AM: Yes, I do.

JW: How old were they when you were first elected?

AM: My two daughters were in college, and my first son was about ready to go to college. My second two were home, my last two boys. One of them I think was a senior, and the other one was about fifteen. He was about a Freshman, I believe, something like that, in high school. They were both in high school. Then Rex went off to college the next year, too. We just had one then left at home after that.

JW: That was convenient then. When I started looking into your background, your husband Don Matlack who was an attorney and practiced law actively, he served in the Kansas Senate in 1965 through 1969. So that's one term in the Kansas Senate. And then Governor Robert Docking recruited him to be his legislative aide from 1969 to '74. That must have been the last six years of Docking's term as governor. Is that right?

AM: That's right. You've done a good job of your research.

JW: And you all were married fifty years.

AM: Just exactly. Don had gotten sick with Parkinson's disease, and he could barely make his fifty-years anniversary, but he did. It was in June, and he passed away in December.

JW: There was a lovely article in the newspaper that talked about how you all had been married for fifty years and were completely in love. It was just a charming article.

AM: Thank you.

JW: I don't know if you saw those clips, but I'll make sure you get a copy of it.

AM: Thank you.

JW: There has to be a story behind why you decided to run.

AM: Yes, there is. Of course, the first story that people don't know about, after Don had served his term in the Senate, we talk about gerrymandering and so forth, but it was time to redo the districts. The legislature could not agree in the districts for Sedgwick County. Do you remember that story at all?

JW: No. I was not in politics at that point.

AM: Okay. The court said that they would draw those districts in that area. They couldn't agree either, and it was time to file for office, and they said, "Oh, just all the six legislators from Sedgwick County, run at large," in the whole county, which we had six senators. So they all had to vote that way [*for all six senators*], and Don had been mostly in Sumner County, [just] a little part of [*his district*] was Sedgwick County. It put him into an entirely new district. All the Democratic senators lost that year because of that. That has not been heard of since. Very few people remember that, I'm sure, but that was when he lost being in the Senate.

He came home then one day from being a representative for the governor [*legislative liaison to Governor Robert Docking*] to the Senate and said, "I've got something I want you to do." I just supposed I'd forgotten to get something or to pickup something. He said, "I'd like for you to run for the House." The person that was in my district had decided to retire. He thought it would be a good time for women, and I decided that that would be a good thing to do. When we still had our kids at home, we had a conference, and we finally decided I would do it.

Then the person that had that office, Valley Center was in my district, decided to run again because they couldn't get anybody else to run. We really worked hard that year. Much to my surprise, I won. Then I was in then for the ten years. That was the way I really got in politics.

My kids, everybody worked. We had high school kids. In fact, one of them was Kathy Greenlee.

JW: Oh, really?

AM: Yes. She helped me campaign the first time in 1974.

JW: Good for her. She later worked for Governor Sebelius.

AM: Yes, and the Capitol and the Health Department, and Aging Secretary.

JW: Then went to Washington and was Kathleen's Chief of Staff when she was Secretary of HHS.

AM: Right.

JW: You had a good worker working for you.

AM: And another thing we did in that was we took all the lists of all the registered voters, not just one party but all the registered voters. We made packets that had one page of those in there with stationery and three letters in there, just form letters that they could write and envelopes and had people write personal letters to that one page of people to the whole district. I suppose we had over a hundred people writing those envelopes and those letters. We didn't do that ever again, but that one time we did, and it seemed to work.

JW: It probably worked very, very well. When you were drawing on people to help you with that

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campaign, were your contacts in Methodist women and the B&PW Club, were they helpful at getting you elected?

AM: Sure. All my friends, yes, from the Democratic women, all the Democrats, all my friends of any kind. The kids' sport parents, everybody I knew helped at that time.

JW: I think that's a really good story about how you decided to run. The lists that I was looking at are women in elected state offices, and I started in 1919, which was the first year that the 19th Amendment passed, and the first woman that was elected in the Kansas House was Minnie Grinstead, and she took her husband's place when Judge Grinstead died, and she made that trip all the way from Liberal, Kansas in a buckboard. Can you imagine how hard that was?

AM: My goodness, no. *[It took me about 3 hours to drive to the Capitol.]*

JW: All the way from 1919 until probably 1960, there were never more than four women serving at any time. I would go through the list, and there would be two or three names that would run and serve for maybe two or four years, and then there wouldn't be anybody else there.

The year that you went to the legislature, eight women were elected in the House.

AM: Right.

JW: Ruth Wilkin was one of them.

AM: Yes.

JW: Ruth Luzzati from your Sedgwick County. Jayne Aylward was there.

AM: The first two you mentioned had been there before me. Ruth Wilkin and Luzzati. They already had been there. They were some of the four that were there.

JW: They were some of the four. They had got there in the early seventies. But 1975 was a watershed year because you went from more than four. All of a sudden, you had eight. By the time you left, there were thirty-five women in the house.

AM: Right.

JW: It was pretty amazing to see the large numbers coming along.

AM: It really was.

JW: What did you think about being in the legislature when you first got there? It was nice that there were a number of women that came in with you, but how different was it than what you

expected?

AM: It was pretty much what I expected because I had been there, of course, with Don in the Senate and so forth. It was pretty much what I expected. It was interesting to try to get things done in the work, like in committees. If two women talked together, the guys thought we were going to try to figure out something to do as though we could. You kind of had to learn what your best way to get something accomplished was.

In some of the committees, the men didn't seem very interested in listening to what a woman said. But if you go and talk to them ahead of time and tell them, suggest and talk with them and try to influence them, then they might very well repeat exactly what you told them in committee. Of course, they wouldn't give you credit for it. So it was kind of funny to work that way, but you got used to that. It worked okay.

JW: I want to talk a little bit about your committee assignments. Is that okay?

AM: Sure.

JW: In 1975 through '76 because when you went, you were elected for a two-year term, and you were on the same committees for both of those years. You were on Energy and Natural Resources, [Judiciary], Federal and State Affairs, but I guess Bill Reardon was chair of Fed and State, and he went in the second year to a different committee, and you became chair. Now that is really unusual for a woman to be chair of a committee at that time.

AM: Ruth Wilkin was [appointed by] John Carlin [Speaker of the House in 1977-78], and it was when we had the majority in the House. Ruth was chair of [Assessment and] Taxation. He had given her that job, and she was very good at it. Then in the second year of our majority, the Education Committee chairman left the legislature. Bill Reardon was the person to lead the Education Department. So then I got to be the chair of Federal and State Affairs. I think Ruth

Wilkin and I-- I don't know if Glee Smith, the Republican lady, the one Republican lady, ever had a committee or not under the Republican—I can't remember that. As far as I know, Ruth was the first person. I was the second person to be a committee chair.

JW: I think that's probably true. Do you remember any of the issues that you took up in Federal and State Affairs? That was a place where all kinds of issues ended up.

AM: That's right. Anything that didn't fit nicely into Insurance and Taxation, Education, and all those things, we got to handle such as the abortion issues, ERA, liquor issues. All the social issues that came up, we got to handle. All of those issues were very important in that committee. Birth control, those kinds of things. Roe vs. Wade had been passed in 1973 before I got there. So it was a matter of trying to get around that. At that time, of course, Kansas was very, very conservative on that issue, and my people were very conservative on that issue. I had gone home one Friday evening just ready to take a shower. I thought I had politics turned off, and this group of women had gotten together in Clearwater, and they demanded that I come

over to see them right now, right now about the abortion issue. I told them what I was doing. I was really tired. Can I do it some other time? No, we have to do it right now. So I got dressed and went over there to see them. That's when the right-to-life issues became really important. Many of the Catholic churches especially had right-to-life meetings and so forth, and that was a very hot issue from then on and still is.

JW: I think if you trace the history of that issue starting in '73 with the Supreme Court ruling and how the legislature has dealt with it, the legislature has completely shifted in its approach. It was pretty much open to no restrictions.

AM: Yes.

JW: In the seventies and in the eighties. But by now, abortion dominates everything, the discussion of it. It dominates everything.

AM: It did pretty much then as well.

JW: Really?

AM: Yes. I had lots of meetings to go to about that issue every weekend.

JW: Was that coming out of the churches? You said the community—

AM: The Catholic churches, mostly. I had three of those in my area. So we had lots of meetings about that. Then the ERA had been just passed, too, before that. I was really glad that was finished and done.

JW: I can imagine that packed a lot of hearing rooms. But you were also on Energy and Natural Resources. Is that because of the composition of your district that you wanted on that?

AM: I hadn't requested to be on any particular committee, but that came in very handy because one of the bills that I sponsored was concerning hazardous waste. About 1976 or '7, I can't remember which, in Furley, they started to dig a hole. They had bought the land, started to dig a hole to dump in hazardous waste. The neighbors all got excited about it. It was close to a river. They came to me. So we got busy on it. We couldn't stop that project, but we did get it to be safe so it would have a lining that would not leak and a lot of regulations and so forth. From then on, I worked on hazardous waste a lot. The bill passed in both Houses very well. And then there was no transportation for hazardous waste and nuclear materials. So we worked on that as well with that project.

JW: What about water issues? It seems to me that that whole Sedgwick County area had some difficulties with water. It was a big development issue. They had Equus beds. Did you work on any of those kind of issues?

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AM: The Ogallala [Aquifer] water, everybody gets water from that for their cities. So that's always important to do that. The regulation of the farmers, how much water they use in their irrigation and so forth and all kinds of things come into play. So water was an important issue at that time. I don't remember just what all we did. We regulated the farmers and how many feet of water they could use on the plants and [tried to replenish the aquifer] so forth like that.

JW: You also switched over to the Judiciary Committee in 1979. You were still on Fed and State. You were still the ranking minority member on that. You moved off of Energy and on to the Judiciary Committee. What prompted you to do that? Were there issues that you were interested in?

AM: You know, I was thinking, because it mentions here I was in Judiciary. I thought I was on Judiciary from the beginning actually.

JW: You could have been, and our research just didn't pick it up.

AM: I think I was, if I remember correctly. I was surprised that I was chosen for Judiciary. [All the lawyers were] on that committee, [and just a few] that were not lawyers were on that committee, and I was one of those. That took a lot of time and a lot of reading and so forth. Of course, every bill did take a lot of studying and so forth. But I enjoyed my time on Judiciary very much. I was on a subcommittee for Juvenile Justice, the Juvenile Code. We went through that [and made changes]. That's an interesting subject, the problems that children have and things like that were very important to me.

JW: At this point from '75 to '78, Robert Bennett was Governor. Is that right?

AM: Yes. Mike Hayden was the Speaker of the House.

[NOTE: Pete McGill was speaker in 1975 and 1976; John W. Carlin became Speaker of the House from 1977-1978 when the Democrats were in the majority those two years. He was followed as speaker by Wendell Lady from 1979-1982. Speaker Carlin ran for Governor in 1978, defeating Robert Bennett, and was elected two terms, 1979-1986. Mike Hayden became Speaker of the House during Carlin's second term, 1982- 1986. He followed Carlin to the Governor's office in 1987.

JW: John Carlin was when you first went, and then Mike moved up. Is that right?

AM: No. Mike Hayden with Bennett as being a Republican Governor, Mike Hayden was the Speaker. Then when John Carlin was elected—let's see. John was Speaker—wasn't he Speaker when the Dockings—when the [inaudible].

JW: He [Carlin] was Speaker for the two years you were in the majority, '75 and '76.

AM: No, he was Governor.

JW: Then he ran for Governor.

AM: John Carlin was in when we were in the majority.

JW: Yes. Okay.

AM: He was in. That's the way he appointed women to the committees and stuff, the chairmen of the committees. And then when I retired from there, he appointed me to the Art Commission, when I retired from the legislature.

JW: John Carlin was good about appointing women and giving them opportunities, which I always appreciated.

AM: Yes, I did, too, very much.

JW: Did you have a chance to look through some of the lists of bills that you had introduced or that had gone through legislation that you might have been involved in.

AM: That hazardous waste thing was the most important one. And there was another one, the Unclaimed Property bill, was very important then. I had read that New York had this. It wasn't known across the country very much, but New York had done it. I thought that sounded like a good idea, and I introduced it, I think in 1978. Then another Democrat later on, three or four months later, introduced another bill just like it. I don't know why, but he did.

In the meantime, Joan Finney was treasurer. She saw in there that I had done that. She called me right away, which I should have called her, but I hadn't thought about it yet. Anyway, she helped me a lot with that. It became a committee bill. It was studied in the summer. She helped with that. It was really an odd bill because all the utilities and people that had deposits where you put in a deposit for your water or electricity or any kind of thing like that. People then would move away and leave it there. So those kind of people, the banks, the credit unions, utility people, all those people were really not for that bill, but they couldn't really say too much about it because it really wasn't their money.

*[Joan Finney was Kansas State Treasurer from 1975-1991 and later became the 42<sup>nd</sup> Governor of Kansas, the first woman to hold that office.]*

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Anyway, we worked on it very hard. I carried it on the House Floor, and I had worked and worked. I had that bill memorized back and forth, front to back. Anyway, it passed by a long ways. Of course, it took a year or two to do that. It brought in at least, I think it was ten million the first year for the state after they got it in gear, and it's been more than that since, ever since. It's gotten money back to people where it belonged as well.

JW: I think it also got Joan Finney elected governor.

AM: Probably so.



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JW: She was at every state fair with the Treasurer's Office, holding a booth in one of those big buildings. People would come to the computer and look up, "Oh, I have \$25.00--

AM: That's right.

JW: --from my deposit", and they'd get a check. They thought that was the greatest thing they'd ever heard of. You carried that bill.

AM: Yes. That was my bill originally.

JW: I'll be darned. Well, good for you, Ardena, that's great. Were there other pieces of legislation? You talked about the Juvenile Code. I know that that was worked on quite a lot.

AM: Yes, there were others I don't really remember too many. A lot of them are just local bills of interest—in Wichita, on I think it was 21st Street, the railroad tracks, the trains always stopped at that track, and there were miles of cars that couldn't get through. It was the only place around.

JW: I heard this.

AM: It was the truth. So we as Sedgwick County legislative people, we put in a bill that would regulate when and how they could stop and for how long they could stop across a track for the public roadways and things. Things like that always came up. I don't remember. We had detention of kids that were brought into the police. They were keeping them in the jails. We said they had to have a detention center to hold them. That was one. I don't know. One was if you had an old car in your backyard, and you decided you wanted to go get it fixed up, but it still ran, there was no way if you had not tagged it for a few years, there was no way to get it tagged. So we allowed that they could get a permit to get that car moved to somewhere and fix it so they could then get a tag. Just simple things like that sometimes. Hunter safety apparel was one. Oh, gee, I don't know what else, just all kinds of things. Of course, there's always equal pay. That's always an issue. We had some of those.

JW: I noticed you had introduced one bill that would require equal pay for work of comparable worth.

JW: That was one of your proposals .

AM: Yes. And then one that required unions to not limit women's work, which they were doing.

JW: Yes.

AM: I don't remember now what the article was they were doing, but we had to make a bill for that.

JW: What about smoking in restaurants? Were you part of that move?

AM: Yes. We, of course, wanted to get rid of smoking in restaurants. But first we had to say they had to have a special room for smoking at first, and then eventually we got rid of smoking all together. So that was quite a change.

JW: Did you have a lot of complaints from constituents about that?

AM: Oh, yes. They thought it was crazy.

JW: That and automobile seatbelts were the thing that I got the most calls about, I think, for a long time.

AM: Right, and for children, too. The safety seatbelts were for children three on up, and then we made it for three years old. Of course, now they have it everywhere for all kids. It's interesting how you have to take this a little bit at a time and improve on it.

JW: Ardena, if you think back on those ten years that you spent in the legislature, I think at that point, you all were having ninety-day sessions every year. So it took a big chunk of your time to come to Topeka, find a place to live, stay for those ninety days in the session. When you look back on those ten years that you spent, what is it that you feel best about?

AM: Well, the laws that were passed at that time I suppose. After Don had been there, and then we went on and worked in the Democratic Party and kept on going. Of course, we always worked in the church and those kinds of things. It's very interesting. You learn so much about so many things that make such a difference in your life, and you don't even know it.

JW: What about the constituent work? One of the things that I look back and remember are the people that saw an elected official as someone who could help them solve some problems. Maybe that's different in Sedgwick County than it was in Topeka, but I used to get a lot of constituent complaints—not so much complaints, but they'd come to me and say, “I need help getting something done.” Did you have a lot of constituent contact?

AM: Not as much as you probably did. Every weekend, we would have meetings that you went to and told them about the legislature. I started a meeting with all the mayors in the area. I had about ten, I think, nine or ten mayors of small towns. We met regularly, and people would come to those meetings once in a while to find help and so forth. The Furley thing with the hazardous waste, that began with constituents needing help. And another time with the hunting -- something or other about teenagers that we finally got help. There weren't a lot except for the abortion issue. There was a lot of that, especially in the later part of my tenure. They hadn't built up their roots when I first got in there, but then toward the end, they were very organized and very vocal about that.

JW: What is the contrast you see between what the legislature looked like in 1975 to 1985 and

what it looks like today? Are they still the same kind of problems? Are there stark differences?

AM: Well, there's a lot of differences and a lot of sameness, too. The communications and technology is what changed things a lot. When I was there, we had the newspapers, and that's another interesting story about my election. I'll go into that later, if you want.

JW: Yes, I do.

AM: We had newspapers and telephones and a little bit of TV. It was expensive and not a lot—we didn't have nearly the campaign TV stuff that we have now, of course. It was more by written words or letters and things like that or telephone calls. But the things, equal pay for equal work is still going on. Washington, DC to be a state, that's still [an issue]. There was a bill that I helped with way back in, I don't know, the seventies to have that happen, and it's still going. It still hasn't happened. Elimination of food tax, we still haven't done it. We had bills on that then. Exemption of the—well, I said the food tax.

JW: Right. Sales tax on food.

AM: And funding education is always a problem. Of course, there's more private schools now. So that's a bigger problem about what to do with our funding and whether to consider that, but that in my later term. That was a problem then, whether to give private schools any of the tax money.

JW: Why did you decide to leave?

AM: My mother and dad were getting older and needed more attention, and Don's folks certainly needed attention. His mother had a heart problem, heart surgery. I was just tired of really the abortion question. I had a really hard campaign, the last one before we left, before I left.

The little weekly papers come out on Friday, and this little journalist from Valley Center called me [right before the election]—this is the last time I campaigned—she kept asking me these very technical questions about my voting record. I finally asked her, “Where are you getting all this information?” It would have taken a lot to find out. She said, “Well, your opponent has put a whole big page in the paper, one whole page, black, and there's all these things that you have voted on.” It was pretty much Chamber of Commerce type voting, and most of them I had voted maybe for an amendment or something, but I had voted otherwise when it went on through, when it straightened out.

She said, “If you want to answer this, we'll hold the paper up until you have time to put in your own ad.” I said, “Sure, I'll be glad to do that.” So she gave me a copy of the ad, and I sent in my ad and my paper what I would say. Then I called all the other papers, there are three or four in the area, like Mount Hope was in my district, and there were some other papers, Haysville, Goddard, I believe it was. I don't know, several papers. He had done the same thing in all of those papers. They all agreed to hold their papers a day until I could get an answer in that

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paper. So if that little gal hadn't called me, I might not have been there the last term. It was, of course, on the abortion issue and all that kind of stuff.

But I just kind of got tired of campaigning all the time is why I really quit --and my parents. Then Don, too, was beginning to retire from his work. He retired finally later, but he wanted me to be a secretary in his office.

JW: How did you feel about that, Ardena?

AM: I said, "If I'm going to do that, I'm going to go to legal secretary training, school." So I did. It was several months schooling in Wichita. I went in, and I became a legal secretary. I then helped him in his office for a while.

JW: What kind of law did he practice? Was it labor law?

AM: Just general practice, and it was in Wichita. Then he retired and came to Clearwater when he had Parkinson's disease. So I was [able to help him as] he retired. I did miss it. It's very interesting. You learn so much about so many things.

Then, I was on an Administrative Rules and Regulations Committee at the last—I don't think we'd gotten to that one yet.

JW: No, I kind of got sidetracked and didn't do that. One of the other people we interviewed, I guess it was Sheila Frahm. Do you remember Senator Sheila Frahm?

AM: Yes. I didn't serve with her, but yes.

JW: She said that Administrative Rules and Regs was the best committee she had because she got to learn the nuts and bolts of how everything worked.

AM: That's really right. You do things you never thought of. We were going through Rules and Regulations to cancel out things that didn't need to be anymore. So it was a busy informational committee, licensing and all kinds of things—nurses' licensing, doctors, dental, eyes, any kind of licensing things you'd go through and see what was needed to be changed. It was an interesting committee.

JW: When you decided that you were going to become a legal secretary and not run for re-election again, did you work to see that a Democrat took your place?

AM: Yes, I did. I did. I had this teacher at Goddard that was very interested and was very helpful in my campaign. I thought he would be an ideal candidate.

JW: Was that Rick Bowden?

AM: Yes, Rick Bowden. I went to him and I said, "I think I want to retire, and if you will run, I will

retire.” He was kind of surprised and said he had to think about it a while. If he hadn't said he would run, I probably wouldn't have retired. I would have gone ahead. But he did run and won his election. I wish more legislators would do that when they're going to quit, that they would find a good candidate, whatever party they are, to take their place. Sometimes they just leave and forget about it.

JW: He was a remarkable legislator. Unfortunately, he's already passed and is not with us anymore, but he was the architect of the 1992 School Finance Plan that survived three different Supreme Court challenges.

AM: I didn't know that, but I'm not surprised.

JW: You picked a good one, Ardena.

AM: Thank you.

JW: He was really good. He was the last one from that Goddard rural area of Sedgwick County. Since then we've had people from Valley Center, from some of those smaller places. They've all been anti-abortion, rural-oriented legislators.

AM: Very conservative. I've been very disappointed in that. They don't seem to find anybody else, even to have any competition.

JW: The Democrats have fielded several good candidates. I guess what you were observing in the seventies in the backlash to the Roe vs. Wade decision that came out of the Supreme Court; that began to grow and grow with discontent. The people in that [rural] area have acted on that anti-abortion issue, and it's really dominated the people who have represented in those areas since.

AM: Yes. They become one issue kind of people, just vote for one issue, no matter what anything else is.

JW: We only overlapped two years where we served together, but I know that you were really involved with the Federated Women's Democratic Clubs. How effective do you think those women's clubs are in politics in general?

AM: Well, you know, I've been asked that before. It seems to me that when there's a Democratic Women's Club in the area, the Democratic Party is stronger.

JW: Interesting.

AM: It has seemed to be that way. When we had a Democratic Committee in McPherson, that party was stronger. I think Wichita Democrats have been stronger. They're not as strong as they used to be, but when there was a strong Democratic women's group there, the party was stronger there. In Hutchinson, for instance, now we hardly have a committee there. Out west,

we had a few. Pratt County had a women's group, and it was more Democratic then than now.

Of course, it can play both ways. The party helps the women, and the women helps the party. You're not sure which is the horse. I think they're very important. Women have more time. They get things done. If they decide to do it, they really work at it and try to accomplish it.

JW: I wondered if maybe one of the reasons—and I don't know about Republican women's group, but they have women's groups as well, but they seem to be diminishing in influence as well. If the rise of the number of women in elected office had anything to do with the less interest in the women's clubs in general. Do you know?

AM: I don't know either. It could be that it is, that women are supposed to get out there and do their own thing now and don't need that women's groups' support necessarily, I suppose. But the women's group raise a lot of money for candidates, and they do a lot of campaigning for candidates. I still think it's a viable thing to do. And we do have men associates. If they want to be a member, they can be an associate member. So we do have some of those, too.

JW: When you are looking back at what you did in the legislature and what you accomplished, do you see any change in the way the legislature as a body works?

AM: Yes, I'm sure because of technology particularly. I think otherwise the system of getting bills through and getting them to the floor and all of that doesn't make any difference. If you're in the majority party, you're not going to let a minority party person of one have a bill that's going to pass. You have to get help from people from the other—you have to cooperate to get anything done. Of course, right now, there's not that cooperation. There used to be a little more cooperation on some bills and so forth than there is now. I think it's a very difficult situation right now.

JW: People tell me that the partisanship is at a higher level than it used to be.

AM: Yes.

JW: I remember women of both parties getting together, talking about common issues that they had, and working back and forth across the aisles.

AM: Right.

JW: I'm not sure that that happens as much today as thirty years ago.

AM: I don't think so. I don't think so at all.

JW: Is there anything else that stands out in your mind about your ten years in the House that you would want to make sure your grandchildren know about?

AM: I don't know.

JW: You're got twenty-one of them, or twenty-two of them, right?

AM: Yes, I have 20 great grandchildren and by August there will be 22! Some of the interesting things we passed in 1975 that came in later like electronic bank transfers were allowed in 1975. Then in 19—I think it was '84—yes, in '84, it wasn't until '84 that they allowed loans to be in the branches of banks and things like that. It's always an interesting change of things. We had children in need of care information system for KDI. Proof of car insurance is one, not until 1984 that we had to have proof of car insurance.

And we haven't talked about the Open Records law and the Open Meetings laws. They came through Federal and State Affairs. Of course, they're always being changed as they were then. The Open Records Bill—I think they had the Open Meetings law before the Open Records law. But anyway those both came through Federal and State Affairs, and I worked on those a lot.

JW: That's a big deal though, Ardena, trying to make it so that government was open to people. They now spend a lot of time talking about transparency, but isn't that what Open Records and Open Meetings was about?

AM: That's what we were talking about, right. That's one of the things that they're still talking about, transparency, and that's what we were doing then, trying to get people more involved and knowing what's going on.

Then there were things like strobe lights for buses and safety in buses and things that was passed in 1984. Strobe lights on buses, you know? You're always trying to better things in the legislature. That's really, really good. Of course, an increase in minimum wage. We're still fussing with that, and we fussed with that back in 1984.

JW: It sounds to me like you really had a good time in the legislature.

AM: Yes, I did. I was probably a little hesitant to speak with the newspapers, as I shouldn't have been. But I was afraid that I would be misconstrued and misunderstood or say the wrong thing. So I didn't work much with newspapers. If they asked me questions, I answered, but I didn't really volunteer much, which I probably should have. Looking back, that's one thing I would have worked at harder probably, but I didn't.

But after that, I was really busy in the women's department. I served in the National Federation of Democratic Women for six years after that and was state chairman of that. Also our church, we did lots of things on the children's, on the Bishops' Committee for Children. We gave out scholarships for children's work in the church for churches working with children, needy children. So I kept doing those kinds of things, even though I was out of the legislature.

JW: Because you are about your community?

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AM: About children, community, and education, yes.

JW: All of those things.

AM: And you do, too.

JW: Yes, and I keep doing them as well.

AM: Yes, you have.

JW: Do you have any final advice for someone that might be contemplating running for a state legislative seat?

AM: If you're willing to work hard and learn and study and you like people, do it. It's not an easy job. You know that. But it's an interesting, a very interesting educational job, and you feel like you are making a difference to it.

JW: Good. The final question has to do with leadership. We're looking into with this whole series of interviews people who were leaders that you admired or qualities of leadership that they exhibited. Who were the good leaders, and what was it that made them good leaders?

AM: Oh, my goodness. That's a question that takes a lot of thinking about really. You have to be able to communicate. You have to be open to people, be interested in their problems, be inclusive, want to be fair, equality, kindness. For me, just humanity, be interested in bettering the community as we say, leadership. Mr. Carter, President Carter said something to effect not long ago that do all the good you can wherever you are whenever you can with whomever you can and for all that you can all the time. He said it in different words. I'm just saying those myself. He said it much nicer than I did, but that's what you need to do.

JW: I think that's a pretty darned good answer. Anybody stand out in your recollections of people who really met those qualities of leadership?

AM: Oh, lots of people, sure. Several of the presidents can do that very well. President Carter and his wife one, for sure. A lot of women have done it. I'm very proud of our vice president. But there have been others in the past that have. I can't even say their names right now, a lot of them that have had leadership. Let's see. Who was the black lady that ran for vice president years ago?

JW: Barbara Jordan?

AM: No, it wasn't Barbara Jordan. She was a small, wiry lady.

JW: Shirley?

AM: Shirley Chisholm, wasn't it? People like that that really get a lot done, but they communicate. They can organize and plan. Of course, Kathleen Sebelius was a good one for



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that. *[Hillary Clinton and Michelle Obama are excellent leaders.]*

JW: That's a good answer and a good assortment of people. Anything else that you think we ought to get on the record before we wind this up?

AM: Well, I appreciate it very much, you having me. It's been fun to do this. I hope we'll see each other again in person some of these days.

JW: I do as well. Let me tell you one more time, it's <https://ksoralhistory.org>. KS for Kansas, oral history.org. In about two or three weeks, we ought to have this up, and you'll be able to show it to everybody in your living arrangement.

AM: Oh, my. Oh, my goodness. Maybe I won't want to.

JW: Oh, yes, you will. You've done a nice job, Ardena. You always did a nice job.

AM: I appreciate that.

JW: So on behalf of the Kansas Oral History Association, I thank you very much. This has been an interview with Ardena Matlack from Clearwater who served in the Kansas House for ten years. Thanks, Ardena. Bye bye.

AM: You're welcome. Thank you for having me. Thank you very much.

[End of File]

***[Postscript – added by Ardena Matlack after the interview was completed, not part of video]***

*I remember my legislative service that began 47 years ago as a challenging, fun time. Now I am ninety years old and remember the fun times.*

*My husband and I were a political team. We attended the 1968 Democratic National Convention in 1968 in Chicago when Mr. Hubert Humphry was the nominee. Don was a delegate, and I was an alternate. We attended the 1976 National Convention in New York; Jimmy Carter was the nominee for President and Walter Mondale was the Vice-Presidential nominee. Don was the delegate, and I was an alternate. We took our youngest son, Tim, with us and enjoyed NY while Don attended. Then in 1984 at the San Francisco National Convention I was the delegate and Don the alternate. Walter Mondale was the nominee that year and it was exciting to have Geraldine Ferraro, be the Vice President nominee. Several women, including House of Representative member from Colorado, Pat Schroeder were considered.*

*We also attended two Presidential Inaugurations, Jimmy Carter's in 1977, and Bill Clinton's in 1995. A daughter and her husband plus two grandchildren attended with us. What fun!*

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*I remember one of the awards I received was in 2008 , the “Outstanding Woman of the Year” Award given by the National Federation of Democratic Women. Several of my grown children came to Arizona to be there for the presentation. I still belong to the County, State, and National Democratic Women’s Organization.*

*Raising my five children to be productive citizens and working in church music all my life as choirdirector, bell choir director, pianist and organist has been my vocation, but politics has been an interesting and challenging avocation that I enjoyed very much. It has given me interesting and meaningful experiences and has been an important part of my entire life.*

*Thank you for giving me this opportunity.*

*Ardena*