

FLENTJE: This oral history interview of Marvin W. Barkis, former speaker of the Kansas House of Representatives, is being conducted under the sponsorship of the Kansas Oral History Project, Inc., a nonprofit corporation created for the purpose of establishing an archive of oral histories of Kansas state legislators who served prior to the year 2000. These interviews are funded in part by a grant from the Kansas Humanities Council. Professor H. Edward “Ed” Flentje of Wichita State University is conducting this interview at the Kansas Statehouse, in the House chambers in Topeka on October 27, 2017. The audio and video services are being provided by Chapman Center for Rural Studies at Kansas State University under the direction of Tom Parish.

Mr. Barkis practices law in Miami County, Kansas, and has offices in Lewisburg and Paola. He graduated from Ottawa University in 1965 and from Stanford University School of Law in 1968. He was first elected to the Kansas House of Representatives in 1978 and reelected to six additional terms, serving from 1979 through 1992. He served as minority leader of the House from 1983 through 1990 and as speaker of the House in the 1991 and 1992 legislative sessions.

Welcome, Mr. Barkis.

BARAKIS: Thank you.

FLENTJE: Is that reasonably accurate?

BARAKIS: It is.

FLENTJE: Okay. Well, when did this all begin? Was there a DNA in—of politics and elective office?

BARAKIS: You know, in answer to that, I would—one quick answer is I grew up on a farm with my dad—he was a farmer/businessman. At one point my grandfather ran for the Kansas House as a Democrat, and there were two Republicans who ran in Franklin County ended up getting into a bad primary, and they were mad enough at each other— oh, I got to stop. My grandfather died about six weeks before the election, and the local committee—

FLENTJE: Of your dad?

BARAKIS: Yeah, my dad’s father died, Frank Barkis. My dad’s name was Marvin, like mine. And dad stepped in and had cards and all he did is go to a few ice cream suppers, and the election came, and lo and behold, for the first time ever, they had a Democrat senator from my district. So, he was there, like, 1951 to 1955, I believe. And I came up here as a page at the Senate. He lived in the Kansan Hotel and I

thought this was the biggest place I had ever been. I paged with one of the Dockings. I came back from that. We've got home videos of me walking around the Capitol, looking at "Abe" Lincoln and talking about this and that, and—

FLENTJE: You would have been a teenager.

BARKIS: I would have been about the eighth grade or so, I think. I was born in 1943, anyway, that was an experience that left me thinking I would like to be in politics, sort of. Now, I grow up—am an officer in high school. I go to Ottawa University, and I become president of the student body. And I would tell you that I've noticed over the years that a lot of people who get here, like, Governor Sam Brownback, were former presidents of their student bodies or student body officers. And so I didn't know that was training for this, but I think it perhaps was.

To fill in a little bit the gaps—I come up here. I'm interested, but I'm in—first, my wife, Kay, grew up in Turner, Kansas. I knew her when she was five years old because her dad—her grandfather had a tractor business in Louisburg, so I remember seeing her at church and then went our separate ways. As the years go by, I go to Ottawa University after I get out of high school. I go to Ottawa. I'm involved with a lot of things. My junior year, she shows up, and I'm very impressed with her.

FLENTJE: At Ottawa?

BARKIS: At Ottawa, and her grandmother had said, "There's the nicest boy in our church, and you ought to introduce yourself." So she was a go-getter and beautiful, and I was really impressed, but she wasn't so impressed, so that I had to go to Stanford Law School to better my credentials.

BARKIS: That's what I tell her. Now, we've been—we—she's very much on line with my political philosophy. I went to Stanford three years, and then I came back from there, and that's when I re-met my wife and we started dating, and very shortly after that, we got engaged and got married. I worked as a Legal Aid storefront lawyer on 12th Street in Kansas City, Missouri, for two years, and she worked in an all-black school, in a program that the federal government called the Teacher Corps, so we had a really interesting—I mean, I knew the Black Panthers, the welfare rights mothers. I had stories—I could talk to you for hours about Legal Aid and being the only white guy in the pool hall and working with kids that had no fathers and things that just break your heart.

I came out of there thinking, Thank God I grew up on a farm in Kansas with two parents who loved me. I'd know how lucky I was. I also felt a strong commitment, and still do, to issues involving those kids. I

have them in my mind today, you know, and so Legal Aid happened. Kay and I had gotten married the fall when I started with Legal Aid, 1968.

I hitchhiked to New York after I didn't get drafted because I had mononucleosis and they said, "Come back in six months." Well, I went to New York, and then I was going to go on a steamer, work my way around the world like Jack London. When I got to thinking about it, I'm thinking, She's too good-looking. She's too sharp. I gotta do something. So I called her from New York, hitchhiked back home, got engaged the next week. We got married. Went to do the Legal Aid, Teacher Corps.

Then—I think I told you earlier—at the end of that two years, I came home, and I said, "Dad, guess what we're gonna do." And he said, "Oh, get a real job?" And I said, "Oh, no, no, we're gonna go to Africa." So we hit the road for about eleven months and went to Europe. Bought a \$300 car, sold it in Marrakesh, went up to the Congo River as the only white people. Hitchhiked through Uganda after Idi Amin took over. Basically a great adventure with someone to share it with. It's a good thing I came home. Best decision I made.

And then after that, we went to Paola, Kansas. I started practicing law, and she taught school. Then we started having children, and we had three great children, and it's the best adventure of my life, is having those—Ann, John and Will. But at some point, Tom Laing, who will figure later in our discussion, shows up at Paola. He's working for Don Allegrucci, who was running for Congress. And so they want to get my support, and I met with Don and his wife in our home. And I decided that if there are these kind of people in the Kansas legislature, maybe I ought to run for office. And that's really a factor in my running the first time-- that conversation.

Now, earlier,—

FLENTJE: Your father was a Democrat?

BARKIS: I had registered as a Republican. I worked for Wayne Angell, an economics professor at Ottawa University when he ran for Congress. I worked with Dave Owen when he ran for lieutenant governor. My wife was the Montgomery County chair. After the election, I decided the Republican Party was going more extreme to the right, and I was not going to be comfortable in it, and I'm not going to run for anything anyway, so I changed parties.

So like a lot of people, I'm a convert, and a convert is actually more serious than just somebody who falls into it. So I was a chosen, thoughtful Democrat, and I have never regretted it. It's been for me a very important part of my life. I feel like our party speaks for children, speaks for those people in the shadows of life, the elderly, the needy. It's a party I'm proud to be involved in. And I can tell you, all through the years of my political career, this interest in children's issues drove me to be here and to want to make differences.

FLENTJE: So most of the '70s, you were practicing law? BARKIS: Yes.

FLENTJE: But then in '78 you decide to run? That's the first—

BARKIS: Yes.

FLENTJE: —elective office.

BARKIS: I'd been a committee chairman, but I hadn't done anything else.

FLENTJE: Yeah. And are you saying that visit with Allegrucci—

BARKIS: Made a difference. You know, it said maybe politicians can be serious people, and Don Allegrucci was a serious person, and a good, smart guy.

So it turns out that I get here. First year, John Carlin is governor. We take a train to Wichita--a great adventure. We're all happy. The place is great. What I don't know, though, is when I get here, the majority of Republicans are now back in control, and they're not going to give us a whole lot of input. So I found myself, after the first year here, thinking, I'm not sure I'm gonna get to do anything, although I did get one. I learned about how to work in the minority, and you get a speaker, Wendell Lady, to carry a bill that you're interested in that had to do with the Lakemary Center in Miami County. A school or— it's not just a school, a place for exceptional children. So we got a few things done that first year —things that I would think affected me when I was thinking about this interview and talking about leadership and stuff that happened. Now, somebody said, number one,—

FLENTJE: You're on the back bench.

BARKIS: I am over here somewhere in the back. I don't have much to do. I'm sitting back there. But I listened to people, and one of the things they said—and you'll have to understand if you listen to me for a while how hard it was for me to obey this rule, but they said, "Don't go to the microphone unless you've got something to say, because people get sick of the guys that go all the time." So I'm sitting there. I didn't go to the microphone the whole first year but once.

FLENTJE: Who gave you that advice?

BARKIS: Some of the older Democrats and the other guys—like, there were some real older ones that took me under their wing. They were from Wyandotte County, and they said they want to teach you the real lessons. One is you go early to the receptions because you always get the shrimp. They were quite the good advisers, but I noticed that they got pretty comfortable kind of sudden there.

Well, anyway, I'm trying to feel my way through that first year, and I found out— I mean, the first year, the biggest thing—probably the most serious debate I was ever involved with on the floor of the House was the death penalty issue that came up with— Carlin had said that he would sign it if it was passed. It was dead serious. I mean, I thought about it a whole lot, and Democrats for the most part were not—they were going to back the governor's position. But the debate for two days was—was excellent. I mean, it was really excellent. I did not know till almost to the last minute how I was going to vote. I ended up voting for the death penalty, and as a Democrat that was not exactly what you would do if you're planning on going into it in the future. But I came down on the side of pure deterrence, and the argument I made was: somebody kills my kid, I want to know I don't have to do it in return. Society's got to take—avenge me. I don't believe—I don't believe in deterrence. What I believe is vengeance. And that's how I voted. Now,—

FLENTJE: And that was extremely controversial—

BARKIS: Yes.

FLENTJE: —during Carlin's term.

BARKIS: Oh, definitely. So that wasn't as—you know, I just did what I felt I should do, and through my times—and when I had issues come up like abortion and pro choice, I took positions because you shouldn't be here if you don't want to accomplish anything or stand for anything.

But on the death penalty, just as an aside, as time went by, I read articles, particularly on the state of Missouri, that every death case costs several million dollars. Now, you know I'm a kids' advocate, and I'm thinking, Two million or three million dollars to put a guy to death—it doesn't make good economic, practical sense. We ought to be spending that on children that don't become criminals. So at the last point, I supported making it a hard 40, you know, and making it so they're going to be in prison for their lives, basically. But then I didn't support the death penalty, for the reason that— of economics, which had not been debated at the time we were talking about. It was a moral question or whatever.

FLENTJE: Yeah.

BARAKIS: The one time I went to the microphone—and this will lead to some other thoughts I have about leadership—I went down there because I read an article in The Topeka Daily Journal [sic; The Topeka-Capital Journal] about “rats taste like chicken in the Soviet gulag.” It was about an American that got caught and sent out to the gulag as an American citizen and how he—anything you could find for protein was great. So I came down to the microphone and made what I would say is a patriotic speech, saying, “I’m proud to be a politician. I’m proud to be in a free country and be able to be here, in this body.” So the speech got an applause—everybody stood up. It was a good, rousing, patriotic, proud of it. And so that was it. And then towards the last few days, I found out we’re having an award ceremony called “Freshman of the Year.” At that point, I call my wife, and I said, “They got cameras down here. They’ve got—this thing is really—I don’t know whether it’s for real or not for real.” So I ended up sitting there as they went through this guy’s trip, the runner-up, and then another runner-up. And then I get to the last thing, and I go, No way. And I got the Freshman of the Year award.

FLENTJE: You were Freshman of the Year?

BARAKIS: Yeah, I—you didn’t know. I could have used it in my political stuff.

FLENTJE: I did not know that.

BARAKIS: You didn’t find that. Well, it’s a spoof. And one of the guys who previously got it used it in his campaign material, so they made him swear that he wouldn’t use—I had to swear I wouldn’t use it in campaign material.

BARAKIS: But I believe—my experience was if you can laugh at yourself, if you can take this kind of experience, you become someone that people can see as a real person. And I have a good sense of humor, and I don’t take myself too seriously about things. So that was kind of the beginning of maybe my leadership stuff. And then I did—I carried the severance tax for Carlin on the floor. One of the old farmers says, “You know you ought to look at leadership.” Well, after being here for a while, I’m getting dang tired of being in the minority, and I’m thinking—

FLENTJE: Fred L. Weaver is Minority Leader.

BARAKIS: He was the minority leader, and I ran for the agenda chairman, --I got it, and that meant that every day, I was in charge of a half-hour meeting of Democrats, and I had to come down to the floor and announce there’s going to be Democrat agenda meeting tomorrow in the old Supreme Court room, which I usually used the opportunity to tell a joke or get, you know—for one time, there was a whole airplane loaded with marijuana out at Dodge City, and they found it, and then they decided they had to

do something with it, so they burned it, and it—in the evening the smoke and the flames attracted the terns, and they were flying around, so by evening there wasn't a tern left unstoned.

BARKIS: Let me—one other thing about that. That got me in front of the group all the time. When I got the job—the previous guy read every bill, discussed everything. I created a one-page thing that I gave to every minority leader. Their job was to report on the bill. I didn't have to read any bills if I didn't want to, but Bill Reardon would do education, so they all participated. And one of the things I did from very early on and had thoughts about if I ever become a leader, I want to share the power, so agenda chairman. We can talk about other bills we did, but—But during that period of time, Fred Weaver decided to not run. I ran against a guy named Don Mainey—the assistant minority leader—was his job to be had. I beat him, you know, two to one. Rebels, freshmen. Hardest campaign I ever did in my life was asking these people to vote for me. It was very personal. So now I got the job. I hire Tom Laing to be my administrative assistant, which he was till I was no longer speaker, except one year, when he ran Tom Docking's campaign. I think the staff I had and the staff that worked in other offices are probably as important—and if you want to do a real history of how the legislative process goes, you really ought to be talking to people who were staff members because they did it. They carried the water. And what I found out about having a quality, first-class staff was they made me a better person. They made me a better leader. I felt like I couldn't let them down, so I found myself probably better, and I really couldn't say enough good things about my staff.

FLENTJE: So, Tom Laing was with you those eight years, pretty much?

BARKIS: All but one.

FLENTJE: And when you were minority leader? BARKIS: Yes.

FLENTJE: I didn't realize that.

BARKIS: And, boy, Tom is one of the smartest, honest guys you ever could ask for. And I was going to mention—I had Tom, I had Jolene Grabill, I had Mary Isenhour, Tony Ruis, Kim Gerrity, Bob Wooten, Joe Scranton, Tony Wheeler, Ed McKechnie. I mean, those are all people who were working in and around there. And that's not even all the people that were there. But I always had good staff that made me—The other thing I always believed in is—is I got into leadership, and when I became minority leader, the rule in the days of old was if you backed the wrong candidate for the leadership, you're not going to go to Washington D.C. on a junket anymore. You lost your free trips and the good stuff, or maybe your committee assignments. I got the leadership team into my office, and we began to debate different things. And I said, "One thing I think I'm gonna do is I want to take the National Conference of State

Legislature trips. We're gonna divide them into halves. People that never had any trips, ever, get a half. People that have had the trips all the time get a half. So we'll share, over the next two years, those deals." I did not punish the losers. One of the things I think made my leadership as strong as it was is I built the community. We didn't play traditional hardball politics. The result was before long, all the other guys' supporters are now supporting me because I've treated them fair. The people who got me elected are in that—they're in that leadership team.

FLENTJE: Were you ever challenged?

BARKIS: No. Not to that. But I got that, and I think I built community, and it made a heck of a lot of difference when you're in the minority. You know, the past, you'd split on issues, and some would go with—you know, I had to hold the group, but when you have a group that's participating, when it's the party—when I appoint Kathleen Sebelius as chairman of Fed and State and I appoint Joan Wagon to Tax and I appoint Bruce Larkin and Rick Bowden and on and on,—I had great committee chairmen. I really did, as I got, you know, to be the speaker.

FLENTJE: Talk about the politics of that time. I remember Marvin as kind of a partisan guy.

BARKIS: You know what we did? We believed in stuff. We used the minority to try to create a record on things that we cared about, and [that called for] being partisan. One of the things that's real easy to do, is to go down the line, keep your head down and just keep coming back here and never getting anything done. We wanted to accomplish stuff, so over the time that Mike Hayden was governor (and I had a good relationship with Mike; still would if I was around him. He and I both came out of a farm background, so we had a lot of common things) we really had the two years when he was governor and Jim Braden was speaker (Jim Braden had his hands full because of the divisions inside of his own party). That was that early time when there's ten or twelve or fifteen "Rebels": Kerry Patrick and a whole lot of representatives. I mean, Jim Braden got to the point when we changed the rules without talking to the speaker about it. We just—these guys offered us a deal, and we—we opened the rules so it was a lot harder for them to keep a bill tied up in committee, and basically we liberalized and took some power away from the speaker. We could have gone further. But I think Jim got to where he really didn't have the power, and I don't think Mike Hayden understood what Braden's problems were. He'd been speaker, and he knew how he got things done. He didn't have the problem that Jim Braden had because these guys [Rebels] come up here, they're freshmen, and they are radical. I mean, they went to cut

government across the board. You know, they're still around in the national level. They're still around here. But they were the first. I mean, it was an unusual time, and they—they really were not well liked, I can tell you.

But we also had times when—by making—my preference would have been not to make deals with those guys because philosophically we didn't have anything in common. And occasionally we could make deals with moderate Republicans on specific issues, but we didn't have a coalition of the moderates with us; we had a coalition, somewhat, of the radicals and us on some issues. The result of that was it was dang difficult for Mike to address reappraisal and classification issues. He had his hands full because of this coming of age of the conservative kind of radicals.

BARAKIS: I think that was a real disappointment for him, and maybe he didn't always understand it. But Braden got a lot of criticism for things that wasn't really his fault exactly. I mean, I can tell you he was so nervous about all this that he'd call me to see whether we were going to change the rules that day or not. He—he'd kind of go to Washington and not have anything happen. And I basically felt like I kind of had the power of a little bit more than a minority leadership.

You know, somewhere in the process, I think that there were discussions that I could have maybe become speaker by making a deal with these guys. We had the votes. But I'd have to give up power, and I didn't want the job. I said, "I don't think I'll ever be speaker of the House. I'd like to be. But I'm not gonna do it if I can't be a speaker for the issues I care about." So that never happened. And then lo and behold, the next year we run an election, and we win by one vote.

FLENTJE: Well, let me—I, again, looked at the gains. In the '86 election you would have been in your maybe fourth term as a legislator. The Democrats gained two seats. In '88, seven seats were gained, and then in '90, five seats. Were you involved—I mean, how much, as minority leader, were you involved recruiting and trying to get folks elected? Was that part of how you saw your job?

BARAKIS: I did not like not being able to get things done, and being in a minority, you really don't have too much power. So what do you do about that? Do you go home and quit, or do you work on recruitment of good candidates? We got very sophisticated. We made deals with the Republicans. They wanted some things, and we wanted some things, so we did—we all got computers to do

reapportionment, so we ended up with a very rational reapportionment, kind of a balanced reapportionment.

I spent hours of my life in the summer and the fall, recruiting candidates on the phone or meeting people. I believe we recruited George Teagarden kind of candidates, people who in their districts were quality people who they voted for them even though they were Democrats. So what I ended up with, because of how it really worked—when we ended up with our minority increase and a little more power, somebody over here's going to decide with us on some issues, we can block on some. We had a lot of progressive ideas.

We got within sight, and we could then get—as we did that, we got some of the old-timers to vote as part of the group because they'd been voting to keep their head down. Maybe they'd vote anti-union on something or they'd basically not stick with it.

FLENTJE: Of your party?

BARKIS: Yeah. So, I would call somebody up. And I can remember calling Sheila Hochhauser, a woman that's Jewish, going to run in Manhattan, Kansas. It can't happen. It did happen. She won, and a teacher out there won, and nobody had ever—just one of those that never had a Democrat.

And Stevie Stevens, who was a hippie kind of gal who lived up in Leavenworth and was all about Wolf Creek [nuclear power plant] and fighting Wolf Creek—and I can talk about the nuclear stuff because I found out pretty quick that the business community, like the people that run Wolf Creek, thought that we were just kind of a courtesy call until they found out they didn't have the votes without us. But I was good at it. Tom was good at it. We worked with people.

FLENTJE: Did he [Laing] do a lot of field work at that time?

BARKIS: No, he didn't really, but if somebody had called, wanted to know about how the process works—but I did a lot of it. The party did it. I mean, getting good candidates is really difficult, and if you looked at the political—there were a lot of years when the Democrats didn't field anybody in Johnson County, and then by the time we were doing this—and we could see that last period. We're within five votes. If the right things happen, we might get the majority. That year, that election, there were ten House seats within a hundred votes.

FLENTJE: You're talking about 1990?

BARKIS: In 1990 Rick Bowden lost and then got it back because they miscounted. Elaine Wells lost and then got it back because it was, like, a few votes. We came to the floor with several elections still in contest. We end up with a one vote margin, 63 to 62. But we had it. We didn't cheat on—we didn't use power on—usually—because we didn't have to have those hearings. You know, we had the votes to stop it. So now—I'm amazed that I'm speaker—

FLENTJE: Let me recast that—

BARKIS: Sure.

FLENTJE: —that election. You've described the House getting the House majority by one vote. A former governor is beaten by Joan Finney. Mike Hayden, the incumbent governor, is beaten by Finney. So you start in '91, the third time in state history Democrats have a majority, and you have a governor who has no legislative background. How does this work?

BARKIS: Well, I wasn't sure, but when she made it clear she was going to veto every budget appropriation if she didn't get initiatives and referendum passed, I knew we had some problems. I mean, you're dealing with a person who got elected as a populist, who had lots of strengths around it. I mean, we always assumed that that was going to be—if Mike lost, it was going to be to Jim Slattery or Dan Glickman and not Joan Finney. She was way underestimated, but she was a person of the people. If she came to a meeting in Paola, Kansas when she was treasurer, she'd know everybody in the kitchen. She knew how to [campaign]—she remembered names. She had a good heart. She was all about getting the initiative and referendum and using sales tax. She wanted to take care of [remove] all the loopholes, so you had seven or eight hundred million dollars in potential tax money to deal with school finance issues. So, I'm now used to working with a governor like Carlin. Everybody down in there [governor's office] was knowledgeable. They had broken down into the ag deal and the kids' issues and economic issues. Now we got all new people. The governor's daughter became her assistant, and she was not—nobody there really knew the nuances of the political system, so for me, I think, Okay, we're gonna help her.

But then some of the ideas kept getting kind of to the point that I think [Robert H.] "Bob" Miller and I both decided that we're gonna have to quit playing politics.

FLENTJE: Bob Miller is now minority leader.

BARKIS: He's the minority leader, but he's a solid guy and conservative but not radical in any way, shape or form. He's thoughtful. He's out there on a tractor thinking, like farmers do. And I found him to be a

solid guy. And we really ended up, by the end of the session—we didn't just pass hard stuff, we passed hard stuff [that] was veto-proof. I mean, we did school finance, which—

There's a story on school finance, because the governor vetoes the bill that I fought really hard to get out of the House—

BARKIS: She vetoes it. I think, Well, maybe the teachers and other people can get somebody to change their vote. We only needed a very few votes to override her. So I called an override session to override our own governor. It didn't work, and it was the longest session, I think, up to that time, and I—but I felt like we owed it to the kids in Kansas and the people I came up here to be helping, which—teachers and education, because I think capital investment in children and people is way better than infrastructure investments and all the rest of it, because I believe that really can change the future. So I'm not too sure that it was very well thought of at the—at that point in time downstairs, but we did it. So that's school finance. It's sitting in court.

One of the things we did, and I think it was useful, was get her to have a special commission appointment. It was staffed—some—she appointed a lot of members. Judge [Terry] Bullock gave us another session to try to get it done. Nobody almost in any legislature in America did a major school finance rewrite unless the court wrote it for them. I mean, they didn't—legislators didn't want to mess with the heat of this kind of stuff. It's going to cost money. Taxes are going to change the money that goes to southeast Kansas and whatever. It's a tough, tough nut.

So, after that summer, they report back. They reported back a potential school finance thing, and we had hearings, and I guarantee you that that issue was tough, and it went back and forth between us and the Senate. And I owe a lot to Don Crumbaker --was an old, honorable, good guy that had been in education forever, and he—he really got along with our leader, Rick Bowden. And so I knew that. But I also knew one other thing: Expertise counts. And one of the guys that I consider a friend and one of the smartest, best guys in Kansas, is Dale Dennis. You'll find the Republicans trusted him. We trusted him. When the House, towards the end of session, came up with a school finance proposal, ours, Dale was helping us. We had him as a resource then. We had meetings back there, and I'm sitting there with people from Johnson County, who can't hardly stand what we're doing because they're going to maybe lose their elections. I've got western Kansas people, small schools, but I traveled around the state when I was working on my children's committee stuff, and I saw hungry kids and talked to people, and I knew

we had to do something with school finance because it did something for kids, it did something for education and it did something for property tax relief because we raised an income tax and little sales—and by the time we got through, our tax system was progressive, balanced more than it had been ever. So our House proposal that went back to the Senate and back and forth—when it left the House, it left veto-proof. We had more votes at the final vote on that than we needed, that Governor Finney couldn't override it. She had some ideas, but she couldn't do it.

FLENTJE: Now, you're talking about '92.

BARKIS: Yes, I supported it in '92, but, see, the first year, we tried it and it failed. Okay. The second year, we succeeded. And when you list all the things that we did—we did reapportionment, we did school finance, we did classification, we did—the one that I probably hold the most dear to my heart was: The summer after the first year, I got the Legislative Council, the Coordinating Council, to let me have a Children's Initiatives Committee.

FLENTJE: Let me come back to that.

BARKIS: All right.

FLENTJE: Because that's worth talking about separately.

BARKIS: That's one of my favorite topics.

FLENTJE: When I reviewed the history of this, I'm kind of bowled over based on my reading of the history. I mean, at the start of that '92 session you've got a one-vote majority, not overwhelming—and probably a few Democrats are not going to go along with some of this.

BARKIS: On a given day, we had at least one guy that we'd never know whether he was going to vote with us or the Republicans or not vote.

FLENTJE: But you didn't wait for anybody. You folks said —“we're gonna do this.”

Where'd it come from?

BARKIS: It came from building the coalition with the Republicans—the moderates. My theory on politics in Kansas is we traditionally had good government. The split was urban-rural, but we had good, solid people making good, solid, middle-of-the-road government. We supported schools, we supported mental hospitals—we were a progressive, moderate state early in our history, all the way through, really. I mean, it was a state to be proud of, and we did stuff we—I felt like—when I was thinking about being a Republican, it was a good party, doing good things. But when we have this situation evolve where we begin to work—to know that the governor might veto whatever any one of—if we just pass it with a few votes, it's going to be vetoed, so what do we do? We

make strong coalition decisions. I mean, I didn't get it done just because it was Democrats; I got it done because there was a whole lot of Republicans who wanted school finance and wanted tax things done, and they could—some of them hide out from the income tax thing and vote against it, but we had a—almost all the big items you would have read—we were—we were—after the first year, when she vetoed stuff for no real reason that we could figure out, I think Bob Miller and the guys around him decided, “We're not gonna play politics” in that second year. They decided, “We're gonna prove that democracy is strong and resilient and can get by with someone who's in the middle, who doesn't fully understand it. We have to—we have to move up and make things that are good for Kansans, that they can live with.”

Because nothing I did was an extreme Democrat position. It was to the middle, and I'm proud of that, and I was proud of the Republicans that helped me. I mean, I have thought since I got to this place, we have better people representing Kansans than Kansans realized, and that was on both sides of the aisle.

FLENTJE: But that school finance action was a dramatic departure from the past.

BARAKIS: But the reason we did it is because we had votes from both sides. It was a compromise. When “Bud” Burke died this year, I noticed in his obituary that one of the things he mentioned was working with me on the issues at that time, and I think—we had Fred Kerr and we had Jerry —

FLENTJE: Jerry Karr.

BARAKIS: Jerry Karr. And Bud and Bob Miller and a lot of other people really trying— we—we didn't get caught in games between the House and the Senate. The school finance thing had a very legitimate back and forth. We couldn't do it without the Senate, either. But I really—

FLENTJE: But most of those votes were not easy, yet the House kicked out school finance by mid-March: a uniform mill levy. Never done. A basic floor on base school funding. Aid for capital improvement.

BARAKIS: Well, it stood ten years after—I mean, it worked.

FLENTJE: Three hundred and fifty million dollars in new taxes, income and sales. You got one vote—

BARAKIS: I didn't, but I had all those Republican votes.

FLENTJE: Yeah.

BARAKIS: We didn't make a Democrat deal and shove it through; we made a vote for Kansas, like conference committees sometimes do, between the House and the Senate. You know, when you bring a bill out of the House for school finance and it's got more than a veto number of votes, what's the Senate going to do? They're going to think, “Well maybe we ought to take this—this is a pretty good work

product. We had some input.” I mean, we all had input, and probably we had political shelter from me being the speaker, to do some stuff. And it wasn’t a partisan year. In my opinion, it was: “We’re gonna settle down and make it work like we all kind of would like to have it work, for real.”

But with governors—the one thing I also know is governors have the only job in Kansas that I would have loved to have had, because you can set the future. You can deal with the future, because otherwise democracy is a reaction to crisis: Wait till the water’s brown in western Kansas; then we’ll get a water program. The governor can get into it. Tax balance and fairness, children’s stuff—you name it, a good governor—you will look around the country, even now, and the governors get to pick—speak for the future

FLENTJE: Agenda setting.

BARKIS: They are agenda setting. And I think for two years, because of the peculiar situation, I got to function—the House did—a lot like a governor functions—you know, in terms of following things and wanting things, giving back—

FLENTJE: I was going to say, the governor wasn’t setting the agenda.

BARKIS: No, the governor was hands off, right from—the press said, “Governor Finney”—

FLENTJE: No, she’s vetoing!

BARKIS: But she—I sit here and watch Democrats grinning, voting to override vetoes because she didn’t talk to us about them, and we didn’t know they were coming, and we didn’t know why they came, and that was just the way it was. The governor got very—I think she probably learned that she had to deal with this one when the initiative and referendum got killed. Now, we passed it, but we didn’t pass it with enough votes to put it [on the ballot] and the Republican’s coalition we had didn’t vote for it. Much.

FLENTJE: Okay.

BARKIS: Initiative and referendum resolution was designed to be somewhat reasonable if you have to have one.

FLENTJE: Mid-March, the House passes school finance over to the Senate—I, again, went through some review of this. They defeated school finance one time, second time, third time, fourth time, fifth time, and—

BARKIS: But then about then, we came up with our own House proposal.

FLENTJE: No, you’d already sent it over.

BARAKIS: I think we re- —maybe we revamped it. I was looking at—

FLENTJE: But that's after Conference Committee and so forth. My point is you're sitting over there, looking across the chamber, looking across the Capitol, and they're struggling—Fred Kerr, Bud Burke—

BARAKIS: Fred's brother, Dave Kerr and.

FLENTJE: Harder, Joe Harder. And then they finally do pass it on the sixth try. I mean, they actually voted it down that many times and then brought it back.

BARAKIS: And in preparation for this, I read [Kansas Association of School Boards lobbyist] Mark Tallman's essay or paper he did on the school finance issue, and it read like a good book to me because I had never really understood exactly all the stuff that was going on.

FLENTJE: My notes are from Tallman's paper on this, and they finally got something passed on the sixth try and got it into Conference Committee. And so then you're in conference, negotiating back and forth. And I think—the reference you've made—you got a vote of 91 to 43 in the House.

BARAKIS: Pretty incredible, wasn't it?

FLENTJE: The Senate did not have that kind of a margin. But—

BARAKIS: I got reapportionment passed by that—

FLENTJE: One of the things that's in that paper that I'm going to quote: "We have a proposal we believe is a winner. This proposal meets the needs of our children and the constitutional responsibilities of the state and provides the greatest property tax reductions ever." That's—

BARAKIS: Pretty good.

FLENTJE: —Marvin Barkis.

BARAKIS: But it was absolutely true.

FLENTJE: Yeah.

BARAKIS: And I think it was because we took everybody's inputs, we got voters to vote with us on our side that could not bring themselves—I mean, we lost a few. Johnson County would have been very difficult. But this was good for small schools in—almost anywhere in Kansas. It was fair. And when you go to schools that don't have air conditioning and don't have decent buildings and don't have anything and you're in Miami County, next to Johnson County, and you see what they do with a mill levy—are the kids there more important than the kids in the rest of the state? And my goal, from the very beginning, was: I agree with our Constitution. We, at the state level, have responsibility for educating all the kids of Kansas. When it gets out of line, as it got, Jonathan Kozol was a guy who wrote book called *Savage Inequities: Children in America's Schools*. He basically said when you damage a kid in school by not

giving him resources, you're damaging a kid for life. You don't get a second chance. And I like the quotes from the guys that talk about, you know, kids are the messages we send to the future. Bill Clinton says at a speech in Wichita, "If we don't take care of the next generation, if we ever get to where people believe that the next generation isn't going to do as good as we are, then we're going to fail as a society." And I believe that stuff. I absolutely am devastated by the directions we go in our country right now.

FLENTJE: Now, you can't remove yourself from all this experience, but if you try to stand back, how were you conducting yourself as speaker? I mean, what—how did you see your role because the House Democrats were out front with this—

BARKIS: Well, some of these issues we had to deal with were forced on us.

FLENTJE: Yeah, it was.

BARKIS: But the issues that some of us really cared about got wrapped up in the schools—the children's stuff that we ought to talk about before this is over.

FLENTJE: Yeah.

BARKIS: And I look back on it, I think my strengths and my personality sometimes are not understood, but I basically got elected because I could talk to the normal guys in our caucus, because I didn't take myself too seriously, but I am a serious person. And sometimes by sharing leadership, people get invested and they form community and they form a sense that they're all in it together. And we can have urban-rural guys split on issues but still get together.

Bill Reardon and I, for example, are absolutely opposed on two sides of the pro-choice or the abortion issue. He's Catholic. And so I look at it and think: On every issue I really care about, Bill's there. He and I don't agree on this issue, but we're going to work together for kids. Less abortions, you name it. I will—all about trying to feed hungry kids and do something after they're here. You know, one of the things that used to bother me, was people voted on the abortion issue and then not vote for feeding pregnant women and infant children programs and prenatal programs and I'm all about that. They're here. Whoever makes the decision, that's up to your philosophy or religion. But they're here. We got to take care of them. They got to have a good school. They got to have a school breakfast. I went to Wichita and spoke several times on pro-choice issues. I got probably beat up on some of that.

[Following a break, the interview resumes.]

FLENTJE: Did you have a primary opponent in '94?

BARAKIS: Probably didn't ever have a primary opponent. I only had—

FLENTJE: No, I'm talking about the attorney general race.

BARAKIS: Oh, yeah. Wint Winter [Jr.] and I got endorsed—actually, we got endorsed by all the major newspapers—Topeka, Lawrence; Steve Rose[journalist in Kansas City metro area], [The] Kansas City Star. What we didn't realize, both of us, is the Republicans—the Wichita school district had a bond issue out, and it brought out a whole lot of extra voters in the primary, so the two guys from that area won the primary, the Democrat and the Republican.

FLENTJE: And that would have been?

BARAKIS: think it would have been '94. I think I ran—I was going to run for governor, and then Slattery got in, so I knew I couldn't match him for anything, raising money. I didn't have enough to do it on my own. But the guy who was running for attorney general got killed in a car accident.

BARAKIS: But then I had kind of a ready-made group of trial lawyers figuring they'd support me, so I figured, I'll run for attorney general, even though I really don't want to be attorney general very bad, but I thought, I probably won't get elected, anyway. I'll do a swan dive outta this experience. And, you know, I found myself back in Kansas, in Louisburg and Paola, doing just the same stuff I was doing before I went to the legislature, and it's still satisfying. I solve problems for real—for real people. I mean, I'm still doing mostly trusts and estate planning, is kind of what's happened to me, but—

FLENTJE: Are you still a practitioner?

BARAKIS: I am.

BARAKIS: One thing Democrats did, though, all through those years—we had a lot of fun. We had the Senate Democrats and our group to hotel over here, and we were making up songs about "Tax Hike Mike never met a tax he didn't like / He taxed the farmer and the farmer's wife / He taxed them once, he taxed them twice / He's Tax Hike Mike."

FLENTJE: Nineteen ninety campaign.

BARAKIS: We had made up a whole lot of songs about—just kind of a fun, creative thing, and we all thought we were being fun, and we'd do it—we had a lot of camaraderie as House Democrats, and the senators came along when we were doing stuff, and the day of—the evening of the campaign or the day before, I had brought an old—I don't know what it was—'60s Chrysler limo that had been a hearse and an ambulance, and anyway, I put "Tax Hike Mike" stickers. And the next day, I got to be in court in Paola. I'm driving to Paola. The damn thing blows a gasket, and I'm at

the side of the interstate out here. So I hitchhike. I get out and hitchhike, and I hitchhike all the way to Paola. A guy picked me up, took me right to the courthouse. I got there on time.

So, I get an editorial in the Parsons newspaper. The Parsons newspaper said, "It looks like the next speaker of the Kansas House—what kind of leader would hitchhike? What kind of pathetic thing"—it was like a real critical thing. So I met the guy that was the head down there. I can't remember his name now, but anyway, he was—I said, "I want you to know that when you've hitchhiked through Africa, been the only white guy on a boat, hitchhiking in Kansas isn't exactly a big deal" And so I told him that.

Well, then, he was the editor of the Olathe paper later, and he sends me a clipping, and it says—I told him we hitchhiked to Uganda, where Idi Amin had just taken over the country three days—three weeks before we got there, which is true, and there were people dead in the streets, and we were heading on to Mount Kilimanjaro and out of there, my wife and I, but—so he writes me a—or sends me this headline from the International Tribune: "Idi Amin Eats His Lawyer." And apparently he was living in Libya. He was noted for barbecuing his enemies. And this British woman said her husband who was a lawyer, but he'd lost this case, and he disappeared. And so they claimed he—

FLENTJE: Must have been eaten.

BARKIS: That was a little sideline story, but it was kind of fun.

FLENTJE: —can we shift to the Children's Initiatives? I read a paper on this that said, "Marvin Barkis, House minority leader, and Robert Miller, House majority leader, attended an NCSL session in 1990 on the threats to neglected and abused children." Does that ring a bell with you at all?

BARKIS: I've got one thing. I want to find it. This is the Blueprint on Children and Families and we handed those out all over the state. And in this blueprint, it summarized, kind of like a plan for the future—we had targets for change. We had strategies for the state, strategies for committee—communities, strategies for business and schools. I had always been a children's advocate, but Bob [Miller] and I had gone to a meeting in D.C.

A guy spoke that was a Chamber of Commerce fellow. And he talked about how business community—the businesses should invest in children because they become their workers, and if there was ever a good economic reason—and then he'd go on to talk about prenatal care. Early childhood investment is dramatically economical. I mean, we—we don't have to deal with blind children, we don't have to deal with a lot of disabilities if the mother eats good, if we have resources available—and when you're learning—a lot of the learning occurs before you're old enough to be in school, so we already are

messing up by not getting in early. And it dawned on me, listening to him, That's exactly what our group of people were always dealing with on—you know, there were a lot of legislators here that liked kids' issues. So after that, I came back, got authorization for us to have the committee, and Bob and I chaired it.

FLENTJE: And that's over the interim of '91—

BARKIS: Ninety-one, '92, and so I had the guy from Security Benefit [Howard Fricke]. We had an officer from Sprint. From Cessna, John Moore, who went on to be lieutenant governor, was on that committee. We met—we had a few senators, mostly House members and the business guys, and by the end of the time, we made recommendations that end up being in about eighteen different bills. We went from having a children's budget to mandating school breakfasts, and on and on. And we put more money in school budgets that year. And I think fifteen of those bills passed. They were revolutionary.

We created a Corporation for Change that would be useful too—we wanted—we knew we were going to be here. We were pretty sure we would be in a majority, but we tried to leave behind us the institutions, like Corporation for Change, that would look at ways to change schools in the future and help kids. We thought the school finance was right on target because it lowered property taxes, but it also helped kids and put more money in education.

So, I was really proud of it. We had a Chamber conference. Sprint—one of the Jerry Karr's deal—he worked in west Africa in something like a Peace Corps, he and his wife, and he quoted a proverb that Hillary Clinton adopted. It was—I heard it a lot over the years after that, but it was the first time I had heard it, was when I heard it from Jerry. And it was, "It takes a whole village to raise a child." And that's who I see—I still see that as the way I see education, only the whole village is Kansas. It's not Louisburg or Paola; it's Kansas. And that's what our Constitution says, so you got to think about a kid in Pittsburg or southeast Kansas or out west as much as the kids in Blue Valley [Schools] and Johnson County. So, I think that was most important—everybody that was involved on our side of the aisle loved that children's committee. They loved the idea that business should be involved as a future player on children's issues. I'm sort of sad because I think over the years, it's been dismantled. School finance got bent out of shape. I mean, there—there really is a fundamental issue between our two parties in a lot of ways, and one is people who think less government is always better and let the parents do stuff. If the kids are hungry, it's the kids' fault; society shouldn't get involved.

And then people who believe that government is a tool that can be—it can be used efficiently and smart, and it can make great differences, and we need to think of ourselves as helping the kids who aren't next door but are somewhere else in America. I mean, I care about a kid in Mississippi.

FLENTJE: But Bob Miller is right there with you on that.

BARKIS: Bob Miller. I told you, from the very beginning he and I weren't too different on issues, and none of the—I mean, there were a ton of representatives around us on both sides that agreed. I got an editorial in the Salina paper. It was real interesting because some people were upset because we were trying to do this kind of intervention. Then a guy says, "Everybody says Barkis is a liberal, but he's not. He's a conservative, because conserving and dealing with our children is the best—it's a fundamental thing that a conservative ought to be for, and it was—I was happy to read it and think that that is the way I see it.

I fought the highway program tooth and nail and killed it one year, and I killed it not because I didn't think southeast Kansas ought to have highways or whatever; it's because I think highways—when you put money there and you don't put it in tech stuff at Pittsburg State University—if you don't put it in kids and capital, this isn't going to produce much. And would honestly believe the reason Johnson County had the wealth that it's had is it had good schools. I think it's the best economic development tool we have.

FLENTJE: How did you kind of see this relative to school finance? What surprised me when I went back—here, school finance is really bubbling up, and in '91 it kind of falls apart. Later gets resurrected. But you and Bob are off on a children's agenda.

BARKIS: We had a list of things we were doing. We were doing reapportionment. That's usually—we're taking five congressional districts and reducing it to four. We're doing sentencing reform. First time in—we got it so that if you're a criminal in one place you get about the same sentence as you get somewhere else. And we don't put nonviolent prisoners in penitentiaries that we can't afford; we put the most violent—and we let the other people have other kinds of things. That's a great thing in itself. When I look back on what we did, I'm just amazed sometimes that it was like a renaissance year. It was probably the most productive year that I know of that we've had, and it was unusual, and I don't think it was one of those oddities that come along. I don't think people really understood it from the outside. I don't think people totally understood me from the outside sometimes, because I'm real strong on things

I believe in, but I'm awful easygoing. And when I was speaker, every day I'd pretty much go down to the Coke machine on the first floor and sit there for an hour, just talking to anybody that came by, because I want them to know I'm accessible to you. You don't have to be a lobbyist. You don't have to be someone who wants to advance a cause.

I don't have a bone with lobbyists, but you got to remember, there's no free lunch. When you go out with somebody that wants to make you do what they want you to do, and they want to convince you or help you make decisions, they're still getting paid to advance that particular cause. We're there to speak for the people like children and old people that—really kids. Kids don't vote. Old people have a pretty strong voting record, and they get a lot of stuff, but to take—you know, to take—

FLENTJE: But you elevated this like a speaker rarely does. You name yourself chair. The minority leader is the vice chair. I don't recall that ever happening.

BARKIS: I don't know, but I know that it was really a super good project, and it worked really well for a lot of reasons—a lot of places, and it made me feel, looking back on this—you know, it's hard to be a speaker and then get beat in your next election. I mean,

I did all these things, and maybe I didn't get enough information back home, but I also got swept over by the churches getting involved in politics in a way that they had never been involved prior to that election.

FLENTJE: Well, prior to that.

BARKIS: Yeah.

FLENTJE: Did you have—you've named some of the key people on the team that put together school finance. Was there a similar group, or was the Children's Initiatives just didn't get the kind of attention that school finance got.

BARKIS: Let's put it this way: I put people on there, like Kathleen Sebelius and Joan Wagnon, and Republican women, and we had a committee that every one of the people on there I believe cared about the issue, personally. So it was not—I did what I always did: I looked for the best I could find to put in places where I could trust them. I always led like Genghis Kahn. It's a management style that says, "I'm not the boss. I'm the guy that comes and counts on"—he swept through Europe on a basis of his appointing people under him and trusting them. He didn't try to micromanage. I didn't believe I'm not the only guy that's smart around here. I was one of the guys that could understand if I let these people work, they will make me heroes.

We had lunch with Joan—and I guarantee you, after being at the YWCA and being the president—you know, the leader there, she could not wait to get her teeth into these issues.

One thing we did that—go back to the proverb, “It takes a whole village to raise a child.” Sprint made a movie for our use in that convention on that topic. They pointed out the issues of the status of children, Kansas is not so dang good at the time, when you looked at the number of kids and how we compare—and it’s probably worse today. I mean, we prided ourselves, as a people, of being all about helping each other and building community, and yet our kids didn’t evidence that, because if at the same time you believe that, you don’t want to put resources into it, you can’t—you can’t win.

FLENTJE: Let me shift gears a bit.

BARKIS: Sure.

FLENTJE: You talked about how you and Bob Miller connected. Did that just kind of happen when you were speaker, or when he was majority leader, and you were minority leader—when did that start?

BARKIS: We never—I mean, Bob and I didn’t go out to dinner and hang out together. We went to parties. We had our own kind of social things. But he reminded me of George Teagarden, “He’s one of the best guys you run into, has the most integrity. I roomed with him. I talked to him a lot in running.” First-class farm, rancher guys. And I find a lot of affinity in my mind with people who spent a lot of time on a tractor or in a field, thinking.

I remember Robin Leach. He was a dairy farmer. He’d get up at 4:30 in the morning, milk cows and then come down here and make my life miserable. He would come up with more dang ideas than anyone. You know, I had to go, What’s Leach up to now? You know?

So, I think that Bob and I both—his conservatism and mine pretty well matched. I mean, I think our philosophy on some things would be real different, but he didn’t have to do this. I mean, he was willing to do it. He was interested. And I believe when you interview him, you will find him thinking it was something that he was proud to have accomplished.

FLENTJE: Let’s shift to Joan Finney. Certainly, that ’91 session—it was kind of oil and water. How would you characterize working with Finney?

BARKIS: I think the problem is that most people that come here, as she did, to accomplish something—I said she was a great campaigner. She was well loved by her family and friends, and she brought a lot to the table. She did, however, not—I find thinking some ways she just didn’t bring the knowledge—even

though she'd been Treasurer, she had never been on this floor. She never really had to do the pushing and shoving that goes with making legislation, so you go in thinking it's easy. I mean, Donald Trump's got the same issues. I mean, he's basically not knowledgeable about how it works, and it's really difficult to get it to work if you don't understand it. So you get frustrated by it.

I mean, we didn't—we never knew—and honestly, we tried our best. I—I sent people to talk to her, it wasn't just me, and I never hated her or anything. I just didn't always agree, and I was inclined, if I didn't agree, to not hide that. But I didn't walk out of there. I'm sure they got upset with us, but in my job over the years, I've had a lot of people awfully upset with me that were not back in the right—state chairmen or not—I mean, this job, when you get into it, is not only about the legislature; it's about the governor, it's about the press, it's about the courts, it's about recruitment. It's about a lot of things that float around that I didn't know when I got the job, the minority leader, exactly what I was going to do with it. I learned.

BARAKIS: She came in with ideas that she was going to be able to—because she was governor—say, “We're gonna do it. Close every [sales tax] loophole and make a bunch of money, and we're gonna solve problems with that, and then we're gonna let the people have power through initiative and referendum.” Sounds great until you really think about California never could raise any money because they put a deal on the ballot to freeze their tax money, and that screwed up their education and mental health and a lot of things. So you got to be careful where you put the power. And I didn't personally think that the power should be out here. If you're going to have a referendum, initiative, I thought it should be limited to putting things that could go to the legislature, and maybe they had, by super majority—they'd have to—they'd pass it, unless it was, you know, blocked by a bigger minority. But we ran one out of here, and we got as many Democrat votes as you could.

FLENTJE: Was the real break with her when the House Tax Committee just couldn't move her exemption idea on sales tax?

BARAKIS: I think initiative and referendum, when you read the clippings about that period of time, was a bigger deal—that was the deal, that she was going to use her power to veto things to get that. We couldn't get it. It wasn't possible.

FLENTJE: You couldn't get to two-thirds.

BARAKIS: No, we couldn't.

FLENTJE: I mean, you probably couldn't get many Republicans, did you?

BARAKIS: No. The Republicans actually took that away from us. We made a good-faith effort. I think that helped. She finally realized at some point that she couldn't veto everything. But she didn't realize that we'd been sitting here for years, trying to get certain things out of the legislature that we couldn't get from the minority, but when we got the majority, lo and behold, the Senate actually could straighten up. There was a lot of years when the game up here was Senate versus House, you know. And we'd say that when a House member went over to the Senate, they raised the IQ in both places, or something.

FLENTJE: You know, you started almost—what?—forty years ago, and we've gone through some political turmoil, certainly since you served. There are a couple of things that I'm kind of curious. You had mentioned earlier this Rebel group may have been the first sign of this kind of free market, cut taxes, cut budgets orientation.

BARAKIS: It was the first time.

FLENTJE: I was involved with Mike Hayden. I don't recall the Kochs being involved in state politics at that time at all. I was wondering if you did. The Kochs, Koch Industries.

BARAKIS: No. I mean, I met the Kochs. I even pitched them when I ran for Attorney General, and I—I have mixed feelings about them. I think they're very smart—smart guys, got a real strong—we don't agree on philosophy, but that doesn't mean I don't respect them as—as having the right to be where they are and do what they do. We've had—think about the John Birch Society history in Wichita in Kansas. I mean, I was a major in economics and went down to Wichita with Wayne Angell, and he spoke to the people down there, and I came back thinking, This stuff is radical, too. It's real radical. And it's still kind of floating around.

FLENTJE: Oh, yeah.

BARAKIS: We have in this country a lot of this nativism and anti-government and—

FLENTJE: Getting rid of the income tax. I mean, the Kochs allied themselves with that way back when. Well, let me shift gears. Another development that was going on was, of course, the abortion issue. And I saw an article that—yeah, I think it was in '92—you did—the legislature did pass an issue on abortion, kind of a compromise. Do you remember anything about that?

BARAKIS: Basically, it took away from the local government the ability to regulate abortion—outrageous kind of decisions. It was a compromise that we thought was well enough—it wasn't a win for one side or the other, but it was also like what we did on the other issues. "This is gonna be a rational, 'What can we do, that we can agree on doing, that doesn't make this a criminal offense and it doesn't allow the cities to get totally out of control?'" And, like I said, I'm — I pro-choice. I have been pro-choice, and I'm pro-

choice because I think if I were a woman, I'd want to make my own decision. I find myself going like my dad, as a farmer. They were independent. They don't want somebody telling them what books to read, what church to go to, what to do with a baby. And we had two miscarriages, my wife and I, and we had to really deal with the issues of this with our doctor, and—

But I felt that way before. I don't want abortions. I wish every kid was born to someone who would love him and not create trouble for him. But I was there when it was close to the end of the back door—you know, you'd slip around, get your girlfriend some money, and the people were doing abortions in awful settings. But, like I said, Bill Reardon and I didn't agree on that, but we worked together—

FLENTJE: Did you see the political emergence of this?

BARKIS: I always knew that, like gun control, abortion is a kind of an almost single issue for a lot of people. That's what—one of the drivers for Trump to have his Supreme Court, was to get another justice on the abortion issue. And people have the right to have single issues they want to stand for. I think when you get here, you're standing for the people of Kansas. I—I don't think it's a litmus test—it shouldn't be a litmus test for a Democrat to run for something. I know some people who—they will disagree, but I will tell you, when it came push to shove, I spoke—I was there. I had people walking along, chanting, "Hey, hey, ho, ho, Speaker Barkis has got to go." And I did, and I knew going there that it could happen, but I didn't want to be here to not speak up for the things I care about.

FLENTJE: Now, are you—are you talking about a particular event?

BARKIS: It was an event in Wichita that was put on that was at a park, and it was during Operation Rescue [an anti-abortion group responsible for the Summer of Mercy in Wichita] time, and I put my money where my mouth was. I'm willing to negotiate on lots of things because I think there's not exactly right answers, but somehow that touches a real—I just don't like people to tell me what to do. That's why I became an attorney. It's why I don't work for a big law firm. It's why I don't work for—didn't go into business. And Vance Packard talked about "the corporate man" and I just don't take well to being told what to do.

FLENTJE: How did your caucus divide on that?

BARKIS: Oh, I'd say that a number of Democrats—and I found a lot of Catholic Democrats,—some of the best legislators I've ever known, have been Catholics, because they have the ethics of—. And I liked working with nuns because they were all about helping kids that were here, and they were anti-death penalty. I mean, it's inconsistent in some ways. Somebody's pro death penalty and against abortion. I mean, it's a religious, full theology, and people ought to think about it and figure out what they think

about this stuff. But I'm an attorney. I know the gray areas of the world. I have dealt in gray area for most of my life.

I think I was really good at this job because I'm interested in everything, and I had really good people skills. I spent my whole life dealing with people. I mean, that's what I do. I don't deal with long-term, big lawsuits. I deal with people that are hurting. Their kid's been killed in an accident. They've got a marriage falling apart. I mean, that's where my life has been. So I feel like a priest. I had a chance to see the human condition, and I tell people if I could write real well, I could write a great American novel in Paola, Kansas, because the world comes through there. Humans are kind of the same. I always believed the way I got here was in part reasoning from small to large.

My office. Kids are in trouble. Teachers are not getting paid. We're losing good teachers. Something needs to be done. It's not a perfect world in Paola, Kansas, and from that, I came here and reasoned, How can we do something about it? And to me, to say, "Oh, a family ought to take care of their kids"—well, they ought to meet some of the families I met in my Legal Aid in the later years. They're not taking care of the kids, but does that mean a kid doesn't have a right to have a decent chance in life? And so I've always reasoned from little to big, and sometimes, by reading a lot of stuff, I reason from big to little. I mean you can read books and get good educations about stuff.

FLENTJE: Well, let's—you've gone on to something that I wanted to spend a little time on, and that's just leadership skills. You got to see a number of House speakers before you became speaker. Senate leadership. Three governors. Did your leadership skills comes from Ottawa University student council president or where?

BARKIS: That's a good question. But, I mean, I was a smart kid, went to a church college after coming out of high school—I was just glad to get on—find out what's coming on next in life. But what I found out was I was the guy that the girls who were coming to Ottawa were interested in because I didn't smoke and I didn't drink and I was a good Baptist kid. My mother was really a heavy-duty church person. My dad went along. I was raised doing Baptist Youth Fellowship, raised in a lot of religious stuff, and in that process, kind of at Ottawa University—I believe the 10th Commandment became important to me, and I have lived my life as an attorney trying to follow that, dealing with people. I've tried to help people. If they don't have money, I help them. I try to do the things that help. I mean, I've

given good advice and saved marriages and had things that I did that I believe came out of the same thing that made me who I am as a potential leader. But I also think I like people. I like to talk.

When I traveled around the world, my wife and I had all kinds of great adventures. People would invite us to their home in the middle of Africa or, you know, just thing after thing, and it was because I was from Kansas, and people didn't know anybody from Kansas in some of the places we were from [sic], but they were interested. I'm a farm guy, and I could talk to the Muslim guys in Marrakesh and go out to their home and find out, Hey, they're kinda like us, you know. The real truth was as I traveled in a third-class train through India, we found people that were really good. The trains were over-packed, and the Indian riders treated us respectfully.

And I think if you can have empathy for other people, and if you're a reader— reading changed my life. I mean, I think the books I read—I'm kind of like Abraham Lincoln: You get one of the unsung heroes that was talked about in this meeting I went to the other night was about—was a teacher that, as a—he was a preacher and a teacher, and Abraham Lincoln was a forlorn young guy that had nothing going for him. His mom had died. His stepmother was a decent person, but he was in a very, very restricted place. And this guy loaned him books, gave him books. So when President Lincoln was on the way to be inaugurated, supposedly he stopped at this guy's house to thank him for having put him on the path to what he was on. And, I mean, I love Abraham Lincoln because to me he changed the world with the Gettysburg Address. He changed the Constitution. He came out—he's the American story. And they're all over the place.

Immigration. I don't even have a clue why we've gotten to where we don't see America as an exceptional place, a democracy as exception, our Constitution as exceptional. Everything that's happening cuts against what Daniel Boorstin said was important and if we lose it, we're in trouble, and it takes away from community. And when you take away from community and you break it up, we lose all the value that we get from having community, and we get—you know, I mean, look at the countries where they don't let women do anything. They lose half the possibilities because of that. We are a great country. I love being an American, but I am worried about it, and I think you can watch this—you can watch this society fall apart like other places.

I once decided to read really smart books, and I read a book by Marcus Aurelius, and it made me think—he said, you know, the great leaders of the past, the great heroes, all that’s left of them is occasionally a monument in the sand, something that says something, and maybe there’s inscriptions, but they’re dead and gone. And he was one of the most powerful men on the planet, and he was a Stoic, and he was a civic—believed in civic duty and slept on skins and on the floor. I happened to be in California, at the [J. Paul] Getty Museum, and the day I was there, they had a room, and it had one statue in it, because he was noted for working on rehabbing statues, and it’s supposedly the only statue of Marcus Aurelius.

And things like that affect you. I had somewhere around here, you talked about leadership skills. I think I lost my little notes. I can’t seem to find it. But I had a whole set of things, you know, that I found to be useful in terms of what I did as a leader, and that was to not take yourself too seriously. Bring everybody along. Trust your committee chairmen. Don’t second guess them. Don’t try to be the smartest guy in the room. Try to take the responsibility for getting the smartest people to work with each other. Group dynamics was really good. I led, like women lead, where you build committees, and you work together. I came here at a time that before that, there was speakers would speak, and people did stuff. You didn’t have input as a committee chairman, hardly. Basically the speaker was the head of the military. He was it.

I came along at a time where the real facts were, you couldn’t tell the first time I’m Minority Leader, I come down here to the mic, to the seat. I think, Well, I gotta do somethin’ about roll call votes. I don’t really understand them exactly. But I raised my hand. You got to have ten hands. I raised my hand. I look around. There’s not another hand up. I said, Well, there’s so much for being the leader. So then I went back, and I said, “From now on, I’m gonna tell ya, I’m not raising my hand till there’s ten other hands up back here because I’m not gonna be embarrassed again.”

FLENTJE: You said that in the caucus?

BARKIS: I did. I told them. We changed the rules. The other thing—I’ll tell you some other stories about being speaker. There’s a red phone up there. I don’t know what the heck the red phone’s for. Nobody’s giving me any advice.

So, I look at the phone, and I pick it up, and it goes, “Capital security.” Well, that’s good to know.

FLENTJE: Did you learn on the job?

BARKIS: I did. The first time I ever sat in that seat up there, I never had been in it. I never asked any of the previous Republican leaders, "I'd like to chair the caucus for a day." I just wasn't going to do it. So I didn't. And so I'm up there, and we're—first time, we kept looking at this—red lights all around here and white lights and—Oh, this is great. They got their name. I won't have any trouble at all. I just go, 'Wow, that's Bill Reardon. He's voted red.' That's fine.

Next step: You have the right to change your vote on a roll call vote. Now I realize, I don't know the names of 40 percent or so of the Republicans. I can't remember the name of half the Democrats because I just blank on it under stress, and I barely got through that first morning when two or three people changed their votes. Fortunately, it wasn't a big group. So—after that, I had a person on each side of me from my staff, and their job was to make dang sure that I knew who it was that raised their hand. I mean, we don't have any rules for how to do this. Unfortunately, Carlin didn't tell us anything. We haven't had any history.

BARKIS: You know, we're playing it by ear. We're working up things in the back. One of the representatives comes over, and he says, "Well, why don't you use the book?"

I go, "What book?" Well, in the back of the drawer here, way back at the back is a book that speakers have been using for years. It had everything in it you could ask—it was like a Bible for how to run—

FLENTJE: They never shared the book with you?

BARKIS: No, nobody shared the book with you, or anybody.

FLENTJE: It sounds like you were learning on the job. There wasn't anybody you borrowed from particularly.

BARKIS: Not really. And I learned one thing about leadership that wouldn't be obvious—that you wouldn't think of. But every day, before the session was over, generally, I would wander up and down the aisles, and I would speak to everybody on my side of the aisle. When I'm speaker and I've got the power, you know that one of the common questions is, "When are we gonna break for lunch?"

BARKIS: That was how you found most people weren't listening to what the debate was. But I felt like I was a little bit like a shepherd with sheep, and you scratch their neck, you know how you deal with your 4-H animals. It's not analogous, but it's like they are respected, and every guy here, person here got elected, and they should be respected, even if you know they don't understand what's going on at the moment. And I did that. One of the things I did I was proud of: I put Herman Dillon as the chairman of

the Transportation Committee. And Herman, after he'd done that, he went back and got a high school equivalency degree. He'd been a truck driver, and he was the chairman of the committee where these big companies wouldn't let him in the front door of their business. He did a good job, but I was proud of the fact that that's what you can do in a democracy.

FLENTJE: Well, let me—we're getting, I think, toward the end of my notes, at least.

BARKIS: All right.

FLENTJE: You finish the '92 session, a dramatic set of accomplishments. School finance is reshaped, and you say it's been bounced around. I look at it, and I think the basic structure is what it was in '92. And the Children's Initiatives got changed in different ways, but there's still some significant things going on. And you've named other issues. All of a sudden, you're running for reelection. What happened?

BARKIS: Well, Jene Vickrey was a high school graduate. He was a carpet layer. He went to every church, did commune at the Catholic church and the Fundamentalist churches, and churches got involved in a way that I couldn't get that kind of help from volunteers—a few Democrats and this, that and the other. Part of it was—I'm not claiming it was all about that, but there was a wave of change, and I think what we found was I was a kind of an indicator of what was coming. And even though there were other people that got defeated, all of a sudden, churches really got into the game. I mean, Jerry Falwell, the Moral Majority.

I would have probably won, even despite all of that had Ross Perot not gotten back in. He dropped out of the race, and then he got back in, and when he got back into the presidential race that year, there were probably 1,200 new registered voters, and many of those new people did not vote for an incumbent from anywhere. They would all—it was like a taste of the future. But it killed me, and I didn't lose by very many votes. But he dropped out, and then he decided to get back in, and there were people with sheets, hanging them off of overpasses and—I mean, I couldn't get enough information out to offset it. I really think that it was—

FLENTJE: Did you see it coming?

BARKIS: We had been thinking there was going to be something like that, but, you know, I don't know. I—I would have been—you know, here I am, the most powerful guy ever from my county in the legislature, and I'm getting knocked off. But it happened after that quite a bit in the next few years. And I think it's happening today.

FLENTJE: I always said '94 was a real turning point. I mean, Democrats lost fourteen seats in '94, not as many in '92. You've mentioned two things: Perot—I mean, the abortion issue and Perot. You didn't mention school finance.

BARKIS: School finance should have been a winner for me. Our schools made out good. They had property tax relief. They were—it was a good—

FLENTJE: So that wasn't a negative in your point of view—

BARKIS: Not at all. But I wanted to—before we'd stopped, I wanted to—I had talked about this book, but I think it's—it's something I just got from my local town. Louisburg has a community book every year, and this is the book, and it was written—it's called *Life in a Jar: The Irena Sendler Project*. It's based on a true story. Started in a little high school in Bourbon County I believe it is. And the three girls got involved in a history project. They end up writing a play called *Life in a Jar*. They won the state historical contest. They went to Washington.

In the process, over the next—they started giving this in synagogues and churches and whatever for a while. They eventually found the lady. She was 90 years old. She lived in Poland. She truly was an unsung hero. She saved 2,500 Jewish children from the Warsaw Ghetto. This book talks about those girls meeting her several times. She was 90 when they met her. She was an unknown person in Warsaw, in Poland, because when the communists came in, they didn't let any of this happen. They just put a clamp on heroes from Poland, and—so nobody really knew about her.

These girls did this play. They got national news on it. They did all kinds of things and went to Poland. They were national news there. They were treated like,—I mean, they're 16-year-old kids. Sendler basically became a mother or grandmother kind of figure. The teacher went over with them, and he was a really great guy. It's a story about a good teacher, good kids can change the world. This lady ended up being nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize because of their involvement. She ended up being named the number one citizen of Poland. She ended up being named in Israel for her— because she truly took babies—and the story, *Life in a Jar*, is she promised the parents, "If you let me have your kid and I'll save their life, and I will keep a record as best I can of where that kid come from, so they'll not be on—they won't be unaware that they're Jewish and that you're their parents." And probably 500, 700 of them actually connected as they grew up because some of this stuff disappeared, but she put the names and the stuff in a jar and buried it in a yard behind where she lived, across from the Nazi military deal.

FLENTJE: Wow.

BARKIS: I had read a lot about that part of the world and the Warsaw Ghetto. It's the only place where the Jews really took on and fought to the point the Nazis wiped that— there were 400,000 people there towards the beginning of the war, and by the end there were no people there. They died in Treblinka. They died in Auschwitz which I visited with my daughter. My wife took my sons there, because I think you ought to remember that.

And I'm very, very angry at our President for even implying that people associated with that movement, that time are "good people doing a good thing," because I don't feel that way at all. [He refers to the president's comments about some of the white- nationalist marchers at Charlottesville, Virginia, in August 2017.] I mean, you think that a gunman killed fifty people in Las Vegas [on October 1, 2017]. It's terrible. Try killing orphans walking down the street. Try reading that book, and the heart of it—our book clubs, and conservative and liberal guys—they're kind of—a lot of them never read books till they retired and whatever. And every one of us—every one of us last week, when we're reading this book felt moved by it.

So, I'd recommend this *Life in a Jar* for Kansans to read. I think it's great that my town had the high school kids read it.

FLENTJE: You've convinced me my little book club should take it up.

BARKIS: Well, that's really how I was going to end. I did want to end on talking about Daniel Boorstin, and you think about reading him because he's speaking in *Parade* magazine, you know, and it was—the greatest danger we face, and it's basically dividing ourselves up and forgetting that we were built on community, people coming together to build things. And we've got the greatest Constitution. If we don't do that, if we go the way we're tending right now, I wonder if democracy will be here.

I would also suggest *Atlantic Monthly*. Two weeks ago had a short article about the guys that founded the *Atlantic Monthly*, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Oliver Wendell Holmes. A group of men came together because they believed that America had an exceptional—was an exceptional country, and it was exceptional because of the Constitution, because people came here and had a real opportunity, because you weren't judged by the history of your family or where you were—your religion.

And so they're worried about it. I'm worried about it. But I'm getting old, so, you know, I don't—I just—I just challenge the next generation to do something better.

Interview of Marvin Barkis by H. Edward (Ed) Flentje, October 27, 2017

FLENTJE: With that, thank you, Marvin Barkis.

BARKIS: Well, thank you. I really appreciate it. It was fun to talk again.

FLENTJE: Marvin Barkis, Speaker of the House, '91, '92.

BARKIS: Thanks.

[End of interview.]